

(Not) knowing: a research on *some thing* in choreography

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Introduction

1. *Brief history of the research*

This research paper is a composition of questions, possible answers, thoughts, practices and dances that have constituted the ground of my two-year research at the Master of choreography I have conducted at the ArtEZ School for the arts in Arnhem (NL).

The core of the overall research has to be found in a physical state, the body's condition that is in between the desire of grounding itself and the attraction for a movement that keeps the body constantly out of balance and at the same time looking for balance.

This state of the body has been presented and discussed through physical practices and dance pieces to first of all understand how it triggers movement(s) that might provoke a re-organization of time and space (studio, theatre or another site where a dance takes place). I talk about re-organization as a possible change of the conditions of space and time that occurs when a body is set in motion and that makes that space different from how it was before the appearance of visible and less visible movements.

In case of written materials, this research supports the analysis of the physical practice, it informs the physical practice and wants to open an interdisciplinary dialogue among artists from different fields.

Though physical practice has been the starting point of the research, it has always been interconnected with theoretical themes that in different ways arose from and with it, also in relation to other artists that dealt and are dealing with similar topics.

I have encountered several notions and artistic practices that informed the research and since the beginning of my MA studies I have been looking at other choreographers' practices that have dealt with ontological aspects of choreography through the invention of own body languages and choreographic methodologies that respond to different ideas of dance as movement(s) produced by a body in motion. Those movements are visible and also less visible, they are possibilities and latencies that counterbalance what is tangible and graspable of a body in motion.

The consideration of dance as bodily activity would probably make this research quite traditional if compared to contemporary dance practices that for instance consider dance also as a movement of thoughts and not necessarily as a physical practice.

For example, American choreographer Jeanine Durning writes about her own performance *Inging* as "choreography of the mind, moving in the continuous present. It tracks the velocity of thought through a proprioceptive cascade of non-stop speaking"¹.

In *Rire/Laugh/Lachen*, a performance by German choreographer Antonia Baher, choreography is interconnected with dramaturgy, music and composition to organize the gestures linked to the act of laughing and highlight its musicality, shape and physicality.

Choreography has certainly evolved into a variety of practices that include elements that go beyond the traditional understanding of dance as movement of the body and I am also interested in movements that are not physical.

For instance when I refer to emotional² movements I am indeed considering inner movements that in my view contribute and are even the source of physical movement in the process of making a dance.

¹ http://www.jeaninedurning.com/?page_id=31 last visit 12-03-14

² If one looks at the etymology of the word emotion and specifically its derivation from Latin 'emovere', to move out, it implies already a movement.

Later in this thesis I will extensively talk about conditions of the body as a dialogue between inner and outer movements.

Still, the question how the body can be excavated so as to find a specific articulation -which is the organization of the body in motion, 'a way' to move the body parts also involving less visible movements- and how that *makes* time and space stay open.

Although the analysis of my own physical movement has been the starting point for the research, the investigation has made an interesting shift, changing perspective and considering physical movement not as the main focus but as a means to generate *some thing*, which has finally become the main topic. Theater scholar Ric Allsopp has written extensively about what he calls "something else" in choreography. In his text "Something else: on latency and composition", which is part of the publication *Inventing futures* (Arnhem: ArtEZ Press, 2013), Allsopp writes about the affective "something else" as "ubiquitous but obscure presence in performance in the relationship between latency and composition" (23). A choreographic image, writes Allsopp, is the "something else" that appears when "a thing becomes other than it is"³ (23).

I have modified the "something else" into *some thing* because 'else' immediately evokes another thing to which it might be compared. Moreover, this would also imply a definition of *what some thing* would be.

The *some thing* that my choreographic practice wants to grasp is not so important to define in terms of recognizable, rational meaning or by giving a description or an explanation.

It could be seen as a condition or a state that can be understood and perceived in different ways.

In fact, this research is an invitation to suspend the search for meaning when looking at a dance and focus on what a dance *does* rather than what it means.

The fact that dance *does* instead of *means* offers a specific point of view that doesn't want to exclude other ways of thinking about dance but certainly links dance to a more material realm by associating it to practice. The making of a dance is in my view a form of craftsmanship, very related to doing and not so much to a concept or idea as starting point for a dance.

Doing a dance means in my view to produce body knowledge.

Choreographer Emio Greco and dramaturg Pieter Scholten have dedicated a long-term research on how body knowledge is produced through the creation of the workshop "Double skin double mind", which I will discuss in detail in the second part of this thesis.

The research was based on a rather simple question: "how do we pass on a precise and meticulous vocabulary when it has never before been defined"?⁴

The question is interesting and relevant also in my research, not only for the issue of transferring movement vocabulary but also as a fundamental question about how dance and choreography can be discussed as a kind of knowledge that is not based on a specific notation system as for instance in music. Practice becomes thus the starting point for theoretical considerations.

ORIGIN mid 16th cent. (denoting a public disturbance or commotion): from French *émotion*, from *émouvoir* 'excite,' based on Latin *emovere*, from *e-* (variant of *ex-*) 'out' + *movere* 'move.' The sense [mental agitation] dates from the mid 17th cent., the current general sense from the early 19th

³ John Jasper in Perloff Marjorie, *The poetics of Indeterminancy, Rimbaud to Cage, Avantgarde & Modernism Studies*, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1999.

⁴ *Company in the school, between experiment and heritage*, Amsterdam, EG/PC and AHK (2007)

To go back to dance as doing, the shift from meaning to doing would also make possible to overcome the division between *how* and *what* and embrace a different thought, clearly formulated by Lyn Hejinian in her introduction to *The language of Inquiry*, 2000 ⁵:

“To know *that* things are is not to know *what* they are, and to know that without what is to know otherness”.

I think of choreography as a practice that on one hand preserves the *unknown*, defending a certain mystery that the dancer in the first place is invited to experience: it is the mystery of the dance’s origin, which might be an emotional state that can be found only by digging into one’s own personal need to move and that will be never fully understood rationally.

On the other hand I see choreography as based on a rigorous practice of *knowing how*: how body knowledge is produced and retraced, how it finds its articulation and how it is transmitted and grasped within a choreographic process.

Choreography might be seen as an event, *some thing* that happens according to a specific set of conditions, which are given through a generative compositional practice.

The question is then how those conditions are grasped and organized within a choreographic form that could be also related to an existent object, for instance a piece of music.

The desire of this research is also to merge those two different approaches to composition, seeking for a compositional practice where both coexist.

The paradoxical state between concreteness/knowledge (of movement, of the dancer) and abstractness/non-knowledge (produced and evoked by the dance) will be a constant tension of this thesis. This paper also contains a small glossary with words that will appear very often and that are also the topic of the publication *Table conversation*⁶, a written encounter with artists from different fields initiated by Erica Preli, graphic designer, and myself.

Main sources

Considering physical movement as central interest in my choreographic practice, I will look at several choreographers whose practice and artworks have dealt with movement research and have influenced my own understanding of dance and choreography.

In particular, I will refer to specific practices, texts or dance pieces and how they have been built, looking at the compositional choices and working methodologies.

Examples such as Salva Sanchis’s practice of the *perfect movement*, Frédéric Gies’s work *Dance practicable*, Emilio Greco’s *Double skin double mind* workshop will be used to discuss how dance ‘articulates’ based on a specific idea of the human body.

Other choreographers such as Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker, Michele di Stefano (company Mk) and Rosemary Butcher will also be discussed, in particular by looking at specific pieces and their compositional choices in relation to the dance material.

⁵ Mentioned in Ric Allsopp *Notes on poetics and choreography*, Erasmus IP Keynote, 2013 p.6
Original reference: Lyn Hejinian *The Language of Inquiry*, University of California Press (November 6, 2000)

⁶ Table conversation is the outcome of Art Branding practice, one of the three branches of the MA program.

Other kind of sources from dance theory and dance history, such as texts written by André Lepecki and Ric Allsopp, will be mentioned to enlarge the scope of the research and to insert it more precisely in the field of contemporary dance based on movement research.

Additionally composers such as Steve Reich and Pierre Boulez will make their appearance through some texts written to expose their compositional methods.

The question that will link all those examples and their relation to my own practice is in fact how the body “must” articulate in space and time so to realize and expose a choreographic thought.

As mentioned before, I consider articulation as organization of the body in motion, which implies a study of the connections between body parts that can be extended also to non- visible body parts (body’s memory, emotional states) that make the body a stratified mechanism where material and immaterial components are equally important to make a dance.

The next step would be to observe how a dance marks trajectories and patterns in space, how it dialogues with existent trajectories and patterns to modify or change the space where it takes place, to generate new conditions.

In her lecture *Instructions for Use: an internal survey of 40 years of improvisational dance* for the MA of choreography in Arnhem in January 2013, American choreographer Lisa Nelson talked about the use of choreographic scores to enable a dance to find strategies to change the space of the performance.

Considering that the dance is already in space before it is actually executed, Nelson talked about how imagination is fundamental to nurture inner scores as conditions that sustain a dance based on improvisation.

The fact that a space is never completely empty is also a fundamental element in my own practice. When I work with dancers, I often refer to the possibility that one’s own dance is already in space and must be ‘worn’ as a jacket. The jacket could be the starting point to build up a whole new space, new patterns or trajectories. One could also think about writing on a blank page, where the blank page is a volume and not a flat surface. If dance is writing in space it is important to investigate on what bases and rules a dance is developed so that it can impress, inform and even subvert space in a specific way. The final question would then be: How does dance write?

2. Considerations on dance history

If we look at the history of western theatrical dance the question “how does dance write?” has always been a fundamental point to reflect on how dance has been present in the art field as the art form that has followed and translated inner and outer movements, tendencies, social and political changes and evolution of human thinking into different styles, techniques and forms.

Following this thought, my interest goes particularly to how dance, as a practice, has kept on questioning its own ontology, how physical movement has been questioned, reinvented, exhausted and even denied from classical ballet till recent practices.

André Lepecki, writer, professor and dramaturg working in the field of dance and performance studies has extensively written about the topic of dance’s ontology.

In the Introduction of his book *Exhausting dance, performance and politics of movement* (2006), Lepecki offers an overview on western dance history and its ontological link to movement to discuss how recent

contemporary dance practices have been accused to have “betrayed” the bond between dance and movement.

The search for methodologies and strategies to write about dance and organize the writing of dance as a bodily articulation is a fundamental part of my investigation.

Therefore I believe that this text offers a solid ground to position my own research and findings in the field of choreography based on movement research.

When thinking about western theatrical dance, one should indeed start from ballet technique, which appeared as the result of the classification of dances that were practiced in several European courts since the Renaissance period.

The posture, elegance, flow and also containment of the ballet technique have traditionally been the expression of high-class society and its aesthetics.

“The royal body dancing was made to represent itself as if remachined in the service of an exacting coordination between upper and lower limbs dictated by a strict musical frame (...)” (Franko 2000: 36)

Lepecki writes specifically about how ballet was identified with flow and elegance in connection to the ideals of that specific period:

(...) The premise of Romantic ballet was to present dance as continuous motion, a motion preferably aiming upwards, animating a body thriving lightly in the air. Such an ideology shaped styles, prescribed techniques, and configured bodies – just as much as it shaped critical standards for evaluating a dance’s aesthetic value (3).

To have a practical example in mind of how ballet translated certain aesthetic taste to develop an idea of dance as harmonious and graceful, we can look at the position of the arabesque (*aa-rah-besk*; literally, “in Arabic fashion”):

“It references an architectural design term that describes and is a *spiral*. The arabesque is designed linearly, parallel to the balletic position, because the body ‘spirals’ from the crown of the head through the back and then straightens through the extended leg, as does the design of the same name. This design was used heavily during the French Baroque when Rameau and Beauchamp codified it into classical ballet”⁷.

Still, as Lepecki writes, though ballet matched the idea of dance as continuous movement and flow, it couldn’t be considered as the expression of the real ontology of dance and he clarifies this thought in the following passage:

(...) According to John Martin, it was not until Martha Graham and Doris Humphrey in the USA, and Mary Wigman and Rudolph von Laban in Europe, that modern dance discovered movement as its essence, and became for the first time an independent art. In his famous lectures at the New School in New York City in 1933, Martin affirmed that dance was to be founded on movement alone, which not ballet nor Isadora Duncan’s dance had done in the past because ballet was dramaturgically too tied up with narrative and choreographically too invested in the striking pose, while Duncan’s dance was too subservient to music (4).

⁷ [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arabesque_\(ballet_position\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arabesque_(ballet_position)) last visited in feb.2014

The search for the real essence of dance, for a kind of movement that “speaks for itself” has been at the core of the practice of several choreographers during the post- modern dance period and it is still present in many works and practices. The search for authentic motion, such as pedestrian movement, initiated in the period of the Judson Church in 1962 as opposition to the thought of dance as constant flow and display of beauty and perfection, resulted in the motto “anything can be (come) movement”. That motto was at the core of the choreographic research of many choreographers of the Judson period such as Deborah Hay and Yvonne Rainer. The opposition to an established idea of dance and representation was translated into movement research, seeking to go back to a more natural movement that wanted to question dance technique and codification.

Many choreographers that were part of that period wanted to put an end to the consideration of dance as expression of meaning or as narrative dramaturgy: in Yvonne Rainer’s *Trio A* for example, each movement is disconnected from the previous one to avoid and reject any narrative association and to not focus on the meaning of each movement but on the “emotional load of a particular event” (Rainer, 1972).

Belgian choreographer Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker used the expression: “movement that speaks for itself” when talking about the early works, which have been composed starting from an essential and simple movement vocabulary “boiled down to variations on walking, turning, waving the arms, jumping”⁸.

In *Exhausting dance* Lepecki discusses the work of several choreographers and artists that have dealt with dance in a very personal way, such as Xavier Le Roy, La Ribot and Jérôme Bel, which have deeply questioned dance’s ontology by “creating works that have critically reframed the idea of dance and exhausted the link between dance and movement to create new possibilities for thinking relationships between bodies, subjectivities, politics, and movement”(5).

As I mentioned in the introduction, at present several dance practices don’t consider physical movement as the ground for choreography. Stillness is present as main element in several dance works and a certain denial of motion has become a common element in many choreographic practices. Other choreographic works don’t involve the human body at all and the absence of a material body on stage becomes the main element. For example, the performance *Evaporated landscapes* by Mette Ingvartsen “can be read as a radical concept of disembodiment, in which neither the choreographer nor other performers set foot on stage, and yet the body is nevertheless, precisely because of its absence, negotiated between the poles of materiality and imagination and constantly created anew in a specific scenario, a machinery of sound, soap, bubbles, fog and dry ice”⁹.

Another good example is the performance *La più piccola distanza* by Italian duo Pathosformel. In the performance an “emotional” machine, which moves squares of different colors on a rail track, is the only element on stage and we never see the performers that actually make it function.

“As in a magical tale, bodies have been transformed in anonymous squares, waiting for being reconstructed from the spectator’s eye, to let reappear again the human presence of every single rhythm”¹⁰.

Dance as technique and expertise has been questioned to open space for different ways to treat physical movement, often not involving professional dancers to present a certain authenticity of body and

⁸ Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker and Bojana Cvejić, *A choreographer’s score*. Mercatorfonds 2012, p.14

⁹ Sandra Noeth “Protocols of encounter: On dance dramaturgy”

¹⁰ <https://vimeo.com/16358722> last visited 18-04-2014

movement and very often to involve the audience more actively as in participatory performances and, in other cases, to have not paid performers at one's disposal¹¹.

3. *Position of my own practice*

My own practice and research wants to exhaust movement by rediscovering the roots of dance as an action, something that one does. Not an investigation of pedestrian movement as in the Judson Church era but on the contrary through a sophisticated and rigorous practice that wants to put movement at the center of the stage and invite the spectator to draw in the body's articulation and its production of space and time.

Choreographer Emio Greco started his collaboration with Pieter Scholten based on a dance Manifesto called *The seven necessities* that expressed the necessities of his dance as starting point for a deep investigation on movement and production of body knowledge based on physical principles that are necessary to find what is "beyond" the body. Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker started from a very simple movement vocabulary to reach an extreme musicality of movement in relation to music and rhythm. Choreographer Rosalind Goldberg started her research for *MIT*, her latest performance, from the relation between movement and a fictional space towards "a fictionalization of behavior as a way of thinking beyond the body I know"¹².

The final goal of my practice is not movement for the sake of movement but the exposure of a condition that 'moves' between a state of knowing and not knowing, between presence and absence. This condition also lies in the full attention that the production of body knowledge requires. *Some thing*, which could be seen as a condition itself, is thus connected to a strict grid of rules and principles that create a necessary constraint on which new rules and principles can be built and new spaces can be created.

How does then *some thing* emerge and can be grasped within a choreographic form?

If one could suspend the search for meaning when looking at choreographic work, the analysis of the conditions that allow the emergence of the work become essential.

In old German societies, a *thing* was the governing assembly made up of the free people of the community and presided by lawspeakers, meeting in a place called a thingstead¹³.

In a way, one could see *some thing* as the result of a collaboration of a group of people.

Similarly, the *some thing* I am referring to could be seen as the result of a series of changes of conditions that occur during the performance. Those changes occur in the performers' concentration and state, in the audience, in space, in time.

To sum up: Condition(s) generate movement's articulation. Movement's articulation generates new conditions, seeking for a spiral of events that leads towards *some thing*.

During the two year program I have experimented with several physical principles (conditions) that have generated a very specific moving body, which is constantly out of balance and never affirmative. It is like seeing someone walking on a slippery surface.

The first physical principle I am using to generate motion is that the pelvis always moves out of balance, limbs articulate afterwards. The pelvis moves out of balance to question the body's axis and verticality

¹¹ In one of his last projects called "Clima", Italian choreographer Michele di Stefano created a series of instructions that some people of the audience are invited to learn and perform during the official performance. The project, as Di Stefano said, was also created according to bad financial conditions of the present situation for the arts in Italy.

¹² Rosalind Goldberg, text for the program of MIT

¹³ Wikipedia, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thing_\(assembly\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thing_(assembly)) (last visit 26-02-2014)

provoking a sort of permanent collapse and reinvention of the body's balance. The pelvis might be associated with the center of the body, not only from anatomical point of view but also energetic.

The center of the body is the source of movement in several physical practices from contact improvisation to martial arts also to work on efficient movements applying as little muscular effort as possible. In my view, starting from the body's center means to first of all question the body's organization towards the search for a new organization and to reshape body's habits that are related to the dancer's education. This also opens space to question technique as codified and recognizable way of moving. On a broader level, the fact that the center of the body moves first also suggests that it generates a sort of rounded space around the body, triggering a dialogue with space that becomes co-producer of the movement itself. The center of the body is always "floating" also to allow a constant shift of weight from one foot to the other and not to "affirm" the body by having the feet below one's own pelvis. Visually, the fact that the body is always slightly out of balance allows, in my view to see, the body-volume is in space-volume and they co-produce movement.

4. Practice of emersion

The mentioned physical principle has been the ground for the physical practice of 'emersion', an invented term composed as mix of two words, immersion and emergence¹⁴. This mix of words indicates a double dynamic: on the one hand a movement that originates in the body and spreads in space and on the other hand a movement that embodies space.

Emersion is a practice that can be divided in three main conditions:

1. Waiting
2. Articulation
3. Resonance

Those three conditions will constitute the main chapters of the thesis.

¹⁴ The suggestion came from Susan Melrose in the assessment for my research presentation in June 2013.

Part 1

Waiting: analysing condition(s)

The first part of the thesis explores the relation between body and space, in particular looking at the moment *before* the appearance of physical movement. I identified that moment with the activity of *waiting*, which has to do first of all with the analysis of the conditions that allow the body's articulation, making space and time for the performer and the audience to observe what is visible and also to 'tune' with what is not visible but might be in space as a presence or a tension. *Waiting* is also related to decision making: the decision of the performer will be made according to specific conditions and will be renewed each time new conditions will be established.

In *Tuning and delay*, a dance piece that I presented at the end of the first year of the Master program, I developed a practice (*tuning and delay*) that came out of the experience of physical proximity. The two dancers that danced the piece used physical proximity as a means to 'tune' into the other person's space, which we considered as a sort of reverb around the body.

In particular we focused on the common space in between the two bodies, the limit zone that doesn't belong to one of the two dancers because it is a shared space, a sort of interstice between two walls.

The shared area has been also a space to be 'preserved' because physical contact was not allowed in most part of the piece.

The space in between was thus the main element that gave rise to the dance together with other rules and principles, such as the initiation of the movement in the pelvis, the exchange of roles of leader and follower. By sharing a common physical principle it has been possible to have a similar movement vocabulary to generate the dance without setting the movement material.

The *tuning* into the other's space and movement articulation has also been understood itself as *waiting*: we have created a "dramaturgy of waiting" as a fundamental activity to allow the emergence of the dance.

Waiting has been also considered as a condition itself, a specific way of concentrating for the whole duration of the piece. Waiting as *tuning* into the other's space, waiting for movements to come, waiting that the dance of the other takes place.

Practice

I have created a practical exercise to experience the *waiting* and I have proposed it also to a group of students of the BA of ArtEZ school of the arts during the research intensive, a research week where each of the MA students has worked with a group of dancers to investigate parts of the overall research.

Waiting starts from walking in space (studio, stage), choosing a place and staying in the standing position until that space is exhausted, meaning that one is ready to move to another space.

This practice deals with positioning one's own body in space as almost a temporal occupation of it, seeking for an extreme consciousness of the space where the dance will take place. Waiting is a choice, an action that the performer does before physical movement finds its place through a specific articulation.

Waiting has to do with decision making because it involves the evaluation of the conditions that will lead towards a final choice: the choice to move, how to move, where and when.

Waiting develops consciousness of the body's space (volume) and the space (volume) around the body. At the same time the activity of waiting allows to acknowledge what one doesn't know, information that is temporarily out of reach and that will become specific later on, when the body will articulate.

Movement as an *emersion* will appear suddenly, as a sort of surprise.

Here we encounter the paradox that I mentioned in the introduction and the coexistence of opposite dynamics: the performer is conscious of the condition(s), knows the conditions of his/her own body and its relation with space. The conditions are also the set of rules that will determine the movement's parameters (quality, pace, space, rhythm). At the same time those conditions of knowing allow the emergence of an unknown movement, which for instance will be very difficult to reproduce in the same sequence after its first execution. In fact in this practice movements are produced through improvisation.

In his keynote lecture "Notes on poetics and choreography", presented at the Erasmus intensive in Helsinki in November 2013, Ric Allsopp writes extensively about conditions by looking at the relation between dance and poetry as "languages that operate in excess of the functions of language, and open the possibilities of radical approaches to coherence and affection"¹⁵ (1). Allsopp starts from the relationship between writing and dance to "consider the parallels between a poetics of movement and a poetics of writing, in what can be called 'choreography', itself already a poetics". (1) In Allsopp's text poetics is defined in different ways according to the consideration of it as an "approach to acts of making" (1): poetics as act of immediacy, as a condition, as a generator, as a formal structuring devise, as (endless) practice¹⁶.

Moreover Allsopp writes about the presence of language in dance practices and the tendency that both language and dance have to go beyond the forms that "make them visible and apprehendable to us"(1). This going beyond suggests for Allsopp the possibility to give rise to the "something else" in performance. The analysis of the conditions, the poetics, as Allsopp clearly uses almost as synonymous, becomes fundamental to 'escape' the search for meaning because conditions might be seen as *how* the emergence of "something else" finds its place. This text clarified my own understanding of condition(s) within my choreographic practice first of all as a concept that can be understood in several ways: conditions of space, body's conditions, conditions as set of rules or as starting point for a specific movement research (pre-conditions).

Condition(s) is also understood as a practice of *knowing how* in relation to the production of body knowledge, form and composition. It both regards the process of making dance, which means making time and space, and the final outcome, the *some thing* that is itself a movement and a condition: choreography might be seen as a change of conditions and also as practice that organizes those movement(s). Still, *some thing* stays ungraspable, non definable, opening a space for different understanding of it and thus making the work non-affirmative/static but in constant movement/dynamic.

In her article "Choreographing the site, excavating the dance" Anna Pakes writes about *The site*, a project by British choreographer Rosemary Butcher that premiered in 1983.

"The piece was inspired by images and ideas from archaeology as fundamental conditions for both the process and the performance: The site was first conceived in response to the experience of visiting the remains of a hill fort near Castle Drogo in Devon, which provoked a feeling of 'exhilaration at the bleakness and vastness of things' (Butcher, 2003)" (8).

The piece was first of all an embodied experience of a particular place, which can be seen as the pre-condition that gave origin to the dance vocabulary and articulation.

¹⁵ Laurence Louppe, *Poetics of Contemporary Dance* Dance Books Ltd (May 11, 2010)

¹⁶ At the end of the article Allsopp makes a list of possible understanding of poetics as a sort of glossary.

The movement vocabulary was in fact created using terminology from archaeology such as dragging, post-holding, scraping away, pinning, tunnelling etc.

In fact, "The movement produced refers –sometime explicitly, sometimes obliquely- to the original excavatory activity that the word describes". (9)

The use of such specific terminology exposes a certain understanding of body knowledge: the connection with archaeological terms and notions is a way to emphasize the "value of thinking through the body" (5) as possible generation of space and time.

The understanding of the word condition could thus also be extended and one could think of it as a practice of knowing: as in Butcher's process for *The Site*, I could think the practice of waiting as embodying space and tuning into certain conditions.

In his interview for Dancetech tv philosopher Alva Noë talks about dance as metaphor for consciousness: "Experience and consciousness is something we do actively, not something that happens inside us. Experience is a temporary extended involvement (...) so it is embodied, it's always necessarily environmentally situated and spread out in time and dynamic".¹⁷

This passage clarifies the purpose of the practice of *waiting* and makes it more specific: waiting is connected to the analysis of the conditions that "exist" before physical movement. It has to do with observing and recognizing the conditions of the body and the space around the body. It is about knowing *that* according to those conditions a specific movement will happen and will possibly modify space and time.

It is developing consciousness according to specific conditions.

Choreographer Michele di Stefano, founder of the Italian group MK, talks about conditions as necessary to generate a change of posture in the body. "The change of posture is the result of an inner change that happens due to a set of unknown conditions. Those conditions constitute the environment in which the body of the performer experiences dance as an act of learning".¹⁸

The activity Alva Noë is talking about is indeed an act of learning and it is very present in my own practice too. The analysis of the conditions of space is necessary to learn first of all one's own spatial position so that the dance can take place. Often I ask the dancers to look at themselves from the outside while moving so as to learn and be conscious about their position and movement in space. Once one has learnt the conditions of space, a set of rules can be created so that those conditions can be re-traced each time a specific dance takes place.

A good example of conditions as set of rules is certainly the score written by choreographer Trisha Brown for the piece *Set and re-set*:

¹⁷ Alva Noë "Dance as a way of knowing" interview for *Dancetech tv* By Marlon Barrios Solano. Published on the 25th of July 2012. Source: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FbWVERm5bsM> (last visit 26-02-2014)

¹⁸ Michele Di Stefano interviewed by myself in January 2013

1. Keep it simple! (The clarity issue)
2. Play with visibility and invisibility! (The privacy issue)
3. If you don't know what to do, get in line. (Helping out with downtime)
4. Stay on the outside edge of the stage. (The spatial issue)
5. Act on instinct. (The wild card)

Trisha Brown wrote this text as a set of instructions that could be used by the dancers to perform the piece. Each instruction is in my view also a condition, which defines the kind of activity with which the dancers are busy, the relation between the dancers, the pace of the choreography and the organization of space. Each activity engages the dancer in a different way (physically, emotionally, spatially) and involves also a certain amount of time to wait before making the next decision.

To go back to the activity of *waiting* in my own practice, I could conclude by saying that *waiting* is a state, a condition, and it is an action.

It is a state of the body, connected with space and time and it is also a space for questioning the origin of movements and recalling memories of the body, actions, habits and postures that have been stored in the body.

The state of waiting puts the performer into a quite dimension, where listening and tuning with the spaces of the body and the spaces around the body is the starting point.

To refer to the state I mentioned in the beginning of the thesis, *waiting* is connected to both knowing and not knowing: it allows the analysis of the conditions (gaining knowledge) and also to take time to make a new decision (not knowing).

Joao da Silva, head of the MA of choreography at ArtEZ School for the arts, talks about decision making in improvisation in relation to knowing and not knowing¹⁹.

Da Silva's interest in decision making in dance and particularly in improvisation practices starts from the desire to overcome dichotomies such as knowing- not knowing, conscious – unconscious etc.

Da Silva proposes instead to look at how one uses what he/she knows and doesn't know in dance as part of a process of decision making.

"As a dancer one knows that he/she doesn't know: the point is how knowing is brought to light so that the decision that one makes will make a difference.

Not knowing is rarely accomplished in dance, most of the time we know what we are doing but we don't know that we are constantly deciding.

What differs a dancer from a regular person is that he/she articulates "it", so in a way is aware of bringing to the surface what is for others an unconscious mechanism".

The dancer knows that he/she doesn't know or partially knows the conditions but still makes a decision.

Going back to the practice of *waiting*, it is a conscious choice that will take the dancers to the next step.

Moreover, it's a choice that the dancer will make again and again also to re-set the conditions and initiate something new.

In dance, da Silva says, knowing is a primary condition: "partially knowing and partially not knowing as a condition creates spaces, new spaces, where movements and actions exist as a potential that hasn't been actualized yet.

¹⁹ The text is a composition of passage from a skype interview with Joao da Silva realised by myself (20-03-2014).

This tension requires a different attention both from the performer and the audience, opening space for knowing differently”, “otherness” as Lyn Hejinian puts it.

And more: “For example in Alexander technique one learns how to stop unconscious patterns, how to decide to not move in a known way. In improvisation the basic condition is the fact that one knows the conditions only partially. Each decision is fundamental because it can make a difference while in set choreography most of the decisions have been already made”.

In my own practice improvisation is used according to a strict grid of rules: the dancer has still space to make a decision within a known structure because the ‘rules’ of the structure can be subverted, meaning that there is space for transgression.

The question is how much the dancer knows about his/her own dance and how much attention is required to consider both known and unknown elements in the process of decision making throughout the piece.

Transgression is not as refusal of the established rules but as possibility to ‘play’ with given rules.

In her article "Embodying transgression" Karmen Mackendrick writes that the “completeness of the dancer’s attention is the only way to keep the attention of the audience and draw the spectators out of their easy, passive distance: attention, devoted desire, calls to desire, demands attention”.²⁰

Attention could be a key word for knowing and access for the audience into *some thing*. Attention could also be the shared condition that would again, as said before, move the focus from what dance means to what dance does.

A practical example that certainly contributes to broaden the reflection on conditions as set of rules is the practice of the ‘perfect movement’ by Salva Sanchis. This practice is particularly interesting because it deals with the extreme consciousness of physical movement to generate a specific body and articulation.

A text written by myself follows as clarification and analysis of this practice.

²⁰ In *Of the presence of the body. Essays on dance and performance theory* by André Lepecki, Wesleyan (March 24, 2004) p. 140-156

Practice of *perfect movement*

Intro

This text has the purpose to put in words a physical practice, *the perfect movement* by choreographer Salva Sanchis.

The idea behind the production of this text is not so much to explain the practice but more to analyse it so to reflect on how it works and what kind of theoretical reflection it might generate.

This text wants in fact to create a bridge between theory and practice and support the transmission of the physical experience to open a broader reflection on how a body in motion makes time and space, seeking to identify and specify the conditions that allow the making of time and space.

Those conditions are in this case intended as set of rules, a collection of things that the one who performs this practice is busy with during the amount of time that the practice lasts.

One last and very important thing to say is that the practice is based on improvisation, which makes the movement's vocabulary very diverse according to each performer's background and understanding of the practice itself.

Salva Sanchis has been exploring the practice of improvisation and made it a main element of his choreographic work.

Rewind

I met Salva Sanchis for the first time during a workshop at the ArtEZ master of Choreography in Arnhem in September 2013.

The *perfect movement* was one of the topics of the workshop.

I like thus to consider this text as a report based on my personal experience of the *perfect movement* and also a dialogue on physical practice, its origin and possible transmission strategies.

In the frame of my own research, I also consider this practice as an example of body's articulation that refers to a specific condition: the physical movement is in fact shaped by a set of rules that generate a specific kind of body and its relation with movement.

How it works

At the very first look, the *perfect movement* makes a sort of "graphic body", an environment where the edges between body, the movement(s) that it produces and space are clearly defined.

One could think of an architectural body: the body's structure and shape is highly underlined as the result of extreme attention and capability of planning the movement before it is executed.

In this sense, the experience of *perfect movement* is of a sort of "body's delay" because the core of the practice lies in the capability of visualizing one's own body in space before actually executing the movement. In a way, one could say that the movement finds "its place" only after it has been clearly visualized beforehand.

If we analyse the parameters of time and space, the perfect movement could be considered always "in the future": one is busy with previewing the movement's trajectory always looking forward to the next event, as if there was no space for the movement's past.

In terms of space, there is an interesting shift of attention from one's own body towards the space around the body, which stays compact and becomes a sort of protection that one takes to the next movement and so on. The space around the body feels dry, precise, something like cold air.

Let's imagine a practical example: starting in the standing position.

Rules:

- Imagine the movement's trajectory
- Try to be as specific as possible
- After the movement is executed it is possible to take a short time to observe the current position, which will get shorter because the movement imagined will be more complex

Trajectory: "right hand in front (palm towards the face, elbow bended), left foot slides towards the back so that the heel will be lifted from the floor".

The movement is thus executed.

Rules

The first thing to do is to verify that:

- The body is in the previewed position
- Observe how many details were actually not included in the preview, such as the position of the spine, the distribution of the body's weight, direction of the eyes etc.
- Keep this moment for reflection quite short and move forward

What is very interesting to notice is a sort of alert and capability of seeing oneself from the outside while being extremely conscious about the present body's position in space.

When I practiced the perfect movement I thought about mapping the space, as I was busy in making a path and build my own "tour" of the studio.

When certain timing is established, one starts to shorten the time of the visualization while the movement becomes more and more complex, meaning that one should be able to visualize longer sequences of movement and more details.

This mechanism triggers a specific mode of producing movement and generates a certain economy of movement(s) where the smallest details can be previewed and controlled so that there is almost no space for arbitrary motion.

The practice of the perfect movement is in a way opposite to the one of the *emersion* because in the perfect movement the movement is thought before it is executed while in the *emersion* physical movement appears and it is not planned beforehand.

Still there are similarities in the process: both practices have three moments: waiting/visualizing the movement, allowing the *emersion* of movement/executing the movement, reflection and consideration of the current situation.

More in general all the examples want to open the reflection on how body knowledge is produced according to specific conditions, rules or physical principles.

Knowing is a state and also a question: I know the condition of a specific dance/do I know the conditions so as to make a move?

The tension between knowing and not knowing is fundamental for keeping alive the desire to search for specific articulation. Not knowing is a state that makes the dancer questioning the body again and again. It is useful to trigger one's own presence in the present, in the moment where the body, time and space tune and allow the emergence of movement, here and now.

Part 2: Articulation

How does dance write?

As mentioned in the introduction, articulation is the moment when the body makes time and space, writing the/in and with space as a text on a blank page.

In the practice of *emersion*, after the time spent *waiting* and analysing the conditions, *articulation* is the moment when the body actualizes the decision to move and *makes* time and space.

When one mentions articulation as writing, the analogy with language becomes evident.

Therefore, in this part of the thesis I will look at several examples from other practices to position my own use of such term, particularly in relation to composition.

For example the expression 'movement vocabulary' has been used by many choreographers in several contexts and in different ways.

In my practice, to articulate the body means to channel the activity of waiting (analysis of the conditions) into physical motion, creating movement vocabulary and establishing a dialogue with the existent space. The body articulates and writes space to actualize movements that come out of a tension between knowing and not knowing where not knowing means to acknowledge that one knows his/her own movement only partially and because of that movements must be searched again and again.

The body's articulation involves not only a specific way of organizing body parts but also the constant search and recognition of the conditions of space and time, which could also be seen as a constant *tuning* to be 'present' and produce movement that is always related to the very moment of its production.

The tension between knowing and not knowing finds its visibility in the body through a specific way of organizing the body, searching for balance and at the same time by questioning one's own stability.

The principle of the pelvis out of balance is one of the elements that contribute to a specific way of articulating the body by creating a specific movement vocabulary that, as in the case of *Tuning and delay*, becomes a shared field between the performers.

Another important aspect of this second part is the consideration of how movement vocabulary is organized within a choreographic structure, how the relation between movement and composition becomes *some thing*.

Examples of movement vocabulary

In *A choreographer's score* by Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker and Bojana Cvejić (2012), movement vocabulary is clearly defined in the glossary at the end of the book as the “totality of all movements used in a dance piece; vocabulary describes movement in terms of its origin, genesis, corporal shape.” (244)

Seen in this way, the movement vocabulary implicitly refers to specific conditions on which it is produced. In the case of the early works by A.T. de Keersmaeker movements are based on simple actions like jumping and turning, as in the case of *Violin phase*, a solo performed by de Keersmaeker herself and premiered in 1981.

In *Violin phase* the movement vocabulary lies in basic movements of the upper body “which stays upright on the vertical -rarely changing the axis- pivoting with swinging arms” (27).

Compositionally, the movement vocabulary is organized following a gradual transformation as well as accumulation. “I do one movement. I add a second movement. I add a third movement gradually building up the whole structure”(27).

Though there is an accumulation of material, the seed of the movement always remains present.

In *Violin phase* the decision to dance in a circle influenced the movement vocabulary: turning. The space pattern was decided before as a pre-object and the vocabulary has been organized according to this decision.

From the compositional point of view, it is very important to consider that Steve Reich's music was built following a specific compositional procedure of gradual process.

In his text “Music as a Gradual Process” (1968), Reich writes about the possibility to hear the musical process through a gradual transformation of single elements, where the main element stays always present.

Reich talks about gradual and he means “extremely gradual: a process happening so slowly and gradually that listening to it resembles watching a minute hand on a watch - you can perceive it moving after you stay with it a little while”.

This is what de Keersmaeker did with her movement vocabulary for *Violin phase*, organizing the movement with a gradual shifting from one thing to another²¹.

Each new shift occurs when there is a change in the space pattern (space conditions the movement vocabulary) plus a series of variations, such as diagonals and other geometric patterns that derive from the circle.

In this case dance writes in floor patterns, which are also visible because de Keersmaeker dances on sand.

In another piece, *Come out*, de Keersmaeker created the vocabulary starting from gestures that are connected to manual labor, as the two dancers were sitting on chairs.

“The movements also draw lines geometrically; they reach out and point into the space in circles and lines” (37). Compositionally, *Come out* is quite similar to *Violin phase* as it is also constructed by accumulating the gestures of the two performers that are composed in counterpoint.

French choreographer Frédéric Gies writes extensively about the origin of movements in connection to BMC© practice for the project *Dance Practicable*²², which is a performance and also a publication made in collaboration with other choreographers and theoreticians. Gies questions the ontology of movement by looking at how the use of different body organs and apparatuses generate a specific kind of motion.

²¹ For more see: *A choreographer's score* p.

²² <http://www.dancepracticable.net/> last visited 22-03-14

The conditions here are thus the conditions of the body, organically, emotionally and anatomically speaking.

In Gies's dance, the movement vocabulary is the response to different inputs and it has mainly to do with movement initiation.

The dance is organized in a written score after it has been practiced. The score becomes the structure that can be interpreted in different ways according to each performer.

Double skin/double mind is a workshop created by choreographer Emio Greco and dramaturg Pieter Scholten that contains the main principles of Emio Greco's practice and reflection on production of body knowledge.

The workshop has been created starting from a question on how body knowledge is transmitted, how practice can be seen as a living archive and how repertoire can be considered in contemporary dance. The workshop is based on four points that are in a way a vocabulary, not as collection of single unities but as different activities that generate a specific motion and also prepare the body for the rehearsals during the artistic process.

"The four principles show a process of intense dialogue between movement and language, and can be traced both in within the corpus of choreographic works and in writings" such as Greco and Scholten initial manifesto "The seven necessities"²³.

The four parts of the workshops are²⁴:

- *Breathing* is a way of giving, a vehicle of information in which you project the state of your body.
- *Jumping* means deconstruction for the sake of reconstruction. Its intensity encourages physical strength, resistance, regeneration and reconsideration of energy. It represents the aim of not having a body
- *Expanding* is a further development of *breathing* and *jumping* in which the first personal choices are taken. It depends on the dancers' critical approach to use what is available and at the same time not to be satisfied with it.
- *Incorporation* is a gradual decrease of length and weight, exercising the ability of control and measure of time and space with the need to explore the outside.

What is very interesting for me is that those principles are comprehensive of many different elements that include not only the action itself but how through that specific action the body relates to space, both inner space and outer space.

The choice of those specific words also tells about the approach to the body as a physical and energetic entity and also as a critical 'thinker' that always looks for more, beyond what is visible as is clearly stated in the description of *Expanding*.

In my own practice of the *emersion*, after the analysis of the conditions, the performer generates movement vocabulary through improvisation according to specific parameters that can be of space, pace, movement qualities.

The articulation of dance might lead to the re-shaping of the conditions: while the body articulates new spaces are generated, connections are made. *Some thing* happens as unique event that hopefully will provoke a movement in the performer and luckily in the audience.

²³ *Company in the school, between experiment and heritage*, Amsterdam, EG/PC and AHK (2007) p.21

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p.21

Dance is thus an action, something that the body *does*.

When I refer to dance as an action I mean that the movement vocabulary is not created as a gesture, as in "Come out" by De Keersmaeker.

Movement is an action because it has a specific purpose of changing the conditions of space and time.

Dance is an action and it is not representative of something else but it evokes states and conditions and even spaces and places as an environment, to go back to Michele di Stefano.

The origin of the movement vocabulary, to stay with Gies's words, is emotional, which means that it initiates as an inner movement that 'moves' the performer and it is actualized as physical movement.

For instance, in the practice of the *consequential movement*, a physical practice created by myself that sees movement as a chain of events, the performer moves according to a specific principle: movement develops as a chain starting from a single hint. The hint can be understood differently: it can be dropping one body part, pulling one body part or simply initiate motion in one part of the body but can also be the response to a specific state, memory or condition that causes physical movement.

In the practice of *consequential movement* the body moves according to specific conditions and still there is the possibility that the origin, the hint, remains unconscious.

The performer *tunes* with the physical space and also with the space of memories that, as said before, are stored in the body.

The result is a space pattern that cannot be decided beforehand and movement has to be followed as another body, which is opposite to the Keersmaeker's approach in *Violin phase*.

To go back to Reich's text, the process becomes fundamental and to "Focus on the musical process makes possible that shift of attention away from he and she and you and me towards it".

Movement writes spaces that were not there before its actualization and does *some thing* in space that it is a change of the conditions of the body, space and time.

The attention of the performer towards "it" means to follow the dance, which doesn't belong to the dancer but to space.

In a way space owns movement, creating a paradox for the dancer because movement is indeed produced by a body in motion but it slips away from it as soon as it is actualized.

A dance is not done for one's own satisfaction but to be offered and shared with others.

Dance makes time and space as an attempt to modify conditions that respond to the imagination of who produces it to trigger the imagination of who watches.

Articulation and coding

It seems at this point important to take a step back and notice how articulation generates codes, how a specific way of moving the body could be seen as a code, not in terms of universal code recognized by everybody but as a ground on which each choreographer builds his/her own movement language.

In my own practice the principle of the pelvis that moves out of balance generates a particular way of moving that influences also the process of decision making, to go back to da Silva's reflection.

The dancer doesn't reproduce a specific 'step' but already knows that will articulate in a specific way and thus will make space and time in a specific way.

In my view, coding is a common field, an agreement that I make with the dancers so that we share a certain way of moving as a fundament for trust. In this sense, the decision that a dancer makes will always be proper within the structure because it refers to a particular agreement that has been made before.

Composer Pierre Boulez writes²⁵ about coding as a strategy for establishing a relation with the musician to make "conscious use of the discrepancy between notation and realization" and describes it a "circuit" that is composed by the following steps:

" A the *composer* originates a structure which he *ciphers*

B he *ciphers* it in a coded *grid*

C the interpreter *deciphers* this coded *grid*

D according to his decoding he reconstitutes the *structure* that has been transmitted to him" (87)

What is interesting for me in this passage is the consideration of a structure as something that can be re-written according to the executor's understanding of it. In my practice this would correspond to the agency that each dancer has in the piece as responsibility that he/she takes in the work. Though some choices are already made during the process, the dancer has still the responsibility of the execution and of "full attention" towards the material that is a primary condition in my work.

In other works, such as the one of Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker, there is in my view another kind of attention because the choreography is completely set. Still, one has to decide, to say yes, to the reproduction of that particular step or structure so that the work is kept alive.

Coding, as well as decision making is always present especially when the physical practice starts from specific physical principles as in my own. Coding is also another layer of knowing about one's own movement because it involves recognition of that particular way of articulating the body that makes a dance different from another.

²⁵ Pierre Boulez "Time, notation and coding" in *Orientations: collected writings*, Harvard University Press, 1990

Part 3: resonance

What stays of a dance?

The third part of this thesis is a reflection on how a dance exists as a resonance, which could be thought as a trace, a memory that is left behind after the dance's passage in space.

After the activity of *waiting*, dance appears as articulation based on specific rules so as to make time and space. Each time a dance is produced it is already gone, it lasts in space for a very short amount of time. As briefly mentioned in the introduction, dance's ephemerality has been a major problem in dance history. In my view the ephemerality is in fact the main strength of dance exactly because it is a reminder of the fact that we don't act, live, breath, on a stable ground.

Moving remains the only way to "maintain balance on the slippery earth"^{26 27}

Choreography could be seen as an overall movement that wants to remind this human condition.

Principles, rules and *articulations* are necessary to counterbalance this non- stable condition and give the illusion that it is still possible to 'impress' space.

Some thing is perhaps the overall movement that wants to displace the audience and in fact it probably exists and can be perceived only by the audience. The audience can choose to not- know and have the chance to understand differently, to go back to Da Silva's words.

In my practice there is very little space for the dancers to not-know. The practices I am writing about are all based on the extreme consciousness of what, where and when movement is produced.

During the process for *Consequential movement*, the second piece of the project *Dances beneath the Oak*²⁸, I worked with the dancers on the physicality starting from a main question: what is an event?

According to this main question, we have opened a reflection about how an event changes the body and where are we after that event takes place. The second question -Where are we?- has been used to keep questioning one's own body and movement while doing it because movement is re-traced, not reproduced, again and again.

If one thinks of dance as a movement generated through certain conditions and of its articulation as movement that creates new conditions, dance could be seen as an event that happens and creates other events, other movements, *some thing*.

Steve Paxton talks about events in the practice of the *small dance* as "the reflexes that adjust everything to keep you upright".²⁹

In my practice I wouldn't think of an event as something that adjusts something else but certainly as something that happens and creates another event as an endless chain.

²⁶ How can we maintain our balance while walking upon the slippery earth? Aztec philosophers addressed this question against an assumed metaphysics, which held that the cosmos and its human inhabitants are constituted by and ultimately identical with a single, vivifying, eternally self-generating and self-regenerating sacred energy. Knowledge, truth, value, rightness, and beauty were defined in terms of the aim of humans maintaining their balance as well as the balance of the cosmos. Every moment and aspect of human life was meant to further the realization of this aim.

²⁷ James Maffie "Aztec Philisophy" <http://www.iep.utm.edu/aztec/#SH3a> last visited 22-03-14

²⁸ Dances beneath the Oak is a choreographic project initiated by myself in 2013. The project is a collection of dances based on different physical principles that evolve into choreographic structures. For more info visit

²⁹ Paxton's talk at CI36: <http://www.contactquarterly.com/cq/webtext/Paxtontalk.html>

As mentioned before, in the practice of the *consequential movement* each movement is a hint that generates a chain of events that involves also other elements, such as music and lights, making the chain of events a dramaturgical element.

Still, as in Paxton's *small dance*, there is something that must be kept upright, *some thing* that could be a resonance, an object, a movement and a condition. *Some thing* could be "it" as Steve Reich wrote.

And what is "it"?

In order to reach a better understanding of *some thing*, I could perhaps explore another parameter, *where*, as another attempt to grab the ungraspable. Perhaps *some thing* is not *what* but *where*, a space that is generated through a specific *how*.

Space

Space, as word and as topic, has been strongly present in the thesis so far and it is certainly one of the main concerns of my choreographic practice.

The conditions I have been writing about can be considered as a set of rules that have the main purpose to enable a change of space and set other conditions and so other spaces.

One could think about the geographical characteristics of a place that influence people's way of living and behaving within a specific environment.

The encounter of dance with space is about how a dance produces space and at the same time how space shapes and defines a certain way of moving, to go back to the practice of *emersion*.

In fact, in my practice I always encourage the performers to establish a dialogue with space, which means to consider space as a partner that, as I said before, co-produces movement.

For example, in the performance *MIT* by choreographer Rosalind Goldberg mentioned before, space could be a gaseous realm that conditions the materiality of the dance and the dancer and contributes to the construction of a fictional character that acts within a fictional reality³⁰.

The space of my practice is an imaginary place, in which atmosphere and materiality are strongly conditioned by the performer's presence that could also be seen as a condition itself, an inner condition that influences the movement vocabulary, the body's articulation, the *making* of space.

Space as sort of another body, whose materiality is plastic, changeable and can be modified according to a set of rules (poetics).

What stays of the dance is space as memory, whose conditions have been modified, changed or even subverted by the body in motion.

To have a practical example in mind, in electronic music this kind of memory would be a resonance or a reverb.

Resonance is a term that can be considered as something that is provoked by something else and also as something that exists per se.

When I think about a dance I think about how it resonates in space, which could be associated with the possibility to evoke images, emotions, memories.

On the other hand a resonance, for instance in acoustics, is "the tendency of an acoustic system to absorb more energy when it is forced or driven at a frequency that matches one of its own natural frequencies of vibration than it does at other frequencies"³¹. (Wikipedia)

Compared to choreography, resonance could be a 'field' where different components -movements, performers, audience- 'tune' into a certain frequency so that the dance resonates in space.

³⁰ The full performance is available at <https://vimeo.com/78910380>

³¹ source Wikipedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acoustic_resonance#Resonance_in_musical_composition last visit 09-03-2014

Some thing can resonate as a sort of amplification that is generated through specific conditions and articulation: if certain conditions are established, one can decide to tune into those conditions so that *some thing* can happen.

Dance resonates and leaves something behind as harmonics of a musical note.

What stay is a sort of trace, the absence of a previous action.

How then does *some thing* relate to the tension between knowing and not knowing?

Spaces in between

In this thesis I am writing about coexistence of opposites, such as knowing and not- knowing, presence and absence, visible and non- visible and I have proposed to overcome the duality of how and what, seeking for *some thing*.

To go back to Allsopp, “something else” could be considered as what is hidden in a performance and must be brought to light.

Probably *some thing* can be brought to the surface only through a movement that is the result of the cooperation between different elements as in the *thingstead*.

Perhaps in order to write about *some thing* one should be able to look ‘over’ the visible or better, be able to perceive what cannot be seen as a physical entity.

One should *tune* with the movements that are generated by the bodies in motion and somehow agree in being moved so to experience *some thing*.

Or, *some thing* could be a space that resides in the imagination of the watcher and the dancer and that comes to visibility through physical experience.

It is not about seeing something but more in order to perceive that a change has happened and has put the dancer and the watcher into the unknown, the unknown that is not necessary to define.

In his article “On vicarious Causation”³², Graham Harman writes about a “weird realism” that sees the connection between objects or substances as a vicarious causation.

(...) Forms do not touch one another directly, but somehow melt, fuse, and decompress in a shared common space from which all are partly absent. (...) Two entities influence one another only by meeting on the interior of a third, where they exist side-by-side until something happens that allows them to interact” (190).

Some thing could be what exceeds the physical body: if two bodies are on stage, one could look at the third body, which is not physically there but is perceived as a volume in space.

What remains of a dance could be an inner movement, a displacement in the performer and in the audience generated by physical motion.

What stays of a dance could be the dance’s memory, the other thing that remains as absence of the material body.

In his essay *Choreographic objects*³³ William Forsythe writes about choreography as “a model of potential transition from one state to another in any space imaginable”.

Forsythe looks at choreography as a practice that exceeds physical motion, not as a substitute of the body but as “an alternative site for the understanding of potential instigation and organization of action to reside”.

³² The article is part of *COLLAPSE VOL. II: SPECULATIVE REALISM*, Editor: Robin Mackay (March 2007)

³³ <http://www.williamforsythe.de/essay.html> last visited 20-03-14

I guess that my interest in this essay lies in the reflection on choreography as a practice that organizes physical and non- physical movements.

Though my starting point and my main interest is indeed the body in motion and how it articulates, it is undeniable that the body in motion produces other movements, resonances that can also be organized in a choreographic form.

The next question that rises naturally would thus be: how does choreography frame the non-tangible remains of a dance?

Organizing latencies

It seems important at this point to reflect on form and composition and strategies to organize *some thing* and it is also important for me to underline that with this research I am seeking for a choreographic practice that combines composition as the setting up of conditions through which the emergence of a choreographic image becomes possible³⁴ and composition as structural procedure, for example in relation to an existent music piece. Because the dance that I am seeking to organize exists as a movement between knowing and not- knowing, it seems natural to consider several approaches to form to sustain such movement. The emergence of movements as main characteristics of the physical practice I have been writing about, such as *Tuning and delay* and *Consequential movement*, depends on a strict grid of rules and parameters that can derive from their specific characteristics and also be decided beforehand according to other elements, such as music or text.

When one dances, one produces movements and in that very moment gains knowledge over that movement, meaning that he or she could know what he or she is doing or just did right after the movement has been produced. The dancer knows what he or she is doing, where and when he or she is doing it. Still, a space for not- knowing stays open, for example for wondering about the source of movement that, as I described in the practice of *emersion*, could be unconscious, emotional.

When I read the scores of Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker I was fascinated by the knowledge over her own work and compositional choices and still when I watch the dances something always escapes my certainty to know and understand what I am looking at. For example, in the *String quartet No.4* on the music by Béla Bartók, the rigorous structure of the choreography seems to slip away to give space to a playful display of dances that seems to emerge out of the strictness of the choreographic score. The vocabulary used by Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker for that piece comes from a series of gestures that are organized within cells of movements and there is no space for any improvisation.

In my own practice, the movement material is instead improvised based on a set of rules that define its rhythm, space and quality. The space patterns emerge from the movement as a response to the choice to 'follow the dance', to pay attention to one's own movement and how it makes time and space. Yet, it is not an improvised performance, nor a reproduction of steps.

I could think about it as an attempt to re-trace the resonance that the dance has left during the process and also during the live performance. In a way, the dance is stored in the dancers' bodies and is released into space according to certain rules that are built so that *some thing* can finally arise. The space in between knowing and not- knowing could be understood as a sort of grey area that doesn't belong to the dancers or to the choreographer because it is the shared space, its is *some thing* that happens and makes that space different from before.

³⁴ Ric Allsopp "Something else: on latency and composition" in *Inventing futures*, ArtEZ press 2013, p.23

Conclusion

Writing this thesis has been first of all for me a good practice for organizing my thoughts and findings to initiate a new and probably very long period of research and discoveries about the fundamental and basic relationship between body and space.

It has been very interesting to trace a map where artists from previous generations and artists of my own generation find a common ground and indirectly share similar questions about how the body, the human body, can still trigger a choreographic thought and how dance can be reinvented and still excavated in contemporary choreography.

Some connections are still theoretical and not yet visible in practice and I consider this aspect as a strength of the research to feed the will to keep searching, digging and hopefully finding answers through physical practice.

Questions such as “How does dance write” will probably stay in the studio with me for very long time. The body as a living and time limited archive will serve as an image and as a reminder that dance is indeed an activity that exposes a true human condition, which doesn't affirm itself but is in constant motion.

The search for a choreographic form that combines emergent and structural aspects will probably exist as a paradox that I will never manage to overcome, nurturing a capability to stay in movement and follow the movement(s) that each dance will produce.

Glossary

Condition: the state of the space and the body, or how things are, or set of generative rules.

Dance: making of time and space of body's articulation according to specific conditions.

Emersion: mix of emergence and immersion that indicates a double dynamic: inside-out and outside-in

Movement vocabulary: set of physical principles that shape the body's articulation, quality, rhythm and space

Resonance: Resonance as amplification Resonance as change of conditions Resonance as tuning

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