

### Expanded Choreographies - Choreographic Histories: Trans-Historical Perspectives Beyond Dance and Human Bodies in Motion

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critical dance studies



Anna Leon

# Expanded Choreographies – Choreographic Histories

Trans-Historical Perspectives  
Beyond Dance and Human Bodies  
in Motion

[transcript]

Anna Leon  
Expanded Choreographies – Choreographic Histories

## Editorial

The series is edited by Gabriele Brandstetter and Gabriele Klein.

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Anna Leon

# **Expanded Choreographies – Choreographic Histories**

Trans-Historical Perspectives Beyond Dance and Human Bodies in Motion

**[transcript]**

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*To Niovi, with all the love I can muster for her.  
And to my father, who keeps company with the trees.*





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Emma, who made me happy while I was writing this text – and beyond.

## Notes on translation

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All quotations are given in the language of the source used. While this has largely been the original language (or a published translation juxtaposed to the original language), some sources are quoted in translation if that was the researched source used.

All quotations that are not in English are followed by a translation by the author. The treatises by Domenico da Piacenza, Guglielmo Ebreo da Persaro, and Antonio Cornazano constitute an exception, as published translations have been used (see Bibliography); deviations from these translations are indicated in the footnotes. Given the complexity of artistic, poetic, and context-bound connotations that may be inherent in them, titles of artworks are not translated. Titles of books and other written material, when mentioned in the text, are translated literally – this is done to facilitate the reader, even if such literal translations do not always do justice to the works.

Quotations integrate – as much as text formatting allows – the orthographic and typographic particularities of the material quoted.



## Summary

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From the staging of objects to motions in urban space, dance scholarship increasingly recognises choreographic expansions beyond dance-making and the moving human body. Additionally, the history of choreography encompasses practices ranging from notation to dramaturgy and composition. Against this background, this book activates the term “expanded choreography” to explore bidirectional relations between contemporary and historical instances of choreography not complying with a corporeal, kinetic, or dancerly focus.

This book juxtaposes nine case studies illustrating common problematics in different periods of European dance history: treatises predating the early-18<sup>th</sup> century, when the use of the term “choreography” was not synonymous with “dance-making”; practices from 20<sup>th</sup>-century modernity, when the relation between choreography, dance, and bodily movement was essentialised; and contemporary works surrounding the appearance of the term “expanded choreography”. In order to address relations between these periods, methodological tools from Dance Studies – Christina Thurner’s “spatialised” dance history model – and Art History – Mieke Bal’s “preposterous history” and Hal Foster’s treatment of the parallax – are used.

Based on the above analyses, *Expanded choreographies - Choreographic histories* presents expanded choreography as a field of diverse qualitative transformations of choreography, not limited to the transfer of physical-kinetic knowledge and practice to domains beyond dance. In parallel, it argues for the decentralisation of a dominant, historically-recent choreographic model based on dance-making, motion, and human corporeality in reading early-modern sources; and for the need to replace a discourse of corporeal/kinetic modernism in 20<sup>th</sup>-century choreography by admitting its multiplicity and including more diverse paradigms in its canon. In doing so, the book identifies the relevance of contemporary choreographic expansions for understanding historical practices – and vice versa – thus foregrounding the inscription of expanded choreography in a macro-historical framework. Viewing expansion as a territory in which the semantic scope of choreography can shift, it pleads for the necessity of recognising choreographic

plurality, with different conceptions of choreography forming – both in contemporaneity and in history – a constellation of multiple specificities.

## Introduction

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2012. The Fundació Antoni Tàpies in Barcelona hosted choreographer Xavier Le Roy's "Rétrospective", a performed exhibition. In parallel with the exhibition, and in collaboration with Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA) and Mercat de les Flors, a conference was organised: *Expanded Choreography. Situations, Movements, Objects*, with the following description:

In the last few years the term "choreography" has been used in an ever-expanding sense, becoming synonymous with specific structures and strategies disconnected from subjectivist bodily expression, style and representation. [...] Choreography is today emancipating itself from dance, engaging in a vibrant process of articulation. [...] Simultaneously, we have seen a number of exhibitions in which choreography is often placed in a tension between movement, situation and objects.<sup>1</sup>

A few months later, artist and writer Mårten Spångberg (who had also collaborated in the MACBA conference) published in *Spångbergianism*:

An expanded choreography owns the future. [...] The future belongs to choreography but only if it acknowledges its potentiality as an expanded capacity. Choreography is not the art of making dances (a directional set of tools), it is a generic set of capacities to be applied to any kind of production, analysis or organization.<sup>2</sup>

The term "expanded choreography" had been circulating for at least a few years before this exhibition and publication, in the most unexpected discursive contexts – ranging from a 2006 text on ethnographic approaches to education (noting that

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1 Expanded Choreography. Situations, Movements, Objects..., Conference presentation, MACBA 2012, <http://www.macba.cat/en/expanded-choreography-situations> (August 2020).

2 Spångberg, Mårten: Seventeen Points for The Future of Dance, 2012, <https://spangbergiansm.wordpress.com/tag/choreography/> (August 2020).

it ‘will have to include an expanded choreography of participatory stances<sup>3</sup>) to a rather surprising type of business-processing model implicating ‘an algorithm for expanding choreographies’.<sup>4</sup>

Expanded choreography is an elusive notion. There is no single, organised, expanded choreographic movement – no body of theorists or practitioners who claim a conceptual/artistic territory. There is no full consensus about the meaning of the term, and how one answers the question of what expanded choreography is indicates and reflects their view of choreography *tout court*. If choreography is related to a disciplinary arrangement of bodily motion, expanded choreography can be practiced by military officials and gender norms; if choreography is related to patterns of motion, expanded choreography can appear in the development of a fractal; if choreography is directed towards dancing bodies, expanded choreography can encompass the dance of non-human materialities. Moreover, as is the case with further widely-debated terms – “non dance”, “conceptual” dance, “post-dance”<sup>5</sup> – the very construction of the expression “expanded choreography” subjects it to criticism; the adjective “expanded” implies both a core from which expansion occurs (raising the question of what that core may be) and the potentiality of limitless widening, where everything becomes (expanded) choreography, emptying the term of meaning. But despite such issues, expanded choreography has benefited from relatively wider acceptance than other terms – most notably, it has been used by practitioners, including Mette Ingvarstsen, Dragana Bulut, Dalija Acin, and Spångberg.<sup>6</sup> Thus – in contrast to artists’ resistance to terms

- 
- 3 Powell, Kimberly: Inside-Out and Outside-In: Participant Observation in *Taiko* Drumming, in: Spindler, George & Hammond, Lorie A. (eds.): *Innovations in Educational Ethnography: Theories, Methods, and Results*, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum 2006, p. 62.
  - 4 Decker, Gero: Process Choreographies in Service-oriented Environments, MA thesis, Potsdam: Universität Potsdam 2006, p. 41. In parallel, “Choreography” itself had been metaphorically activated in discourse about fields ranging from digital technology to biology: Parker, Philip M. (ed.): *Choreography: Webster’s Timeline History 1710-2007*, California: ICON Group 2009, pp. 35, 38, 43, 45, 47.
  - 5 On these terms cf. Adolphe, Jean-Marc & Mayen, Gérard: La ‘non-danse’ danse encore, 2004, <http://sarma.be/docs/784> (August 2020); Roy, Xavier Le & Cvejić, Bojana: To End with Judgment by Way of Clarification, in: Lepecki, André (ed.): *Dance*, London/Cambridge: Whitechapel Gallery/MIT Press 2012 [2005], pp. 93–95; Andersson, Danjel, Edvarstsen, Mette & Spångberg, Mårten (eds.): *Post-Dance*, Stockholm: MDT 2017.
  - 6 Ingvarstsen, Mette: *Expanded Choreography: Shifting the Agency of Movement in The Artificial Nature Project and 69 Positions*, PhD thesis, Lund: Lund University 2016; Bulut, Dragana & Linder, Adam: Mit dem Körper schreiben / Writing with the Body, in: *Jahresring* 61 (2014), p. 178; Acin, Dalija: Exercise Book for Choreography of Attention ‘Point of no Return’, undated, [http://dalijaacinthelander.net/eng/work\\_exercise.html](http://dalijaacinthelander.net/eng/work_exercise.html) (October 2018); Spångberg: Seventeen Points for The Future of Dance.



such as “conceptual” dance – it persists, presenting the historian and theorist with a phenomenon to be addressed.

This book is not an attempt to pinpoint – to define, to stabilise – expanded choreography. Rather, in this lack of clear definition, this book multiplies conceptions of choreography. In this sense, expanded choreography may be seen as an encapsulation of the contemporary choreographic field’s open-ness to re-definitions of choreography – what Bojana Cvejić has called ‘*concept ouvert de chorégraphie* [open concept of choreography]’<sup>7</sup> – not only widening already-existing notions but also asking what *else*<sup>8</sup> choreography can do, what else it can work with, what else it may be. To be sure, other terms could have played the same role. “Expanded choreography” has, however, the advantage of avoiding dichotomous negations – as in the binarity of “not-dance” – replacing them with an opening of potentials. This avoidance of a negative definition reflects and coincides with a wider theoretical and practical interest in choreography “itself”, beyond its dance-making capacity. For example, in 2012, Elena Basteri, Elisa Ricci, and Emanuele Guidi developed a project titled *Rehearsing Collectivity: Choreography Beyond Dance*.<sup>9</sup> In 2008 – four years before the MACBA conference – the journal *Performance Research* published an issue ‘On Choreography’ edited by André Lepecki and Ric Allsopp. A year before that, the research-oriented website CORPUS surveyed dance professionals on ‘What does “choreography” mean today?’;<sup>10</sup> rather than converging on a single answer, the responses pointed towards multiplicity, or expansion.

It is not only in the present that this choreographic multiplicity can be discerned; it is also found in choreographic history. It is important to remember, in effect, that it was only from the 19<sup>th</sup> or even early-20<sup>th</sup> century that the main meaning of “choreography” came to be associated with the act of composing a dance.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, it was chiefly in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that dance-making – and by

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7 Quoted in Knolle, Vera: *Du Visqueux au concept, avec retour possible. Plaidoyer pour une ‘dance (post)-conceptuelle’*, in: Cvejić, Bojana (ed.): *“Rétrospective” par Xavier Le Roy*, Dijon: Les Presses du réel 2014, p. 300.

8 The reoccurring question of “what else” is inspired by William Forsythe’s interrogation, ‘What else, besides the body, could physical thinking look like?’. Forsythe, William: *Choreographic Objects*, undated, <http://www.williamforsythe.de/essay.html> (August 2020). See also Manning, Erin: *Choreography as Mobile Architecture*, in: *Performance Paradigm* 9 (2013), <http://www.performanceparadigm.net/index.php/journal/article/view/134/133> (August 2020).

9 Basteri, Elena, Guidi, Emanuele & Ricci, Elisa (eds.): *Rehearsing Collectivity: Choreography Beyond Dance*, Berlin: Argobooks 2012.

10 CORPUS: Survey What does “choreography” mean today?, 2007, <http://www.corpusweb.net/introduction-to-the-survey.html> (Archive copy from October 2015).

11 Cf. Foster, Susan Leigh: *Choreographing Empathy. Kinesthesia in Performance*, Oxon/New York: Routledge 2011, pp. 40, 43; Moal, Philippe Le: *Chorégraphe*, in: Moal, Philippe Le (ed.): *Dictionnaire de la danse*, Paris: Larousse 1999, p. 543 on the derivative “*chorégraphe*” [choreographer];

extension choreography – became essentially bound to a moving human corporeality.<sup>12</sup> The related definition of choreography as an organisation or arrangement of moving bodies in time and space – based on its association with the medium of corporeal movement, irrespective of the adherence to a norm of dance – is also historically situated in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These points call attention to the historiographic fact that choreography as the arrangement of moving bodies in time and space can be dissociated from choreography as dance-making – and vice versa, choreography can be practiced as dance-making while not engaging with human bodies in motion. But, more crucial still is that the term “choreography” itself first appeared with an altogether different meaning, in the title of French dance master Raoul Auger Feuillet’s 1700 treatise *Chorégraphie, ou L’Art de décrire la danse par caractères, figures et signes démonstratifs* [Choreography or The art of describing dance through characters, figures and demonstrative signs]. Within Feuillet’s treatise, its context, and for the following several decades, “choreography” literally signified the writing of dance, i.e. dance notation, while dance-making was practiced without the label “choreography”. Beyond a definition that renders choreography coextensive with a history of dance-making or the arrangement of bodily motion,<sup>13</sup> therefore, even a cursory glance into choreographic history shows that these are only chronologically-situated parts to a more complex story.<sup>14</sup>

While historical accounts of choreography often focus on the passage from its function of writing to that of dance-making, these meanings of choreography are not exhaustive. Chronologically situated in the very “transition” from the early-18<sup>th</sup> century’s choreography-as-writing to the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries’ choreography-as-dance-making, Edward Nye has argued that, in the 18<sup>th</sup>-century theatrically-oriented genre of the *ballet d’action*, “choreography” acquired the meaning of “dramaturgical structure” or “dramatic composition” and “choreographer” was used as “composer of the dramatic action”.<sup>15</sup> For example, he provides an excerpt from

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Brandstetter, Gabriele : Choreographie, in : Fischer-Lichte, Erika, Kolesch, Doris & Warstat, Matthias (eds.) : *Metzler Lexikon Theatertheorie*, Stuttgart/Weimar : J.B. Metzler 2014, p. 54.

- 12 Cf. Foster, *Choreographing Empathy*, p. 44; Lepecki, André: *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the Politics of Movement*, Oxon/New York: Routledge 2006, pp. 3-4.
- 13 The task of elaborating a choreographic history – overlapping but not identical with a history of dance – has indeed started to occupy the field of Dance Studies. Cf. Foster: *Choreographing Empathy*, pp. 15–72; Klein, Gabriele: Essay, in: Klein, Gabriele (ed.) *Choreografischer Baukasten. Das Buch*, Bielefeld: transcript 2015, pp. 17–49.
- 14 For more information on points made in this paragraph see Leon, Anna: Between and within choreographies: An early choreographic object by William Forsythe, in: *Dance Articulated* special Issue *Choreography Now*, 6:1 (2020), pp. 64-88.
- 15 Nye, Edward: ‘Choreography’ is Narrative: The Programmes of the Eighteenth-Century *Ballet d’Action*, in: *Dance Research* 26/1 (2008), pp. 42–59, esp. pp. 42, 46, 48. Similarly, Susan Foster enumerates that, according to Noverre, elements ensuring the plot – including choosing the subject of a ballet, structuring its scenes, directing dancers’ actions – were crucial elements

a 1770 *ballet d'action* review to suggest that “choreography” may refer to the dramaturgical development of danced drama:

Mlle Allard plays the part of Medea, Dlle Guimard Creusa, and Sr Vestris plays Jason. The latter is without a mask, and surprised the audience by the energy of his performance, not only as a dancer, but also as an actor. He gives his character all the sublimity than one could wish for. The passions are painted on his face with a nobility, a truth, a diversity that is inexpressible, and which shows he has a singular talent for the stage. [...] Mlle Allard, for her part, has a vigorous spring [*une vigueur de jarret*], has hard and fiery eyes which characterise quite well the fury of a jealous woman, and the depravity governing every movement of Mlle Guimard's indicates the extent of her desire to please and to seduce. This choreography [*chorégraphie*] was devised [*imaginée dans le principe*] by Noverre, the man who has greatest genius in this genre.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, although Jean-Georges Noverre referred to choreography as notation – as did Gasparo Angiolini and many of their contemporaries<sup>17</sup> – choreography may have been a far more complex notion in their context.<sup>18</sup> Still more meanings of “choreography” might need to be added to these; Susan Foster, for instance, also identifies certain 19<sup>th</sup>-century uses of “choreography” referring to the teaching and learning of dance.<sup>19</sup>

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of choreographic work, and presents the work of choreographers in the 18<sup>th</sup> century as both the staging of the ballet's story and its adaptation for a published programme: Foster, Susan Leigh: *Choreography and Narrative: Ballet's Staging of Story and Desire*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1998 [1996], pp. 75, 101–102.

- 16 Nye : 'Choreography' is Narrative, p. 45, translation by Nye; see p. 46 for his interpretation of the quote. Nye takes his argument a step further, suggesting that “choreography” may also have referred to the written ballet programme – a libretto-like document describing the danced narrative's plot. Nye, Edward : *Mime, Music and Drama on the Eighteenth-Century Stage: The Ballet d'Action*, Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, pp. 168–169. This aspect of choreographic history may have contributed to a persistence of narrative in (ballet) choreography, at least in France, for more than a century [Chapter 7].
- 17 Noverre, Jean-Georges : *Lettres sur la danse et sur les ballets*, Lyon: Delaroché 1760, <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k108204h/fi.item.texteImage.zoom> (August 2020) BnF, pp. 2, 362; Dahms, Sibylle: *Choreographische Aspekte im Werk Jean-Georges Noverres und Gasparo Angiolinis*, in: Klein, Michael (ed.): *Tanzforschung Jahrbuch 2* (1991), pp. 93–94, 108–109.
- 18 Slightly later, in the early-19<sup>th</sup> century, Jean Faget also spoke of choreography as ‘this art not only of notating the steps and figures of the dance, simple technical expressions, but of putting into action all the riches of pantomime, of composing for this mute language a story, a plot, an intrigue, a knot and an ending’. Quoted in Foster: *Choreography and Narrative*, p. 167.
- 19 Foster: *Choreographing Empathy*, p. 43, p. 226 note 56.

“Choreography” may then refer to an engagement with dance-making (whatever the dance product may be), or with the human body in motion, or both at the same time; it may also refer to practices, like notation, that cannot be subsumed under these definitions. Inversely, practices relevant to dance-making and arrangements of corporeal motions are parts of choreographic history without always being defined as “choreography” in their particular context. From dance-making to dance notation, from arrangements of moving bodies to composition, from the development of danced drama to practices that are choreographic without being called choreographies, a constellation of transformations points to the fact that choreography is better conceptualised as *choreographies* – not reducible to a singular meaning or practice but, rather, a network of historically-situated ones.

This plural choreographic history is not linear or sequential,<sup>20</sup> composed of a series of discrete paradigms replacing one another. Rather, different construals of choreography synchronously coexist; and, instead of pursuing a unidirectional chronology, they reappear at different historical moments, transforming in response to their diverse contexts. For example, choreography as a notational project re-emerges in the writings of modern dance artist Rudolf Laban [Chapter 8]; as kinetography, it integrates the 20<sup>th</sup> century’s focus on movement in the conception of choreography as writing:

choreography, means literally the designing or writing of circles. The word is still in use today: we call the planning and composition of a ballet or a dance “choreography”. For centuries the word has been employed to designate the drawings of figures and symbols of movements which dance composers, or choreographers, jotted down as an aid to memory [...] My study of some hundred different forms of graphic presentation of characters of the different alphabets and other symbols, including those of music and dance, has helped me with the development of a new form of choreography which I called “kinetography”.<sup>21</sup>

Choreography as notation – a writing that (pre)scribes the future performance of motion – has been employed more recently as well. Lepecki,<sup>22</sup> for instance, refers to Thoinot Arbeau’s 1589 treatise *Orchésographie* – which also includes notations

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20 For a criticism of a singular-, linear-, chronologically-organised history see Thurner, Christina: Raum für bewegliche Geschichtsschreibung. Zur Einleitung, in: Thurner, Christina & Wehren, Julia (eds.): *Original und Revival: Geschichts-Schreibung im Tanz*, Zurich: Chronos 2010, esp. p. 10 and Thurner, Christina: Time Layers, Time Leaps, Time Loss: Methodologies of Dance Historiography, in: Franko, Mark (ed.): *The Oxford Handbook of Dance and Reenactment*, New York: Oxford University Press 2017, pp. 525–532.

21 Laban, Rudolf: *Choreutics*, London: MacDonald and Evans 1966, p. viii.

22 Lepecki, André: Choreography as Apparatus of Capture, in: *TDR-The Drama Review* 51/2 (2007), pp. 120–123; cf. also Siegmund, Gerald: *Choreographie und Gesetz: Zur Not-*

and whose title prefigures Feuillet's term – in his theorisation of choreography as a practice of disciplining, ruling the body and/or dance – an 'apparatus of capture', the law according to which the dancing body should move. In this way, the historical association of choreography with a notational project contributes to a contemporary conceptual link between choreography and the disciplinary control of the embodied praxis of dance.

Moreover, different construals of choreography engage in frictions with the practices they are surrounded by and which they aim to describe. For example, while Feuillet's (pre)scriptive notational project was consistent and contextually associated with the aim to centralise power over dance matters (institutionalised through the foundation of the *Académie Royale de Danse*), it may also have offered a possibility of resistance to the control of dancing bodies [Chapter 2].<sup>23</sup> Similarly, the 20<sup>th</sup> century's focus on bodily motion as the primary characteristic of both dance and choreography was defied by scenographic, musical, and textual inputs in multimedia choreographic work; or by the dephysicalisation of movement through its technological mediation. Choreography may also allow positioning with respect to specific *kinds* of practice, privileging some over others. Thus, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, August Bournonville argued that 'the choreographer who only composes according to a given programme is no more advanced than the musician who only orchestrates others' melodies'<sup>24</sup>, implying that "just" developing dance steps is a less-worthy application of choreographic work. Likewise, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, while "choreography" meant "dance-making", it could also refer to specific genres of dance-making that were viewed negatively – writer Fernand Divoire,<sup>25</sup> for instance, used the label "choreography" to derogatorily refer to classical ballet, which he looked down on.<sup>26</sup>

Therefore, contemporary "expanded choreography" appears as a non-centralised network of practices and ideas probing what "else" choreography may be, while choreographic history appears as a collection of interlinked – but not linearly, smoothly-connectible – paths. What choreography has been in Western dance history is therefore as variable and complex as contemporary (expanded) choreography; the two are at times in accord, at times in tension. This book is a

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wandigkeit des Widerstands, in: Haitzinger, Nicole & Fenböck, Karin (eds.): *Denkfiguren: Performatives zwischen bewegen, schreiben und erfinden*, Munich: epodium 2010, p. 122–123.

23 Glon, Marie: *Les Lumières chorégraphiques: Les maîtres de danse européens au coeur d'un phénomène éditorial*, PhD thesis, Paris: Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, 2014, p. 219.

24 Bournonville, August: *Letters on Dance and Choreography*, London: Dance Books 1999 [1860, trans. Knud Arne Jürgensen], p. 58.

25 Divoire, Fernand: *Découvertes sur la danse*, Paris: Crès 1924, p. 34.

26 For the information in this and the preceding paragraph: Leon, Anna: *Between and within choreographies*.

historiographic exploration of the interval where these accords and tensions develop. It proposes a simple operation: to look at expanded choreography through its ties with choreographic history and investigate this history as potentially relevant within the contemporary “expanded” choreographic field. Interweaving present expansions with choreographic histories, this book considers how they can enrich one other. This includes how expanded choreography, with its lack of singular definition – begging the question of choreography’s own definition – can be addressed from a historical viewpoint, nourishing contemporary interrogations with insights provided by choreographic history; and, vice versa, how expanded choreography may contribute to, and foster, the recognition of a multiple choreographic history. Contrary to an insistence upon valuing novelty and a “forward” sense of history, this trans-historical approach seeks relations with the past as manifestations of a ruptured linearity – and thus points to long-term connections as signs of the contemporary relevance of the past.

Looking at the contemporary choreographic context in which “expansion” appears, as well as at a multiple choreographic history, this book notes the distance that both can take from dance-making and human bodies in movement. Contemporary choreographers’ – from William Forsythe’s ‘[c]horeography and dancing are two distinct and very different practices’<sup>27</sup> [Chapter 6] to Jérôme Bel’s ‘[c]horeography is just a frame, a structure, a language where much more than dance is inscribed’<sup>28</sup> – distance from dance is as widely discussed in contemporary choreographic theory as it is practically present in contemporary choreographic works. In parallel, recent historical studies – Nye’s arguments on *ballet d’action* and Marie Glon’s work on Feuillet are both cases in point<sup>29</sup> – also manifest historical distinctions between choreography and dance-making. A de-essentialised, non-dance-specific view of choreography in contemporaneity and a choreographic history not coextensive with dance-making are thus recognised. The historiographic links between them have not, however, been adequately discussed. Discourse on expanded choreography tends to insist on its presentness and perspective towards the future. For instance, when Spångberg writes that ‘[t]he future belongs to choreography but only if it acknowledges its potentiality as an expanded capacity’<sup>30</sup>, the linearly-forward temporal aspect contributes to the perception of a rupture from a dance-centred choreographic past. A similar point can be made about choreography’s relationship with moving bodies. In the dance field of the early-21<sup>st</sup> century, immobility is widely accepted as valid choreographic material –

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27 Forsythe: *Choreographic Objects*.

28 Quoted in Bauer, Una: Jérôme Bel. An Interview, in: *Performance Research* 13/1 (2008), p. 42.

29 Nye : *Mime, Music and Drama on the Eighteenth-Century Stage*; Glon: *Les Lumières chorégraphiques*.

30 Spångberg: *Seventeen Points for The Future of Dance*.

from the staged stillness of Ivana Müller's 2006 *While We Were Holding It Together*, to the drug-induced, almost total lack of motion of Trajal Harell's 2009 *Tickle the Sleeping Giant # 9 (the Ambien Piece)*. As for choreographic motion, it is equally unproblematic in encompassing the non-human – be it animal as in Luc Petton's *Swan* (2012), or inanimate thing as in Clément Layes' *Things that Surround Us* (2012) and Ingvarstsen's oft-cited *The Artificial Nature Project* (2012) – and the non-performative realm – notably though the notion of “social choreography” and the application of choreographic concepts to the social realm and kinetic behaviour within it.<sup>31</sup> Once again, however, the preponderance of the non-human and non-kinetic in historical choreographic approaches has yet to be fully interwoven into contemporary viewpoints. The contemporary world's overabundance in things, its struggles with ecological conscience and the advent of the Anthropocene, its “mobility turn”<sup>32</sup> but also its critique of motion<sup>33</sup> have penetrated the choreographic field, expanding the range of entities and practices that are seen *as* choreography. The loosening ties of historical choreographies with moving bodies are, in this context, yet to be further interrogated and put in relation to contemporaneity.

To challenge – be it in history or contemporaneity – choreography's distances from dance, movement performance, and the human body undoes its association with elements that remain fundamental in the dance field's (and beyond) construction of choreography. But, it also raises crucial questions about the very conceptions of dance, body, and motion, interrogating the tacit equation of corporeality with humanity, motion with visible displacement, dance with any artistic or aesthetic canon. In the current context of ecological urgency – of realising our unavoidable entanglements with non-human agents – and of virtual, instantaneous exchanges, our understanding of the human body as an autonomous, unitary carrier of the subject, or of movement as a necessarily-incarnated process of physical displacement in space, are questioned. Against this background, gazing back to historical “expanded” choreographies can reveal diverse, non-essentialised conceptions of body and movement that have always rendered these notions malleable. The common study of historical and contemporary expansions can therefore point to the particularities and variabilities of choreographic frictions with dance, motion, and the body, interweaving a de-essentialised chore-

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31 Cf. for example Klein, Gabriele: Das Soziale choreographieren. Tanz und Performance als urbanes Theater, in: Haitzinger & Fenböck: *Denkfiguren*, Munich: epodium 2010, pp. 94–103; Hewitt, Andrew: *Social Choreography: Ideology as Performance in Dance and Everyday Movement*, Durham/London: Duke University Press 2005.

32 Cf. Wilkie, Fiona: *Performance, Transport and Mobility: Making Passage*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2015; Urry, John: *Mobilities*, Cambridge: Polity Press 2007.

33 E.g. Sloterdijk, Peter: *Eurotaoismus: Zur Kritik der politischen Kinetik*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1989.

ographic history with equally-complex genealogies of dance, corporeality, and movement.

By questioning the equation of choreography with the teleological function of dance-making and human corporeality as its primary medium – again, be it in the past or the present – the specificity of choreography is further detached from any ontological claim about singular, or essentially apt, means of artistic expression. In this way, choreography’s numerous interdisciplinary connections, as well as its co-evolutions with other art forms, are accounted for. Choreographic expansion is inscribed in a wider context, wherein choreography increasingly entered visual arts institutions; collaborated with scientists and researchers outside of the dance field; articulated its practice in academic contexts; and reacted, and moved towards, the digital, defying modernist claims of artistic “autonomy”. Recognising choreography’s plurality of media and forms of expression – as well as its interactions with other arts – from a trans-historical perspective integrates choreographic history with interdisciplinary art histories, recognising crosscurrents and common frameworks.

This de-essentialisation of choreographic conceptions is a methodological and historiographic imperative for dance studies. It is, however, paralleled by, and potentially akin to, choreography’s ubiquity; it seemingly moves towards an indiscriminate application of the term – much like, as Kirsten Maar<sup>34</sup> describes, has happened with terms like performativity and performance. This ubiquity can turn the notion of choreography from being plural – multiple specificities that are de-essentialised, shifting, in reinvention – to being vague and less-analytically constructive. An attempt to historiographically ground the plurality of choreographic ideas and practices by insisting on their concrete particularities contributes to viewing expansion as a collection of specificities, rather than an undefined space.

Undoing modernist claims to choreographic medium specificity and an attachment to the irreplaceability of dancing bodies also allows choreography – once more, both of today and of the past – to be seen as a practice defined not by its purportedly-autonomous medium of expression, but rather by complex interactions of aesthetic, artistic, educational, practical, institutional, sociocultural, and political factors that are always contextualised, situated, discursivised, and performed. Critical Dance Studies has provided fascinating analyses of the extent to which a claim of modernist autonomy has coexisted with unacknowledged (and, at times, highly-problematic) positionalities – as illustrated by Susan Manning’s writing on Mary Wigman’s “absolute” dance being inscribed in a con-

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34 Maar, Kirsten: Exhibiting Choreography, in: Butte, Maren, Maar, Kirsten, McGovern, Fiona, Rafael, Marie-France & Schaffaff, Jörn (eds.): *Assign and Arrange: Methodologies of Presentation in Art and Dance*, Berlin: Sternberg Press 2014, p. 105.



text of proto-fascist aesthetics,<sup>35</sup> or Foster discussing U.S.-based white modern dance's claims of kinetic universalism.<sup>36</sup> Layering these thinkers' critiques, this book posits that choreographic politics is not limited to the – more-or-less disciplinary, more-or-less democratic – treatment of dancing bodies, but also needs to address the politics of a widely-construed, not-only-corporeal choreographic practice. A corollary of these claims is the problematisation of choreographic authorship; as will be made manifest in several of the chapters that follow, it is not only the creators of dance steps, or the organisers of bodily motions, that may be attributed the authorial role of choreographer.<sup>37</sup>

Based on these considerations, this book identifies trans-historical echoes between contemporary and historical expansions, in order to illustrate common aspects in sources from different historical moments, thus developing choreographic histories that are not subsumed or reducible to a history of dance-making by putting the human body in motion. It is imperative to disentangle this project from that of developing “the” history of expanded choreography – a search for its “precursors”. Indeed, no direct continuity or deterministic causal connections are assumed; this diachronic approach was chosen not to *unite* what is apart in time, but rather to *juxtapose*.<sup>38</sup> Juxtaposition, here, is the creation of a particular relation – one that is based not on preconceived, *a priori* commonality, but on the view that it provides a space for the unforeseen to appear. In other words, the commonalities identified between contemporary and historical choreographic expansion are not taken as signs of an essential similarity, but generate, through unexpected togetherness, new perspectives on each of the elements involved. For the development of this approach, this book draws from Georges Didi-Huberman's notion of *dysposing* [*dysposer*]; this neologism admits the act of *disposing* in the sense of arranging – since ‘[o]n ne montre, on n'expose qu'à disposer [one can only show, one can only expose, by *disposing*]' – but troubles it by focussing on the selected elements' ‘*différences, leurs chocs mutuels, leurs confrontations, leurs conflits* [differences, their mutual chocs, their confrontations, their conflicts]’.<sup>39</sup> To *dyspose* may allow grouping historically-distant cases by embracing heterogeneity, and speculating on the generativity of considering them together.

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35 Manning, Susan A.: *Ecstasy and the Demon: Feminism and Nationalism in the Dances of Mary Wigman*, Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press 1993.

36 Foster: *Choreographing Empathy*, p. 52.

37 Relatedly, Ana Vujanović writes that ‘choreography is being investigated today separately from dancing, leading towards a new authorial practice of performing art’. Vujanović, Ana: The Choreography of Singularity and Difference. *And Then* by Eszter Salamon, in: *Performance Research* 13/1 (2008), pp. 123–130, p. 130.

38 This use of juxtaposition is indebted to Didi-Huberman, Georges: *Quand les images prennent position: L'Oeil de l'histoire*, 1, Paris: Les Editions de Minuit 2009.

39 Ibid, p. 86.

There are dangers in circulating between present(s) and past(s) in this way. By using expanded choreography as a perspective through which to approach historical practices, this book activates contemporary concepts in the reading of the past, invoking the all-familiar figure of presentism – the projection of contemporary (choreographic) values and practices onto the past. Hans Belting warns: ‘it is worth making the distinction between the art historian [...] who wrote about the history of art in order to propose lessons for the art of his own day, and the art historian [...] who was merely unable to avoid seeing historical art with eyes trained from recent art experience’.<sup>40</sup> To maintain an awareness of the distance separating histories and contemporaneities, while simultaneously investing in this distance as creative historiographic territory, this book draws from Mieke Bal’s notion of a “preposterous history”, developed in her study of contemporary perspectives on baroque art, and introduced by Ramsay Burt to the dance-historical field.<sup>41</sup> Bal writes:

Like any form of representation, art is inevitably engaged with what came before it, and that engagement is an active reworking. It specifies what and how our gaze sees. [...] re-visions of baroque art neither collapse past and present, as in an ill- conceived presentism, nor objectify the past and bring it within our grasp, as in a problematic positivist historicism. They do, however, demonstrate a possible way of dealing with ‘the past today’. This reversal, which puts what came chronologically first (‘pre-’) as an aftereffect behind (‘post’) its later recycling, is what I would like to call a *preposterous history*.<sup>42</sup>

Both Burt and Bal refer to artistic practices “revisiting” or evoking the past, but preposterous history may also contribute to a historiographic methodology that admits the inevitability of present-influenced views of the past, and allows it to become an explicit object of research. It is indeed preposterous to look at, say, 15<sup>th</sup>-century dance practices through the lens of expanded choreography; the choice to do so is not an insistence on a nostalgic continuity of expanded choreographic history, but is, rather, based on the fact that this juxtaposition may multiply our present ways of seeing the past, thus making 15<sup>th</sup>-century dance practices relevant to contemporary expanded choreography. In this context, preposterousness is the expression of a desire to engage with history from the

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40 Belting, Hans: *The End of the History of Art?*, Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press 1987 [1983, trans.Christopher S. Wood], p. 14.

41 Burt, Ramsay: *Undoing Postmodern Dance History*, 2004, <http://sarma.be/docs/767> (August 2020).

42 Bal, Mieke: *Quoting Caravaggio: Contemporary Art, Preposterous History*, Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press 1999, pp. 1, 6–7.

consciously-situated viewpoint emerging from the contemporary phenomenon of expanded choreography.

If expanded choreography is a historically-situated shift in our way of thinking about choreography, the historical (re-)reading that it allows is, to a certain extent, symptomatic of the present – it is an indication *about* this present. Hal Foster captures this bidirectional relationship between present and past when he refers to the notion of the parallax, defined as ‘the apparent displacement of an object caused by the actual movement of its observer. This figure underscores both that our framings of the past depend on our positions in the present and that these positions are defined through such framings’.<sup>43</sup> What is at stake here is not a repetition or “authentic” return of the past, but its very formulation as a factor in conceptions of contemporaneity. Instead of a *déjà vu* (a cyclical sameness), the specificity of the present’s newness can be understood in relation to the past, and not as an isolation or a break from it.

Circulating between past and present, and in order to acknowledge the potential bidirectionality of relations between contemporaneity and history, the chapters that follow are not organised chronologically. Part 1 discusses sources from the sparks of the macro-historical period of modernity to the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> century – a period during which the term “choreography” was coined, although its use as “dance-making” was not yet in effect. Examining treatises from the Italian Renaissance [Chapter 3], and mid-17<sup>th</sup>- [Chapter 1] and early-18<sup>th</sup>-century France [Chapter 2], it discerns the limits of a dance, or moving-body, conception of choreography in pre-18<sup>th</sup> century sources, and identifies alternative conceptions of choreography contained within them, relating contemporary expandedness to historical eras in which currently-dominant notions of choreography were absent. Part 2 fast-forwards to the late-20<sup>th</sup> and early-21<sup>st</sup> centuries – the period surrounding and including choreographic expansion. Analysing performance [Chapter 5], video [Chapter 4], and installation [Chapter 6] works by contemporary choreographic artists, it articulates their manifested conceptions of choreography less as instances of a generalised and undifferentiated expansion than as a collection of specifiable, expanded choreographic singularities. This allows them to bidirectionally branch out to historical choreographies. Part 3 jumps back to the earlier-20<sup>th</sup> century, when dance-making and embodied motion became essentialised as core, definitional aspects of choreography, thus contributing to the dominant vision of choreography today. By investigating choreographic practices of the historical avant-gardes [Chapter

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43 Foster, Hal: *The Return of the Real. The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*. Cambridge/London: MIT Press, 1996, p. xii. For a methodological reflection on bidirectional relationships between past and present see also Thurner, Christina: *Time Layers, Time Leaps, Time Loss*, p. 525.

7], as well as modern [Chapter 8] and early post-modern [Chapter 9] dance, Part 3 addresses the multiplicity of coexisting choreographic conceptions – expanded and not – within 20<sup>th</sup>-century modernity. It thus replaces a discourse of choreographic modernism with one that relates 20<sup>th</sup>-century choreographic approaches to expanded aspects of (previous and subsequent) historical periods.

Given the constructed nature of historiography's periodising, this book accepts that any question a historian asks will influence the periodisation they pursue. This resonates with Isabelle Launay's words:

*une des finalités du travail historique est de périodiser, c'est à dire de rechercher la cohérence d'une époque et de définir un moment de rupture annonciateur d'une nouvelle époque. Si périodiser constitue un puissant outil heuristique de la démarche historique pour poser des cadres et faire apparaître des problèmes, encore faut-il garder à l'esprit que ces périodes, en tant que telles, n'existent pas, et veiller à s'écarter de toute tentative de réification. [one of the aims of historical work is to periodise, that is look for the coherence of an era and define a moment of rupture, announcing a new era. If periodising constitutes a powerful heuristic tool in historical work in order to place frameworks and make problems appear, one must still keep in mind that these periods, as such, do not exist, and ensure that one keeps a distance from any attempt of reification].<sup>44</sup>*

Given, as well, the chronological scope of these sections, their content has been modulated by a radical focus on the particular – overall, they are nine micro-histories that populate a macro-historical argument; their juxtaposition creates an open territory to which further cases can be added. Each chapter is therefore purposefully written both as part of general and stand-alone arguments; with the exception of certain intratextual cross-references, the reader can meaningfully go through chapters individually and in any order. The specificity of each case means they do not function as “representatives” of a – chronological or other – “whole”; none purports to “stand for” the period it was situated in, even though each provides a vision of what that period may have been. That is why there are more than one case presented per Part. More specifically, Parts 2 and 3 address artists whose works have (partial) temporal overlap, illustrating the complexity inherent in specific shared moments – and aligning with Christina Thurner's proposal for a spatial model of history that explores the synchronous diversity effaced by chronological linearity.<sup>45</sup> Inversely, Part 1 includes examples that are not chronologically simultaneous, and their juxtaposition challenges the expectation

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44 Launay, Isabelle: *A la recherche d'une danse moderne: Rudolf Laban, Mary Wigman*, PhD thesis, Saint-Denis: Université Paris 8, 1997, p. 24, emphasis added.

45 Thurner, Christina: *Time Layers, Time Leaps, Time Loss*, esp. pp. 528–530; Thurner: *Raum für bewegliche Geschichtsschreibung*, p. 10.

that a chronological period is understandable through a generally applicable, singular, and linear tendency. The selected cases' irreducible particularity is paralleled by their not being exhaustive, as expansion is identifiable in other ways outside, or even within, the periods considered.

In telling this story of a multiple, expanded choreographic history, the geographical focus of this book is limited to (Western) Europe. Examples discussed include texts by French [Chapters 1 and 2] and Italian authors [Chapter 3] that have become mainstream in pre-20<sup>th</sup>-century European dance history; a piece by a Swedish company [Chapter 7] and the ideas of a Romanian artist operating in 20<sup>th</sup>-century France [Chapter 9]; the work that a modern choreographer born in Bratislava, active in Germany, did in the United Kingdom [Chapter 8]; a contemporary piece that a choreographer born in the United States, active in Germany, made the Netherlands [Chapter 6]; and, finally, 21<sup>st</sup>-century works by a Spanish [Chapter 5] and a French artist [Chapter 4]. This European focus is due to multiple reasons. Some are pragmatic, like the availability of sources within a sustainably-accessible range. The main reason is, however, the very notion of expanded choreography and the choreographic history to which it relates. Choreography is a culturally-sensitive notion whose understanding is never a-contextual; both expanded choreography and the multiple choreographic histories that serve as this book's departure points are products of a Western perspective, based on the words and practices of mostly Western artists and dance writers. While, then, this book does not approach expanded choreography as a Western phenomenon – it does not ask how the specific cultural, political, social, institutional, artistic, etc. context of the West formed choreographic expandedness – it assumes that this context is structurally present in the very notion of expanded choreography, without implying that non-Western choreographic practices cannot, or do not, include instances of expansion. The decision to select particularly European cases – as opposed to the wider notion of the “West” – recognises that, while there are several complicities and links between European and non-European Western choreographic history, these links are historically situated and contextualised as well; they cannot be assumed to be trans-historically constant and equally characteristic of all the historical periods discussed. This choice was also made based on a desire to re-locate specificities within the notion of the “West” without projecting an *a priori* unity. This European corpus is indeed, and crucially, but one among multiple dance-cultural *loci*, and does not purport to contribute to the universalising tendency that often characterises Western dance history. The European local, moreover,

does not refer to Europe as a postulated cultural totality but to several European sub-localities, only some of which relate to expanded choreography.<sup>46</sup>

Even within this limited focus, what appears in contemporary expanded choreography and choreographic history is a momentous plurality – a profoundly anti-essentialist image of a choreographic field that is characterised by, and invites, historiographic acknowledgement of complexity, variety, and change. Indeed while the term “expansion” may, as noted above, imply a core – a stable state or starting point – from which to expand, if choreographic history is multiple, expanded choreography is not a step in a series of linear evolutions, but, rather, a collection of new dimensions in a multi-directional, complex territory. Inversely, by underlining a plural and expanded choreographic present, choreographic history may also be more fully understood in its plurality. Juxtaposing chronologically-distant but conceptually-associated examples, this book argues that expanded choreography does not mark a rupture or distance from the past, and that it is not reducible to the contemporaneity that invented the term. By identifying the historical bearing of expanded choreography, it stresses the need to de-centralise and de-essentialise choreography’s link to dance and/or human bodies in motion in historiographic discourse, and therefore the need to include practices not subsumed under these notions in choreographic history. Expanded choreography is an elusive notion, but it is also a territory in which the semantic scope of choreography can shift; what follows is an attempt to fill its elusive territory with a recognition of different conceptions of choreography forming – both in contemporaneity and in history – a constellation of multiple specificities.

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46 On these points cf. Klein, Gabriele: Die Welt des Tanzes. Zur historischen Genese und politischen Relevanz von Universalität in der Tanzgeschichtsschreibung, in: Thurner & Wehren: *Original und Revival*, pp. 81–90.

## **Part 1: Before choreography, expansion**





# Introduction to Part 1

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In dance-historiographic discourse, any practice of dance-making may be referred to as choreography; one can say that 16<sup>th</sup>-century pavaues or early 17<sup>th</sup>-century court ballets were choreographed. At the same time, 16<sup>th</sup>-century pavaues and early 17<sup>th</sup>-century court ballets were produced in a context where the term “choreography” was not in effective usage – as a signifier of dance-making or at all. Indeed, dance history scholars<sup>1</sup> concur that the term “choreography” was put into common use around the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The 1700 text that is considered to have coined it (in French) – Raoul Auger Feuillet’s *Chorégraphie* – introduced it as a referent not for dance-making but dance notation: a literal manifestation of the etymology of “*choros*” – Greek for dance (also related to the dancing and singing chorus of ancient theatre<sup>2</sup>) – and “*grafein*”, or writing. Certain researchers also refer to the 16<sup>th</sup> century and Thoinot Arbeau’s associated term “orchestography”, still linking this to a practice of notation.<sup>3</sup> Until at least the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, then, dance-making and engaging with the human body in movement were practiced without being described as “choreography”;

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- 1 This refers to dance-historical sources in English, French, and German. Precise chronological positionings vary slightly: Gabriele Brandstetter refers to the late-17<sup>th</sup> century, while Philippe LeMoal to the context of Feuillet’s *Chorégraphie* (1700). Foster, Susan Leigh: *Choreographing Empathy: Kinesthesia in Performance*, Oxon/New York: Routledge 2011, p. 16; Moal, Philippe Le: *Chorégraphe*, in: Moal, Philippe Le (ed.): *Dictionnaire de la danse*, Paris: Larousse 1999, p. 543; Brandstetter, Gabriele: *Choreographie*, in: Fischer-Lichte, Erika, Kolesch, Doris & Warstat, Matthias (eds.): *Metzler Lexikon Theatertheorie*, Stuttgart/Weimar: J.B. Metzler 2014, p. 54.
  - 2 Foster adds the meanings of rhythm and vocal harmony to translate the Greek *choreia*. Foster: *Choreographing Empathy*, p. 16.
  - 3 Claudia Jeschke quoted in CORPUS: Survey What does “choreography” mean today?, 2007, <http://www.corpusweb.net/introduction-to-the-survey.html> (Archive copy from October 2015); Foster: *Choreographing Empathy*, p. 17. Gabriele Klein sees the history of choreography as a writing of movement, encompassing the Renaissance: Klein, Gabriele: *Essay*, in: Klein, Gabriele (ed.) *Choreografischer Baukasten. Das Buch*, Bielefeld: transcript 2015, pp. 21–22.

inversely, for a fraction of this period the term applied to practices that were neither dance-making nor the arrangement of corporeal motion.

To say that 16<sup>th</sup>-century pavaues or early 17<sup>th</sup>-century court ballets were choreographed is therefore, strictly speaking, an anachronism. It is an anachronism that has significant strengths, as it allows dance-making to be considered in a trans-historical perspective, making historical practices comparable to more recent ones. Its application should nevertheless not hinder an understanding of historical practices' (choreographic) aspects that are not grasped by a subsequent notion of "choreography" – or even of "body", "motion" or "dance". Dislodging historical conceptions of movement from contemporary expectations, Bojana Cvejić points out that '[t]he idea of mobility with which the art of dance developed over a period of three centuries in Western Europe, before modern dance, was not necessarily bound up with the body of the dancer as its subject'<sup>4</sup>. Similarly, one can question the pertinence of applying a contemporary understanding of dance – as both an institutionally- and aesthetically-delineated form of artistic movement, related to, but not identical with, "everyday" motion – to pre-18<sup>th</sup>-century periods in which the boundaries between artistic and social dance were blurrier;<sup>5</sup> or of applying a post-dualist conception of the body to pre-Cartesian sources.

While early modern dance-historical sources make us question the extent to which currently-dominant notions of choreography, corporeality, motion, or dance are applicable trans-historically, it also so happens that contemporary expanded choreographic practice, theory, and discourse have developed a crucial body of ideas that multiply choreography beyond a physicalised and kinetic dance-making. Based on this observation, the following three chapters operate a – preposterous<sup>6</sup> – shift: they adopt an expanded choreographic perspective in the analysis of pre-18<sup>th</sup>-century dance, thus approaching sources from a period when the modern usage of "choreography" was absent through a contemporary viewpoint that also questions that usage. The point in operating this shift is not to describe an essential similarity between these sources and contemporary expanded practices – substituting one anachronism for another. Rather, it is to

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4 Cvejić, Bojana: *Choreographing Problems: Expressive Concepts in European Contemporary Dance and Performance*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2015, p. 18.

5 Fabritio Caroso's *Nobilità di Dame* [Nobility of the Ladies] (1600), for instance, teaches, apart from dancing, "How Gentlemen Should Conduct Themselves When Attending Parties", "How a Gentleman Should Be Seated", "How a Lady Should Walk and How to Wear Chopines Properly" or "[The Behaviour of] Ladies Who Are Not Invited To Dance". Caroso, Fabritio: *Courtly Dance of the Renaissance* [translated edition of *Nobilità di Dame*], New York: Dover 1995 [1600, trans. Julia Sutton], pp. 135, 137, 141, 148.

6 Cf. Bal, Mieke: *Quoting Caravaggio: Contemporary Art, Preposterous History*, Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press 1999.

investigate the different ways in which the choreographic past may be relevant to choreographic presents. Echoing Hal Foster's argument, by investing in the distance between contemporaneity and early modernity, the analyses that follow admit that present positions influence framings of the past (and vice versa)<sup>7</sup> – and, therefore, a multiplication of positionings in the present may enrich readings of the past. Reading “pre-choreographic” works through a perspective informed by expanded choreography therefore means decentralising a prominent choreographic lens, without affirming that another can fully replace it, recognising choreographic history's multiplicity.

Adopting an expanded choreographic perspective on early modern sources also implies looking for the relevance of past practices in – presentness-affirming and often-future-oriented – current choreographic mentalities. The relevance of early-modern performative and choreographic approaches for contemporary interests can be identified at many levels; from the use of non-frontal, non-proscenium stages to the preponderance of skilled but non-professional dancers, pre-18<sup>th</sup> century dance can be seen as a strikingly opportune dialogue partner for contemporary performance practices. Against this background, the chapters that follow tease out the specific forms that this relevance takes with respect to current debates about (expanded) choreography.

Chapter 1 examines Saint-Hubert's ballet-making treatise *La Manière de composer et faire réussir les ballets* [The way to compose [ballets] and make ballets succeed] published in 17<sup>th</sup>-century France, which provides both theoretical and practical insights on the period's court ballet. Chapter 2 looks into Feuillet's canonical text – the *Chorégraphie* that used the term “choreography” to refer to the writing of dance. Chapter 3 focusses on the treatises of two of the loudest voices of Italian Renaissance dance – Domenico da Piacenza and Guglielmo Ebreo da Persaro – whose writings provide a basis for understanding 15<sup>th</sup>-century dance culture south of the Alps. These chapters do not purport to argue that it is possible to track an “evolution” from Domenico and Guglielmo's 15<sup>th</sup> century, to Saint-Hubert's 17<sup>th</sup> century, and Feuillet's transition to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Correspondingly, they are ordered thematically (rather than chronologically); Saint-Hubert will open the dance by casting doubt upon the centrality of – precisely – dance in ballet; Feuillet will take over by putting into question the place of corporeality in his notation; Domenico and Guglielmo will end the ball by suggesting, apart from a decentralisation of the human/physical body in dance, a reconsideration of the place and nature of motion in their choreography.

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7 Cf. Foster, Hal: *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*. Cambridge/London: MIT Press, 1996, p. xii.

In all three cases, the objects of analysis are written documents – treatises and, when relevant, associated publications (such as notation collections in Feuillet’s system). The fact that the treatises are, to a great extent, composed of text leads the following chapters to a highly discourse-based analysis, despite also focussing on visual aspects of the documents (e.g. Feuillet’s notational signs) and the indications of practice contained within them (e.g. elements of technique described by Domenico and Guglielmo). This is largely because pre-18<sup>th</sup> century sources are often limited to such written documents, through which practice can be glimpsed. The treatises considered here indeed constitute invaluable means through which to access historical, embodied, and performative practices. This value notwithstanding, this book’s approach is to treat them not as informants *about* further practices, but as objects of analysis in-and-of themselves, capable of proposing new ways of seeing choreography. Indeed, the conceptions of choreography identified in the treatises sometimes follow and sometimes are in friction with embodied practices of their time. From this perspective, Saint-Hubert, Feuillet, Domenico, and Guglielmo’s texts appear as parts of a dance culture that was not only performative and corporeal – that encompasses choreographic ideas in bodies and ballrooms – but also found in texts and images. It is this culture that these reflections seek to understand *as* (expanded) choreographic history.

## Chapter 1: Monsieur de Saint-Hubert's expanded choreographic poietics

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Monsieur de Saint-Hubert's *La Manière de composer et faire réussir les ballets* was published in Paris in 1641; today, it is available in a facsimile edition preserving its original language.<sup>1</sup> In it, the author considers ballet and its components, ranging from dance and music to costumes and mechanical equipment. While his work is a canonical dance-historical source about European ballet history, not much is known about *La Manière de composer's* author. He had participated as a dancer and had been implicated in the production of ballets – as he repeatedly mentions in his treatise<sup>2</sup> – but was not widely known by his contemporaries and his work was published in relatively few copies.<sup>3</sup> His reflections are nourished by the ballet culture of 17<sup>th</sup>-century France – notably under Louis XIII, who ruled until two years after the treatise's appearance – but are not accompanied by references to specific exemplar works (only one ballet is named).

Saint-Hubert's treatise is part of a wide corpus of historical sources on 17<sup>th</sup>-century court ballet as it developed in the French court and beyond, which will be referred to repeatedly in this chapter to contextualise his text. Some of these sources take the form of wide narratives blending theoretical principles about ballet with extensive descriptions of specific works, such as Claude-François Menestrier's 1682 *Des Ballets anciens et modernes selon les règles du théâtre* [Of ballets ancient and modern according to the rules of the theatre]; others are works that pertain to dance technique applicable outside the realm of ballet, such as François de Lauze's 1623 *Apologie de la danse* [Apologia of dance]; while others focus on practical aspects of designing, producing, and performing ballets. It is to this latter category that *La Manière de composer* belongs. As such, Saint-Hubert's treatise gives threefold insight into the notion of (expanded) choreography with

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1 Saint-Hubert: *La Manière de composer et faire réussir les ballets*, Genève: Minkoff 1993 [1641].

2 Ibid., pp. 12, 20, 25.

3 Christout, Marie-Françoise: Introduction, in: Saint-Hubert: *La Manière de composer et faire réussir les ballets*, pp. 5, 28–29; Hourcade, Philippe: *Mascarades & ballets au Grand Siècle (1643-1715)*, Paris/Pantin: Desjonquères / Centre national de la danse 2002, p. 137.

respect to 17<sup>th</sup>-century court ballet: firstly, it provides clear principles of ballet aesthetics; secondly, it includes information about production processes and the agents implicated therein; and finally, it describes traits of the resulting works. Moreover, Saint-Hubert's text places specific emphasis on multimedia aspects of ballet and contains one of the most-complete presentations of an artistic figure – the *maître d'ordre* – that is directly relevant to this multimedia nature, thus providing material particularly relevant to an “expanded” view of court ballet.

*La Manière de composer* is more a booklet than a book, which nevertheless manages to pack a great wealth of advice about the art of 17<sup>th</sup>-century ballet into its roughly thirty pages. This advice is at times artistic/creative; the treatise gives suggestions for inventing adequate ballet topics or choosing machines and costumes, as well as reflections upon the dramaturgical structure of ballets. Furthermore, and to a considerable degree, the treatise contains pragmatic and production-oriented suggestions – for instance how many days ballets should be rehearsed<sup>4</sup> or how to approach ordering elements of the production. The author also does not hesitate to propose his own ideas about ballet, since ‘*il est licite de corriger les anciennes reigles pour en faire de meilleures* [it is licit to correct ancient rules in order to make better ones]’.<sup>5</sup> In these ways, Saint-Hubert offers a veritable *poietics* of ballet; a perspective on the art of creating, of *making*, ballets both as artistic process and pragmatic enterprise.

While the *poietics* of *La Manière de composer* advises about the creation of ballets, the projection of a contemporary understanding of the term “ballet” onto the text would be unfortunate, as Saint-Hubert's use of “ballet”, refers to the genre today termed “court ballet”. In this chapter, the term “ballet” is used in line with the vocabulary employed within the treatise itself, and disengages the word from the dominance of its contemporary connotations. A similar concern arises with respect to the word “choreography”, since Saint-Hubert was writing at a time when the term was not in common use (even more so in its later, dominant meanings). And just as *La Manière de composer* cannot be read through the perspective of the present-day dance-type “ballet”, this chapter argues that the treatise may only be partly readable with a notion of choreography relating to dance and the moving body. Investigating Saint-Hubert's portrayal of ballet as a multimedia, heterogeneous enterprise – emerging from interdisciplinary creative work and resulting in an anti-modernist dramaturgical assemblage – this chapter teases out its relevance for a contemporary expanded choreography.

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4 Saint-Hubert: *La Manière de composer et faire réussir les ballets*, p. 17.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 24.

## Of ballet and of dance

Saint-Hubert's treatise opens with a short defence of the practice of dancing. The author classifies dance as one of the three principal exercises (to be) pursued by the nobility, along with horse-riding and manipulating arms; argues that it is beneficial for increasing one's grace; counters the impression that it reduces one's valour (paralleling it with Mars' romantic entanglements with Venus which do not dampen his military ardour); and defends dance practice by referring to its preference by the nobility.<sup>6</sup> These comments seem to generically refer to dance. The prominent, introductory position of such a passage in a ballet treatise is consistent with the fact that 17<sup>th</sup>-century France was characterised by a certain degree of continuity between stage/performance dance and ball dance; members of the nobility – non-professional dance practitioners – performed on stage, ballets were produced as part of court life, steps circulated from ballroom to stage and vice versa. However, at the same time that he highlights this continuity between ballet and non-performance-related dance, Saint-Hubert differentially refers to the *belle danse* – also associated with courtly social dancing – and to dancing representing specific characters (a magician, a student ...),<sup>7</sup> thus introducing nuances that differentiate ball dance from ballet dancing. Menestrier, writing some forty years after Saint-Hubert, agrees with his precursor when he notes that ballets can be distinguished from other dances since they are not composed of simple corporeal positions and movements, but also include expressions “marking” different characters.<sup>8</sup>

Beyond its distinctions between ballet-dance and ball dance, it is important to consider that while Saint-Hubert's treatise refers to dance – including a chapter about it – *La Manière de composer* is not a text *about* dance, but about ballet. In other words, not only does Saint-Hubert not use the term “choreography”, but he also describes practices that are not exclusively assimilable to dance-making. In effect, when Saint-Hubert enumerates aspects of ballet-making, he does not treat the genre as one *only* characterised by dance. Dance is, rather, one of many – and not the first – elements he considers to be part of ballet: ‘[p]our faire vn beau Ballet, il y a six choses necessaires, sçavoir, le Subiet, les Airs, la Dance, les Habits, les Machines, & l'ordre [in order to make a beautiful ballet, six things

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6 Ibid., pp. 1, 4.

7 Ibid., pp. 12–13. Saint-Hubert adds a further consideration of ability in this distinction; he notes that good dancers should be kept for ballet portions including *belle danse*, while other parts do not require technically-accomplished practitioners.

8 Menestrier, Claude-François: *Des Ballets anciens et modernes selon les règles du théâtre*, Paris: Guignard 1682, p. 158.

are necessary, that is the Subject, the Melodies, the Dance, the Costumes, the Machines, and the order!'.<sup>9</sup>

Indeed 17<sup>th</sup>-century treatises are identifiable – such as Saint-Hubert's and Menestrier's *Des Ballets anciens et modernes* – that tend towards a focus on ballet as a type of composite spectacle, in parallel to those – such as de Lauze's *Apologie* – which focus on the steps, technique, and execution of dances. Reflecting this theoretical distinction between ballet and dance, Michel de Marolles (in a lesser-known treatise published in 1657) differentiates his work on the ballet format from those on '*la danse et [...] l'art de sauter* [dance and the saltatory art]'.<sup>10</sup> While, then, considerations about dance and ballet were related, and while reflections on dance were necessary parts of ballet treatises, it is an error to equate ballet with dance. As Marina Nordera points out about the 17<sup>th</sup> century, '[t]he term "ballet" is used [...] to indicate both the whole piece as an entity as well as the danced portions of it'<sup>11</sup> – but the two are not identical. While a ballet may today be seen as a type of dance work, in Saint-Hubert's universe it was not fully coextensive with dance.

Rather, ballet is presented by Saint-Hubert and his contemporaries as a multimedia spectacle. For example, Saint-Hubert argues that ballet's originality can increase through the *entrées* (which include dance) and non-dance elements (such as costumes).<sup>12</sup> His text also places dance in a relatively inferior position compared to other elements of the ballet; for example, he states that dance steps must be "subjected" [*asubietir*] to music and to the *entrées*,<sup>13</sup> thus forming a hierarchical relationship in a composite ballet *poetics* that is not dominated by dance. Other 17<sup>th</sup>-century authors align themselves with Saint-Hubert; Menestrier speaks of ballets as multi-modal entities in which '*l'esprit, l'oreille & les yeux trouvent de quoy se divertir si agreablement* [the spirit, the ear and the eyes find agreeable entertainment]<sup>14</sup>. De Marolles, even though he prioritises dance, also acknowledges the ballet's multidisciplinary character, referring to it as

*une Danse de plusieurs personnes masquées sous des habits éclatants, composée de diverses Entrées ou Parties qui se peuvent distribuer en plusieurs Actes et se rapportent agreablement à un Tout avec des Airs différents pour représenter un sujet inventé où le Plaisant, le Rare et le Merveilleux ne soient point oubliés [...] La Musique et la Symphonie*

9 Saint-Hubert: *La Manière de composer et faire réussir les ballets*, p. 6.

10 Marolles, Michel de: Neuvième discours: Du ballet, in Hourcade: *Mascarades & ballets au Grand Siècle* [1657], p. 225.

11 Nordera, Marina: Ballet de cour, in Kant, Marion (ed.): *The Cambridge Companion to Ballet*, New York: Cambridge University Press 2007, p. 19.

12 Saint-Hubert: *La Manière de composer et faire réussir les ballets*, pp. 8–9.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 12.

14 Menestrier: *Des Ballets anciens et modernes*, p. 1.



*des instruments et des voix y sont tout à fait de la bienséance, aussi bien que les Machines proportionnées aux Sujets et les changements de Scène ou de Théâtre quand il est à propos* [a Dance of multiple masked persons under brilliant clothing, composed of diverse Entrées or Parts that can be distributed in multiple Acts and which are agreeably related to a Whole with different Melodies in order to represent an invented subject where the Pleasant, the Rare and the Marvellous are not forgotten [...] Music and the Symphony of instruments and voices are absolutely proper as are the Machines proportioned to the Subjects and Stage or Theatre changes when this is relevant].<sup>15</sup>

Consistent with this multimedia nature of the genre, dance masters functioning as choreographers for 17<sup>th</sup>-century ballets were not solely dedicated to the art of dance, but were also often the composers of the music for the *entrées*.<sup>16</sup> Contemporary historians also agree that while sets may not have been necessary for ballets, other elements rendering them multimedia – most notably masks and costumes – were important and recurring features.<sup>17</sup> For these reasons, ballet in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century – despite its chronological proximity to the foundation of the *Académie Royale de Danse* by Louis XIV and its contribution to a modernist<sup>18</sup> classification of dance (in opposition to arts such as music) – was a veritably interdisciplinary genre; it was more a multi-modal spectacle including dance than a “dance” work.

Beyond presenting ballet as a multimedia, artistic genre casting doubt upon a modernist conception of any one of its components – including dance – Saint-Hubert's treatise and other sources of/on the 17<sup>th</sup> century also question the possible autonomy of ballet's “danced portions”, to use Nordera's expression. The issue of dance's autonomy in Saint-Hubert's text can be examined through

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15 Marolles: *Neuvième discours*, pp. 201–202.

16 Christout: Introduction, p. 17.

17 Hourcade: *Mascarades & ballets au Grand Siècle*, p. 59; Prunières, Henry: *Le Ballet de cour en France avant Benserade et Lully*, Paris: Laurens 1914, p. 159.

18 The term is used here – and in the remainder of this book – in association with an attachment to medium specificity and/or autonomy. This is, however, not to imply that a pre-20<sup>th</sup> century project of dance autonomy was exclusive to Louis XIV's actions or only achievable through a singular view of medium specificity. Mark Franko's appraisal of burlesque ballet (here focusing on burlesque ballets of the 1620s), for example, also identifies a choreographic autonomy: “[t]he body became a locus of allegorical meaning not only by carrying symbolic properties, but by projecting them physically into space as extensions of itself. This displacement of the organic body is also symptomatic of the concern for choreographic autonomy: the dancing figure becomes autonomous from the ‘natural’ body in a project whose artistic outcome is not bound up with assumptions about psychology and human action resumed in narrative”. Franko, Mark: *Dance as Text: Ideologies of the Baroque Body*, New York: Oxford University Press 2015 [1993], p. 79.

his view on the interaction between dance and costume. As a first indication that costume may subvert dance's possibility of autonomy, the treatise suggests that dance should adapt to costume, thus introducing a potentially hierarchical relationship between the two:

Le ballet estant vne Comedie, muette, il faut que les habits & & [sic] les actions fasset reconnoistre ce que l'on y represente. & le maistre à dancier doit faire les pas & les figures en sorte que l'on puisse dancier avec ce que l'on doit porter sur soy, & tout en sera beaucoup mieux. [Ballet being a silent Comedy, costumes and actions must make what is represented recognizable and the dance master must make the steps and the figures in such way that one can dance with what one needs to wear [or carry], and everything will be much better].<sup>19</sup>

A second indication is found in Saint-Hubert's treatment of dance and costume as media fulfilling the function of imitation. For the author, while dance contributes to the successful representation of characters – '*que chacun dancast suivant ce qu'il represente* [that each person dance following what he represents]<sup>20</sup> – this imitative function is not achieved through movement alone, as it needs to be complemented by costume. Saint-Hubert is a strict critic of dancers who leave their accessories mid-performance in order to dance unencumbered, reducing the spectators' ability to accurately recognise their character. If they do not keep their costume accessories,

*on auroit besoin de leurs mettre vn escriteau sur le dos pour les faire reconnoistre, ainsi que font les mauuais peintres lors qu'ils ont fait quelque méchant tableau* [we would need to put a label on their back in order to make them recognizable, like bad painters do when they've made a bad painting].<sup>21</sup>

Correspondingly, Saint-Hubert claims that if two dancers represent the same role, they must be dressed similarly;<sup>22</sup> the costume cannot vary without varying the character. In these ways, dance does not appear to function autonomously, but, rather, in constant collaboration with costume; props and masks contribute to dancers' imitative role. Other 17<sup>th</sup>-century authors writing on ballet agree with Saint-Hubert: for de Marolles, ballet '*nest autre chose qu'une Comédie muette où toutes les actions se représentent par la Danse et par les habits* [is nothing else than a silent Comedy, where all the actions are *represented by Dance and by costumes*]<sup>23</sup>; for Menestrier, '*comme le Ballet n'a que des Acteurs muets, il faut que leurs habits parlent pour*

19 Saint-Hubert: *La Manière de composer et faire réussir les ballets*, p. 16, emphasis added.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 12.

21 *Ibid.*, pp. 15–16.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 20.

23 Marolles: *Neuvième discours*, p. 202, emphasis added.

*eux & les fassent connoistre aussi bien que leurs mouvemens* [since the Ballet only has mute Actors, their costumes must speak for them and make them recognisable as much as their motions]<sup>24</sup>; for Michel de Pure, *'si les habits sont mal ordonnez, il est impossible que les Entrées experiment bien ce qu'elles doivent exprimer* [if the costumes are badly arranged, it is impossible that the *Entrées* express well what they have to express]<sup>25</sup>.

The collaboration of gesture and costume in the imitative work of dance may lead to an amalgamation of dancer and costume. Saint-Hubert writes that it needs to be prevented

*que personne du Ballet ne paroissent dans la salle avec son habit auparauant auoir dancé [...] particulièrement en France, ou l'on ayme la nouveauté, & le changement* [that someone from the Ballet appear in the room with their costume before dancing [...] especially in France, where we like novelty and change].<sup>26</sup>

This injunction exists, as Saint-Hubert notes, because of a valourisation of variety; at the same time, it suggests that costume and dance movement form a conjunction. In this perspective, the performing figure<sup>27</sup> is not a site of “competition” between body/dance and costume, but a hybrid of both. This figure does not organically express or physically convey the character it portrays, including its interiority and intentions; rather, it symbolically or synecdochally *refers* to this character through a combination of gesture and costume. Character representation is achieved through typified gesture and signifying elements of costume. For example, Menestrier suggested continuous agitation for the motions of the Wind-character, and he provided a whole list of typical props and accessories, such as David with a crown and harp, Apollo with a lyre, and Hercules with a lionskin; de Marolles recommended a dress with different colours to highlight the passage of time (referring to its always-changing nature) and wings attached to its back and legs (to highlight how quickly time passes).<sup>28</sup> Frédéric Pouillaude concurs:

24 Menestrier: *Des Ballets anciens et modernes*, pp. 250–251.

25 Pure, Michel de: *Idée des spectacles anciens et nouveaux*, Paris: Brunnet 1668, p. 287.

26 Saint-Hubert: *La Manière de composer et faire réussir les ballets*, p. 27.

27 For the notion of the figure see Haitzinger, Nicole & Leon, Anna: *The Body Suspended among Invisible Threads: Pavel Tchelitchew and the Ballets Russes' Ode (1928)*, (in preparation).

28 Menestrier, Claude-François: *Remarques pour la conduite des ballets*, in: Christout, Marie-Françoise: *Le Ballet de cour de Louis XIV: 1643-1672: Mises en scène*, Paris: Picard 1967 [1658], p. 223; Marolles: *Neuvième discours*, p. 209; Menestrier: *Des Ballets anciens et modernes*, p. 140.

If the *ballet de cour* could only imitate through the support of annexed representational elements such as costumes, masks, decor, and text, this was precisely because it did not seek to show either individuals or affect, but to produce symbolic figures, instantaneous *signs*, which spectators would take pleasure in decoding and understanding. Thus one could, without risking a failure of verisimilitude, dance the Wind, the Sun, Anger, Peace or the movement of the Stars. [...] The court ballet was not concerned with expressive utterance, with emotion shown in its temporal development, but with an image offered as a snapshot, to be decoded [...].<sup>29</sup>

If dance, as it appears in *La Manière de composer* and related sources, is an important component of a multimedia whole (but not fully equivalent to ballet), and not an autonomous medium of expression (but a contributor to a not-only-human, not-only-organic figure), then a choreography conception centred on dance-making as a corporeal practice is not fully adapted to a genre that expands beyond dance. In these ways, Saint-Hubert's *poietics* point to the need for an expanded notion of choreography – one that provides tools for the description and analysis of dance's relations with, and role within, a composite whole; one that is critical about its attachment to physicality, to allow the assembled bodies of court ballets to be recognised as such.

In this framework, the maker of dance (the artist referred to as a choreographer today) may not be a ballet's principal, dominant, or autonomous creator. In the interdisciplinary enterprise of ballet production, the dance master, as portrayed in the treatise, seems to have been the recipient of advice and directives from other practitioners: the author notes that a ballet's dance master must be told '*ce qu'il est besoin qu'il facent afin de faire les pas & figures suiuant le dessein* [what he needs to do in order to do the steps and figures following the plan].'<sup>30</sup> Saint-Hubert also advises alternating the numbers of dancers in each *entrée*, the number of figures, their duration, and the variety of their melodies and steps,<sup>31</sup> all of which begs the question of whether or not such choices were open to dance masters. Marie-Françoise Christout points out that dance masters also

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29 Pouillaude, Frédéric: *Unworking Choreography: The Notion of the Work in Dance*, New York : Oxford University Press 2017 [2009, trans. Anna Pakes], p. 183. Menestrier notes that '*quand le personnage paroît une seconde fois, il n'exprime rien de nouveau quant à la figure, & il faut que les mouvemens soient diversifiez, que l'on puisse entendre ce qu'il represente de nouveau* [when the character appears a second time, he expresses nothing new with regards to the figure and his movements must be diversified, so that we can hear what else he can signify]', suggesting if ballet figures function as signs, a single appearance of these signs may be sufficient. Menestrier: *Des Ballets anciens et modernes*, p. 142.

30 Saint-Hubert: *La Manière de composer et faire réussir les ballets*, p. 23.

31 *Ibid.*, pp. 10, 16–17.

had to adapt to the skill of their noble performers,<sup>32</sup> instead of following unrestricted creative volition. The non-dominant role of the choreographer is also illustrated by Saint-Hubert's note that one dancing master is needed to do [*faire les pas*] and teach the steps for three to four *entrées*; given that – according to Saint-Hubert himself – a ballet had a minimum of ten *entrées*, one work must have required multiple dancing masters.<sup>33</sup> This is corroborated by contemporary historians who point out that a ballet could have several dance masters (a similar principle of collective, multiple authorship held for 17<sup>th</sup>-century painters and composers).<sup>34</sup> Based on this information, it seems that the non-equivalence between dance and ballet can be doubled by a non-equivalence between dance master and ballet *poiesis*. In effect, Saint-Hubert's text introduces an altogether different figure that may assume both practical and artistic/conceptual authorial responsibility for ballets – one that may be seen as an expanded choreographer.

## A master of order

In Saint-Hubert's list of elements necessary for creating a ballet, his last point is termed “order” – presented as foundational for the success of a ballet: [*c'e n'est pas la plus grande despense qui rend les Ballets plus agreables, mais c'est quand l'ordre y est bien obserué* [it is not the greatest expense that renders ballets more agreeable, but when order is well observed]'.<sup>35</sup> The author then dedicates a whole chapter to the topic of order, personified in a figure he calls the *maître d'ordre*. In the same chapter, Saint-Hubert widens the scope of “order” by referring to the ballets of '*feu Monseigneur de Nemours* [the late *Monseigneur de Nemours*]'<sup>36</sup>; this “monseigneur” is most probably Henri de Savoie duc de Nemours, who was involved in the production of ballets as their “*ordonnateur*” [roughly translated as “ordonator”]. Indeed, Saint-Hubert's references to the *maître d'ordre* bear similarities to information about *ordonnateurs* – courtiers or artists responsible for choosing the theme of ballets and supervising their production.<sup>37</sup> This “master” acquires great importance in the treatise – possibly because Saint-Hubert may

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32 Christout: *Le Ballet de cour de Louis XIV*, p. 162.

33 Saint-Hubert: *La Manière de composer et faire réussir les ballets*, pp. 5, 17.

34 Franko: *Dance as Text*, p. 93; Christout: Introduction, pp. 20–21; Christout: *Le Ballet de cour de Louis XIV*, p. 13.

35 Saint-Hubert: *La Manière de composer et faire réussir les ballets*, p. 20.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 25.

37 Cf. Lecomte, Nathalie: Ballet de cour, in: Moal, Philippe Le (ed.): *Dictionnaire de la danse*, Paris: Larousse 1999, p. 528.

have operated in a similar role<sup>38</sup> and tended to valorise it – which states that everyone implicated in ballet-making should obey him.<sup>39</sup>

The first type of work that the master of order does according to Saint-Hubert's vision is hands-on, pragmatic labour. He works before a ballet is presented, visiting the room in which it will be performed to decide issues such as where entrances will be made and where machines can be placed. He is tasked with finding the best artisans to create the machines and the best operators to use them. He is involved in the preparations of the baller's costumes and accessories. Saint-Hubert furthermore requires that he be present at all rehearsals and that he know the names of the dancers, indicating his familiarity with the members of the production.<sup>40</sup> The master of order is also active during the performance itself, fulfilling tasks that can be compared to those of today's stage managers, such as timing the entrances and exits of different *entrées* or telling the musicians when to play.<sup>41</sup> The master of order is thus implicated in multiple pragmatic aspects of the process of production, staging, and performance.

At the same time, certain passages of the treatise suggest that the *maîtres d'ordre's* role was not limited to this. Indeed, they not only supervised the ballet's craftspeople and other artists but also mediated between them and the ballet's conception, explaining its plan and theme.<sup>42</sup> What's more, Saint-Hubert's text discerns a creative space for those working on "order"; this included, for example, choosing the ballet's participating elements, such as masks and accessories.<sup>43</sup> The treatise further refers to choices made by the duc de Nemours as to whether there should be spoken word in ballet, thus indicating the *maître d'ordre's* role in a ballet's formal and media development.<sup>44</sup> The master of order thus performed conceptually- and artistically-relevant work, assuming an important function of creative authority within ballet *poiesis*. Saint-Hubert goes further: '[j]e voudrais que celui qui a composé le subiet, prist le soin de le faire executer luy mesme [I would like that he who composed the subject takes care executing it himself]<sup>45</sup> – in other words, the person who puts the ballet into practice may also develop its subject. If that person was a high-ranking member of the

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38 Hourcade: *Mascarades & ballets au Grand Siècle*, p. 137

39 Saint-Hubert: *La Manière de composer et faire réussir les ballets*, p. 30. This source uses the male form.

40 Ibid., pp. 26, 21, 23.

41 Ibid., pp. 23–24.

42 Ibid., pp. 22–23; Hourcade: *Mascarades & ballets au Grand Siècle*, p. 149.

43 Saint-Hubert: *La Manière de composer et faire réussir les ballets*, p. 23.

44 Ibid., p. 25.

45 Ibid., p. 22.

nobility – a *grand Seigneur* – who did not wish to undertake the staging, they may delegate creative agency to a master of order.<sup>46</sup>

This view of the master of order is compatible with the tasks of French *ordonnateurs*. For example, Nathalie Lecomte and Christout link the role of the *ordonnateur* with the selection of a ballet's general theme and the elaboration of the libretto, including choosing the poet who would write the lyrics.<sup>47</sup> The creativity in staging displayed by *ordonnateurs* and reflected by Saint-Hubert's *maître d'ordre* was also recognised by other 17<sup>th</sup>-century authors; for instance, Menestrier presents the *Ballet de la nuit*, performed twelve years after the publication of *La Manière de composer*, by paying tribute to its *ordonnateur*

*Monsieur Clément qui étoit incomparable en tous ces ouvrages d'esprit, s'y surpassa luy-meme, & il falloit posseder aussi bien que luy toute la science des Fêtes et des Representations, pour imaginer de si belles choses [Monsieur Clément, who was incomparable in all these works of the spirit, went beyond himself, and it was necessary to possess as much as he all the science of Feasts and Representations, in order to imagine such beautiful things].*<sup>48</sup>

Nordera aptly describes such figures' work when she associates the *ordonnateur* with de Pure's "poet" – who went beyond poetry-writing and 'incorporated the functions of "auteur, inventeur, dessinateur, entrepreneur [author, inventor, designer, entrepreneur]"', highlighting 'a notion of the poet, which seems to return to the original Greek meaning of the word *poiein* (to make)'.<sup>49</sup> Today, court ballets tend to be attributed to their librettist, composer, and/or choreographer(s), be it because their work has left more material traces (librettos, musical scores, notations) or because of the importance that such roles have acquired. Nevertheless, this tendency conceals the potential – expanded – authorship of the master of order.

In both his more practical tasks and his more artistic/conceptual considerations, Saint-Hubert's *maître d'ordre* accomplishes interdisciplinary work, supervising practitioners from multiple fields including dance, costume, masking, music, and machinery. Sources chronologically surrounding *La Manière de composer* further attest to the master of order's multimedia creative role. An example is the libretto of *Les Noces de Pelée et de Thétis*, staged in 1654, dedicated to its *ordonnateur* (the count of Saint-Aignan); the dedication mentions the artists having worked on the verses and machines, but also

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46 Ibid., p. 22.

47 Lecomte, Nathalie (referring to Christout): *Entre cours et jardins d'illusion: Le ballet en Europe (1515-1715)*, Pantin: Centre national de la danse 2014, p. 154.

48 Menestrier: *Des Ballets anciens et modernes*, pp. 176–177.

49 Nordera: *Ballet de cour*, p. 21; cf. Pure: *Idée des spectacles anciens et nouveaux*, p. 215.

*Monseigneur, la richesse des habits, le choix des Airs et des Pas et l'assortiment merveilleux de tant de différentes pièces qui ont composé cet admirable tout, ne sont dus qu'à vous seul [Monseigneur, the richness of the clothing, the choice of Melodies and of Steps and the marvellous assortment of so many different pieces that composed this admirable whole, are only due to you].*<sup>50</sup>

In this interdisciplinary role, Saint-Hubert's master of order also holds a particular position in relation to dance. Beyond mediating information to the dance master, *La Manière de composer* implies that the master of order may, themselves, dance in the ballet.<sup>51</sup> In both these ways, they display more than an observer's understanding and a practical knowledge of dance practice.<sup>52</sup> The artist composing a ballet's steps and motions was therefore not its sole or principal creator, while figures not specialised in dance – but touching upon it as part of their multidisciplinary practice – accomplished central tasks of ballet-making and were recognised in their contribution to the performance. This configuration of creative roles challenges a conception of choreography that solely associates the making of ballet with the making of its dances, and thus points to the need to integrate multidisciplinary figures practicing a non-dancerly ballet authorship into our understanding of court ballet.

Beyond *La Manière de composer*, the nature of the master of order's work can be more-appropriately read as part of a constellation of different figures of European pre-18<sup>th</sup>-century spectacle, who performed comparable duties. This constellation is geographically diverse (going beyond France) and chronologically wide (extending beyond Saint-Hubert's mid-17<sup>th</sup> century) – indeed, Roger Savage suggests '[t]he idea of one man taking overall responsibility for the staging of a dramatic event' can be traced back to the Medieval period.<sup>53</sup> In France, a figure such as Balthasar de Beaujoyeux (active as early as the late-16<sup>th</sup> century) was presented as '*l'inventeur du sujet, & en disposa toute l'ordonnance* [the inventor of the subject [who] disposed all the order]'; the only reason he did not create the *Ballet comique de la reine's* (1581) verses, music, and decorations was, positedly,

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50 Quoted in Prunières, Henry: *L'Opéra italien en France avant Lulli*, Paris: Champion 1913, pp. 170–171.

51 Saint-Hubert: *La Manière de composer et faire réussir les ballets*, p. 26.

52 Henry Prunières goes so far as to suggest that there are cases where members of the nobility performed functions comparable to those of Saint-Hubert's master of order – in this case, the count of Saint-Aignan – and also functioned as choreographers contributing to the work of dance masters. Prunières: *L'Opéra italien en France avant Lulli*, p. 164.

53 Savage, Roger: *Staging an Intermedio: Practical Advice from Florence circa 1630*, in: Mulryne, J.R. & Shewring, Margaret (eds.): *Italian Renaissance Festivals and their European Influence*, Lewiston: Mellen Press 1992, p. 58.



because of a lack of time.<sup>54</sup> A further – and chronologically closer to Saint-Hubert – comparison is the Italian *corago*, primarily active in early opera.<sup>55</sup> The *corago*'s work is amply described in an anonymous treatise dating from the 1620s–1630s, in which they are attributed several spectacle-preparation tasks: command over different construction workers, knowledge about lights, production of costumes.<sup>56</sup> Like the *maître d'ordre*, the *corago* is also involved during the performance; the anonymous treatise ends with a “checklist”<sup>57</sup> of reminders to – among other things – make sure that all performers are dressed properly, machine operators are in position, extra help is available for performers with more than one role, musicians have prepared their instruments, machines are clean. The *corago* was also – like the master of order – a figure whose work spanned text, dance, music, costuming, architecture, acting, and lighting.<sup>58</sup> Mirroring the master of order's more creative work, the *corago* could give advice to, and collaborate with, the poet and the artists of the work they staged, in order to interpret the piece.<sup>59</sup> The English “Master of the Revels” (whose role was confirmed by patent in the English court in 1545) is another comparable figure, who oversaw performances, proposed ideas for entertainments, and engaged with costumes, props, constructions, transportation of materials, and lighting. Like *ordonnateurs* or the *maître d'ordre*, a revels supervisor ‘stood as producer and director who had financial, administrative, and aesthetic control under the king and council’.<sup>60</sup>

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54 Cahusac, Louis de : *La Danse ancienne et moderne ou Traité historique de la danse*, La Haye: Jean Neaulme 1754, <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k108132g/fz.image> (August 2020), BnF, Tome 2, pp. 134–135. Cahusac's “information” comes from Beaujoyeux' own account: Beaujoyeux, Balthazar de : *Balet comique de la Royné, fait aux nopces de monsieur le duc de Joyeuse & madamoyselle de Vaudemont sa sœur*, Paris : LeRoy, Ballard & Patisson 1582, <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k1110737> (August 2020), BnF, p. 2.

55 Anonymous: *Il corago o vero alcune osservazioni per metter bene in scena le composizioni drammatiche*, Florence: Leo Olschki 1983 [1620s–1630s]. Etymological possibilities for the word “*corago*” include the Greek *choregos* – a ‘moneyed chorus sponsor’ – and the Latin *choragus* or ‘props-and-costumes-man’. The term has also been associated with Aristotle's poetics. Savage: Staging an *Intermedio* p. 60; Fabbri, Paolo & Pompilio, Angelo: Introduzione, in: Anonymous: *Il corago*, p. 10, footnote 20. According to Savage, the term “*corago*” was at times used in the 17<sup>th</sup> century to refer to Jesuit college “stagers”. Savage, Roger & Sansone, Matteo: ‘Il Corago’ and the Staging of Early Opera: Four Chapters from an Anonymous Treatise circa 1630, in: *Early Music* 17/4 (1989), pp. 498–499.

56 Anonymous: *Il corago*, pp. 22.

57 *Ibid.*, p. 125.

58 *Ibid.*, p. 22.

59 Fabbri & Pompilio: Introduzione, p. 11; Anonymous: *Il corago*, p. 24.

60 Streitberger, William R.: *Court Revels 1485–1559*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1994, pp. 7–8. The German figure of *Oberhofmarschall* may also be comparable to these. See Stocker, Kathrin: *L'Altérité française en Europe : Appropriations, inclusions, échanges*,

Framing the presentation of Saint-Hubert's "master" with such examples is not intended to impose continuity upon diverse genres. Rather, the contextualisation of Saint-Hubert's *maître d'ordre* with figures such as these can – beyond widening the geographic and chronological scope of the notion – function as a reminder of the multidisciplinary nature of ballet-making, rendering it comparable with fields which are not primarily characterised by dance, such as early opera. It functions as an indication that pre-18<sup>th</sup>-century European spectacle (including 17<sup>th</sup>-century French ballet) challenges the medium specificity of modernism and thus enters into an interdisciplinary history of stage performance.

The preponderance of such creative roles attests to the formal and media characteristics of pre-18<sup>th</sup> century performance, as well as the social status of certain practitioners related to order. It was indeed often members of the nobility and/or court who organised and staged ballets. The power associated with such a position is illustrated by the case of the duc of Saint-Aignan who, after having functioned as an *ordonnateur*, was appointed by Louis XIV as the "vice-protécteur" [vice-protector] of the *Académie Royale de Danse*.<sup>61</sup> (As with many *ordonnateurs*, the *corago* was also required to be related to the court.<sup>62</sup>) Whether noble status allowed them to take a role *already* highly respected or the role *became* highly respected because of the noble status of most of its practitioners, 17<sup>th</sup>-century ballet-making included highly regarded, non-dance-specific makers. In this way, Saint-Hubert's *maître d'ordre* explicitly manifests the importance of looking for the interstices of historical works and creative processes in which social and political power may be lodged – and of acknowledging that this power is not exclusively exercised through choreographic instructions geared towards dancing bodies.

The distinction between ballet and dance shows that a more recent, dance-focussed conception of choreography is not fully applicable to Saint-Hubert's views. The master-of-order figure correspondingly indicates that a more recent, dance-focussed conception of the choreographer as sole or principal creator is not applicable to the ballet poietics that *La Manière de composer* proposes, either. Shifting the focus of creative work from any one medium to the pragmatic, but also artistic, and conceptual coordination between several media, the master of order performs work comparable to today's expanded choreographic practice.

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in: Fabricatore, Arianna Béatrice (ed.): *La Danse théâtrale en Europe: Identités, altérités, frontières*, Paris: Hermann 2019, p. 121.

61 Gatulle, Pierre: *Le Corps guerrier, le corps dansant et l'esprit galant*. François de Beauvilliers, duc de Saint-Aignan (1610-1687), in: *Bulletin du Centre de recherche du château de Versailles* (2013), <https://journals.openedition.org/crcv/12191> (August 2020).

62 Fabbri & Pompilio: *Introduzione*, p. 9.

## The subject of ballet

Given a ballet is not strictly a dance work, and as multidisciplinary figures like the *maître d'ordre* participate in its creation in central ways, Saint-Hubert's treatise refers to a ballet-making that is neither primarily dance-based nor solely dance-oriented. This kind of making may be further understood through an element positioned at the very foundation of Saint-Hubert's *poietics*: the *sujet*, the first to be mentioned in his list of ballet's necessary elements. The subject is the topic of Saint-Hubert's first chapter after the introduction (the chapters follow the order of the list), which starts with a clear affirmation of its importance:

*Je commenceray par le sujet, duquel depend tout le reste, & a qui il faut exactement s'asubietir, aussi estce le principal pour faire vn beau Ballet, que de chercher vn beau subiet, qui est la chose la plus difficile [I will start from the subject, from which everything else depends, and to which one must be exactly subjected, so it is principal in order to do a beautiful Ballet to look for a beautiful subject, which is what is most difficult].*<sup>63</sup>

It is not only the beauty and success of the ballet that depend on its subject, but its originality too:

*Quand ie dy qu'il faut faire vn Ballet, qui n'aye iamais esté veu, j'entends parler du corps du subiet seulement, car pour les entrées il est imposible d'en faire que fort peu qui n'ayent esté faites [...] Ce ne sont plus celles représentées aux autres subiets, mais celles necessaires au vostre, qui est tout contraire aux precedens, & vous vous en seruez parce quelles sont du corps de vostre subiet, & non parce quelles ont esté faites. [When I say that one must make a Ballet, which has never been seen before, I only mean to say this in relation to the body of the subject, since for the entrées it is impossible to make more than few that have not been done [...] It is not those that are represented in other subjects, but those necessary to your own, which is completely contrary to anterior ones, and you use them because they are of the body of your subject, and not because they have been done before.]*<sup>64</sup>

Saint-Hubert thus suggests that his readers look for a 'beau subiet [beautiful subject]' of their own invention 'puis que c'est la mode maintenant; & que l'on ne dance plus les *Metamorphose* [sic] d'Ovide comme l'on faisoit le temps passé [since it is fashionable now and we don't dance Ovid's *Metamorphoses* anymore like we did

63 Saint-Hubert: *La Manière de composer et faire réussir les ballets*, pp. 6–7.

64 *Ibid.*, p. 8.

in the past]'.<sup>65</sup> The importance of the subject is coupled by difficulty in selecting and developing it:

*Je trouue quantité de parfaits Musiciens pour les Airs, d'excellés danseurs pour les entrées, des bos designateurs pour les habits, des ouuriers extremement adroits pour les machines, mais fort peu de gens qui sçachet accommoder vn beau subiet, & y obseruer l'ordre necessaire [I find quantity of perfect Musicians for the Melodies, excellent dancers for the entrées, good designers for the costumes, extremely skilled workers for the machines, but only very few people who know how to accommodate a beautiful subject and observe the necessary order in it].*<sup>66</sup>

The subject indeed forms a “rule” in ballet-making, as illustrated by the author’s treatment of mascarades: ‘*estant ordinairement sans subiet, aussi sont elles sans reigle [being ordinarily without subject, they are also without rule]*’.<sup>67</sup>

Saint-Hubert’s attention to the subject is shared with other authors in the field of 17<sup>th</sup>-century ballet. Menestrier considers that ‘[*l*]out le secret de la conduite d’un Ballet consiste donc au choix du sujet [the whole secret of the direction of a Ballet therefore consists in the choice of the subject]’ and, like Saint-Hubert, ranks its invention first in the list of elements making up a ballet.<sup>68</sup> de Pure expresses his agreement in a wonderful passage:

*Le Sujet est l’Ame du Balet, qui foment la premiere Idée que le Poëte peut avoir conceuë, qui communique les esprits aux diverses parties, & qui leur donne enfin & la nourriture & le mouvement. Ce n’est pourtant pas une Ame parfaite qui soit toute, & toute entiere en chaque partie. C’est plûtost une seve materielle & interieure, secretement & separément répanduë dans chaque membre du corps, qui luy communique toute la chaleur necessaire pour vivre, & toute la vigueur pour agir. [the Subject is the Soul of the Ballet, which incites the first Idea that the Poet may have conceived, that communicates the spirits to the diverse parts, and that finally gives them both nourishment and movement. It is not however a perfect Soul that is in its entirety in each part. It is rather a material and internal lifeblood, secretly and separately spread in each member of the body, which communicates to it all the warmth necessary for life and all the vigor for action].*<sup>69</sup>

According to *La Manière de composer*, the subject should influence how many *entrées* a ballet will contain; Saint-Hubert gives “standard” numbers of *entrées* for different kinds of ballets – thirty for a “grand” royal ballet, twenty for a

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65 Ibid., p. 9.

66 Ibid., p. 7.

67 Ibid., p. 5.

68 Menestrier: *Des Ballets anciens et modernes*, pp. 92, 55–56.

69 Pure: *Idée des spectacles anciens et nouveaux*, p. 216.

“beautiful” ballet, ten to twelve for a “small” one – but stresses that this rule is not strict, since it is the subject that will form the final criterion.<sup>70</sup> It is the subject that also decides the ballet's content; Saint-Hubert writes that no *entrée* should lie outside the subject, all of them have to be appropriate to it.<sup>71</sup> Moreover, it is implied that the subject can help “make sense” of this content; Saint-Hubert suggests that the ‘*discours du subiet du Ballet, soit en Prose, ou en Vers* [discourse of the Ballet's subject, either in Prose or in Verses]<sup>72</sup> be given to the spectators, in order to increase their pleasure, and understanding, of the work. Selecting the number of *entrées* and determining their content, the subject therefore assumes a dramaturgical role in Saint-Hubert's text.

Other 17<sup>th</sup>-century authors further imply that the subject's dramaturgical function concerned how contents of the ballet should be combined. Menestrier writes that ballet does not require unity of action, time, or space – like tragedy does – but does require that everything relate to the same theme;<sup>73</sup> ‘[*]a Fable des ballets [...] ne demande point d'autre unité, que celle du dessein, afin que les entrées différentes se rapportent à un Sujet* [the Fable of ballets [...] only requires the unity of plan/goal, so that the different *entrées* relate to one Subject].<sup>74</sup> He gives examples of how different parts of ballets can result from their subjects: a ballet on the world divided into sky and earth, a ballet on time divided into seasons...<sup>75</sup> De Pure similarly writes of the subject of spectacular entertainments (in this case, entries for kings and queens):

*Il faut qu'il y ait un dessein, un point principal, un noeud mystereux qui d'une façon ou d'autre appartienne si precisement au sujet, & s'étende si naturellement à toutes les parties qui le composent, qu'il ne puisse estre appliqué à autre chose qu'à ce qu'il est destiné* [there must be a plan, a principal point, a mysterious knot which in one way or another belongs so precisely to the subject, and stretches out so naturally to all parts composing it, that it can only be applied to that for which it is destined].<sup>76</sup>

De Pure agrees that there is a difference between the scenes of drama and the *entrées* of ballets, since scenes need to be relate to each other while *entrées* need only be related to the subject.<sup>77</sup> In these authors' perspective, the subject provides a specific kind of dramaturgical coherence – one in which parts

70 Saint-Hubert : *La Manière de composer et faire réussir les ballets*, p. 5.

71 Ibid., p. 7.

72 Ibid., p. 11.

73 Menestrier : *Des Ballets anciens et modernes*, p. 54.

74 Menestrier : *Remarques pour la conduite des ballets*, p. 222.

75 Ibid., p. 225.

76 Pure : *Idée des spectacles anciens et nouveaux*, p. 205.

77 Ibid., p. 241. Cf. also Franko: *Dance as Text*, p. 84 for an elaboration on Pure's positions on the subject and the *entrées*.

(*entrées*) are not linearly articulated with each other but where a transversal topic guides their choice and common presentation. Saint-Hubert insists upon both the subject and the *entrée*-unit, although he does not describe specific ballets' structures sufficiently to allow a more explicit understanding of his dramaturgical model. On the one hand, he considers ballet themes that can be staged in a plot-based way (e.g. Homer's *Iliad* – despite never bringing it to the stage because of practical reasons) and refers to potentially-linear aspects of dramaturgy (such as the '*suite du subiet* [the continuation of the subject]<sup>78</sup>'). On the other hand, however, his text subverts this possibility of linearity; it stresses the importance of alternating between grotesque and serious *entrées* and between different numbers of dancers in them,<sup>79</sup> freeing the *entrées* from a linear progression of plot or character development. He urges that inventing hitherto-unseen *entrées* can enrich a ballet,<sup>80</sup> indicating variability in the staging of the subject beyond a linearly-defined narrative. An *entrée*-based dramaturgical model formulated around a subject did indeed permeate 17<sup>th</sup>-century ballets, in particular the period between 1620 and 1650 when *La Manière de composer* was written.<sup>81</sup> In her analysis of the treatise, Nicole Haitzinger speaks of a '*lose Handlungsdramaturgie* [loose plot dramaturgy]' – with the subject at its hierarchical top – as characterising the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>82</sup> For these reasons, there is support for the idea that the subject in Saint-Hubert's ballet *poietics* influences not only the selection, but also the combination and articulation, of ballet contents.

The idea that the subject might function as a guarantor of dramaturgical coherence in Saint-Hubert's – and his context's – ballet *poietics* is also supported by the role the *sujet* assumes in the ordering of a ballet's diverse media components. The ballet of *La Manière de composer* had (as already described) a heterogeneous, multimedia nature; dance, text, music, costumes, and machinery came together into a colourful whole, resulting in works that Mark Franko has described as 'potentially chaotic'.<sup>83</sup> Such a product was the result of not-always-organised interdisciplinary collaboration. Georgie Durosoir presents early 17<sup>th</sup>-century ballet-making as a wonderfully informal procedure – hinted at by

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78 Saint-Hubert: *La Manière de composer et faire réussir les ballets*, pp. 8–10.

79 *Ibid.*, pp. 7, 10.

80 *Ibid.*, pp. 8–9.

81 Paquot, Marcel: *La Manière de composer les ballets de cour d'après les premiers théoriciens français*, in: *Cahiers de l'Association internationale des études françaises* 9 (1957), p. 192.

82 Haitzinger, Nicole: *Vergessene Traktate – Archive der Erinnerung. Zu Wirkungskonzepten im Tanz von der Renaissance bis zum Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts*, Munich: epodium 2009, p. 106.

83 Franko: *Dance as Text*, p. 1.

Saint-Hubert when he criticises spontaneous ballet creation practices (implying these were common practice) or when he suggests the number of days needed to rehearse a ballet (which seem strikingly short by contemporary standards).<sup>84</sup> Against this background, Saint-Hubert's text makes it clear that the subject should function as a directive towards multiple of the work's media. The subject directs costumes; one should, writes Saint-Hubert, focus less on the luxuriousness of the clothing than on their resemblance and suitability for the subject to be represented.<sup>85</sup> Similarly, the subject directs the choice of machines:

*Qvand aux Machines, elles seruent d'un grand ornement aux Ballets, & les decorent extremement lors quelles sont belles, bien conduites, & misse à propos dans le subiet, de donner l'inuention de les faire cela ne se peut, que lors que le subiet est parfait, & que l'on sçait ce que l'on veut représenter avec icelles [as for Machines, they serve as a great ornament to Ballets, and they decorate them extremely when they are beautiful, well conducted, and relevant to the subject, to give the invention to make them can only be done when the subject is perfected, and that we know what we want to represent with them].*<sup>86</sup>

Here, it is suggested that no task should be undertaken before the subject is finalised; if the artists or artisans start work without a complete idea of the subject, they will work randomly without being directed by what the subject demands. This is also applied to music; the treatise suggests that composers do not start their work before the subject is perfected and the *entrées* prepared, so that the music can follow the planned actions:

*[L]e Musicien reussira bien mieux de cette sorte, que de luy faire faire quantité d'Airs que l'on a apres bien de la peine à accomoder aux entrées & au subiet [the Musician will succeed much better in this way, than asking him to make a quantity of Melodies which afterwards we struggle to accommodate to the entrées and to the subject].*<sup>87</sup>

(This point, it is important to note, is *all* that *La Manière de composer's* chapter on music contains.) In these cases, the subject's guidance upon ballet media is translated into the practical unfolding of the production process. The subject also directs the choice of whether the spoken word is accepted within the ballet; while some approve of its use and others do not, for Saint-Hubert this

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84 Durosoir, Georgie: *Les Ballets de la cour de France au XVIIe siècle ou les fantaisies et les splendeurs du Baroque*, Genève: Papillon 2004, p. 11; Saint-Hubert: *La Manière de composer et faire réussir les ballets*, pp. 17–18.

85 Saint-Hubert: *La Manière de composer et faire réussir les ballets*, pp. 18–20.

86 *Ibid.*, p. 21.

87 *Ibid.*, p. 11–12.

choice is dependent on the subject.<sup>88</sup> Dance, finally, also serves the subject; for Saint-Hubert, the large numbers of dancers available in *grands ballets* ‘*decorent extremement vn subiet y estant bien appropriiez, & lors qu'ils y sont necessaires pour faire voir la conclusion du Ballet* [extremely decorate a subject, being well adapted to it and when they are necessary in order to make the conclusion of the Ballet visible]’.<sup>89</sup> Guiding the choice and creation of such diverse elements as costumes, machines, music, text, and dance – the whole multimedia range of ballet – the subject (itself, crucially, not medium-specific) thus brings together the different art forms implicated in ballet-making.

A court ballet was an assemblage of dance, music, words, costumes, and complicated machinery, as well as – if not always coherently-connected – of scenes. This composite nature renders it indispensable to include, in ballet *poietics*, agents that can assume a compositional role – keeping these diverse parts of the assemblage together, guaranteeing its unity while preserving its heterogeneity. The master of order is, to a great extent, such an agent, but so is the subject; it is a pivotal element, a guiding principle whose “rule” concerns *how* and *what* the different *entrées* will represent, as well as, in great probability, how this content should be dramaturgically ordered. With this in mind, Saint-Hubert’s choice to title his final chapter ‘Of order’ is enlightening – while the chapter focusses on the personification of order in its master, it may be the art and act of ordering itself, via the subject, that is characteristic of Saint-Hubert’s ballet *poietics*. It is indeed telling that the rule of the subject has one striking exception for Saint-Hubert; before the ballet proper starts, the master of order can make an entrance ‘*hors du subiet* [out of the subject]’ and circle around the dancing space, as if to mark the ballet’s territory.<sup>90</sup> To those who pain to guarantee the subject’s application, Saint-Hubert offers an exception. It is also telling that Saint-Hubert chose to title his treatise by reference to the “composition” of ballets; his treatise describes a type of making underlied by com/position, putting together, ordering. Through the importance of the subject, ballet *poietics* may be understood as an art intertwined with invention and ordering, the latter two complementing each other, or even, at times, becoming one. The word “assemblage” in the opening of this paragraph is indeed not used anachronistically (despite its preponderance, with different connotations, in contemporary choreographic discourse). It is, rather, directly related to the treatise’s insistence on order; the 1694 (and first) edition of the Académie Française’s dictionary defines “ordre” as ‘arrangement, disposition des choses mises en leur rang [arrangement, disposition of things put in their place]’

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88 Ibid., p. 24.

89 Ibid., p. 10–11.

90 Ibid., p. 26.



and “composition” as ‘assemblage de plusieurs parties [assemblage of multiple parts]’.<sup>91</sup> Court ballet may thus be seen as an anti-modernist, dramaturgical, intermedia assemblage, a choreographic composition that is ungraspable through a conception of choreography specifically attached to the discipline of dance – but that can enter into juxtapositional dialogues with contemporary expansions that challenge that very same specificity.

## Conclusion

*Poiesis* refers to the art of making – and Monsieur de Saint-Hubert's treatise is an exploration of the making of (court) ballets. It is an exploration of *what* is made in creating a ballet; not, strictly speaking, a dance, but a multimedia entity in which dance participates and interacts with other components. It is an exploration of *who* makes a ballet: a dance master – or several – to be sure, but also costume and scenography craftspeople, musicians, poets, as well as an interdisciplinary figure called “master of order”, who contributes both practically and conceptually. It is, as well, an exploration of *how* ballet is made – not through autonomous artistic practices, but in an interdisciplinary mix which creates a series of *entrées*, the heterogeneous whole held together by the subject. And it is, finally, an exploration of the *act* of making: of the construction and creation of costumes, masks, dance steps, but also, crucially, the praxis of com/posing, and ordering the dramaturgy of an assemblage.

A (court) ballet, in the present reading of *La Manière de composer*, was not solely characterised by dance. And, if choreography is equivalent to dance-making, the treatise's ballet-*poetics* is not about choreography. But, considering that its ballet was not choreographic because it was not principally characterised by dance presupposes that choreography is essentially associated with dance-making – an idea that both expanded choreography and Saint-Hubert's non-use of the term call into question. From this viewpoint, the perceived distance between Saint-Hubert and choreography only exists because of historically-subsequent associations of choreography with dance. An expanded choreographic perspective on his treatise, therefore, removes the focus from dance-making and pluralises an understanding of 17<sup>th</sup>-century ballet as a multimedia *choreographic* enterprise with interdisciplinary creative forces – a non-medium-specific approach to an assemblage-like entity.

De-centralising dance from the quest for the choreographic in Saint-Hubert's ballet also points to the striking relevance his treatise may have for a contem-

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91 *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, 1694, <http://artfl-project.uchicago.edu/node/45> (August 2020).

porary expanded choreography. *La Manière de composer* is an example of interdisciplinary performance and authorship before the historical construction of rigid disciplinary boundaries; of a non-autonomous dance embodied by hybridised figures before the strict physicalisation of dance; of dramaturgy and intermedia com/position as core elements of ballet-making before the reduction of the choreographic to dance steps. In these ways, Saint-Hubert's treatise is a reminder of the very constructability and contingency of the essentialisms that contemporary expanded choreography also upsets.

## Chapter 2: Choreo-graphy or the incorporeal inscription of choreography

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1700. Raoul Auger Feuillet, a French dance master, published his *Chorégraphie, ou L'Art de décrire la danse par caractères, figures et signes démonstratifs* [Choreography or The art of describing dance through characters, figures and demonstrative signs], which presented a system of dance notation. Today, the system is most often referred to as the Beauchamp-Feuillet notation, owing to Feuillet's possible use of previous work by Pierre Beauchamp(s). Feuillet's book proposes a graphic-representation method for social and theatrical dance of the baroque period; the movements of the *belle danse*<sup>1</sup> – developed since the previous century in French noble circles, and increasingly being practiced outside France and by other social groups – can be graphically notated. Dance treatises with notations had been published in Europe before 1700 – Feuillet admits to being acquainted with Thoinot Arbeau's work – but the *Chorégraphie* goes beyond publishing notated dances, by focussing on the notational system itself. Among the multiple sources available on the late-17<sup>th</sup>/early-18<sup>th</sup>-century *belle danse* and its non-French counterparts – notably the works of Pierre Rameau (in French), Gottfried Taubert (in German), or Kellom Tomlinson (in English) – Feuillet's treatise is of particular relevance because of its remarkable influence on the history of choreography as notation (that some of the aforementioned writers elaborated on) and because of its weight in the history of the very term “choreography”.

The Feuillet notation system deconstructs dance into steps, and steps into their constituent elements. A dance is presented by drawing its path through

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1 The term “*belle danse*” was used by practitioners in the 17<sup>th</sup> and early-18<sup>th</sup> century; the expression “baroque dance” dates from the 20<sup>th</sup> century while it refers to the late-17<sup>th</sup> and early-18<sup>th</sup> century (this is the timeframe focussed on here, even though it is not the only one the term may refer to, see Franko, Mark: *Dance as Text: Ideologies of the Baroque Body*, New York: Oxford University Press 2015 [1993], p. 3). For a clarification of this terminology see: Maurmayr, Bianca: De la « danse baroque » à la « *belle danse* » et retour. Usages d'une catégorie, in: *Recherches en danse* 5 (2016), <http://danse.revues.org/1563> (August 2020).

space as seen from above, annotated with a series of signs that encode the positions of the feet and the steps [Figure 1]. The starting position is indicated with a point, a line shows the step's path, and a stroke denotes the foot's ending position. On the step line, further smaller signs are added, corresponding to the different ways in which it may be executed: jumping, *élevé*, *plié*, slides, etc. [Figure 2]. Each dance is accompanied by a musical score; a system of bars on the dance path correlates with musical measures [Figure 1]. A typical notation is a few pages long and bears the title of the dance and, typically, that of its dance-maker. The *Chorégraphie* also provides extensive tables, including notations for the most important steps and their possible variations, as well as a collection of notated dances – compositions by Feuillet himself and by Guillaume-Louis Pécour, to whom the book is dedicated.

Figure 1: First page of a notation in the Beauchamp-Feuillet system. Source: Feuillet, Raoul Auger: IX. Recueil de danses pour l'année 1711, Paris: Dezais 1711, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k8586968/f67.item#> (August 2020), p. 72, BnF. No re-use without permission.

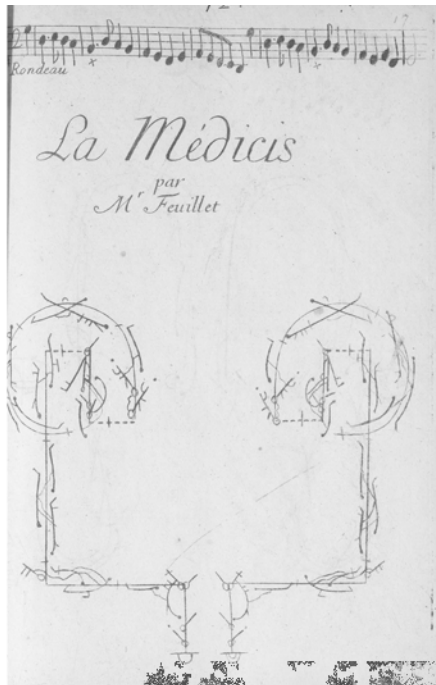
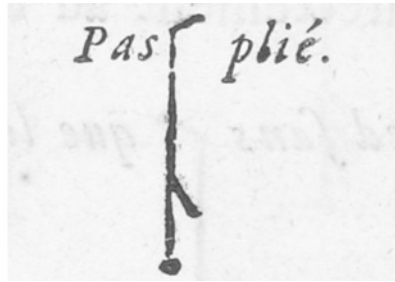


Figure 2: Representation of a step (here, a step forward in plié) in Feuillet notation.

Source: Feuillet, Raoul Auger: *Chorégraphie, ou l'Art de décrire la danse par caractères, figures et signes démonstratifs*, Paris: Brunet 1700, p. 11, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b86232407/f1.image.r=feuillet%201700.langFR> (August 2020), BnF. No re-use without permission.



The Beauchamp-Feuillet system proved to be extremely popular; the treatise was translated multiple times, and its contents were used for the publication of further collections of notations. It thus contributed to the spread of new, fashionable dances and was employed by dance masters in other European countries. The possibility of creating multiple copies of the – mostly engraved – notations also contributed to dances being circulated across social contexts and between the theatre and the ballroom. Finally, it allowed exchanges among dance masters that played an important role in their establishment as a professional community.<sup>2</sup> The notation remained in use for several years, until it was progressively replaced in the later-18<sup>th</sup> century.

Feuillet's book also includes what is considered to be the first occurrence of the term "choreography", which, at the time, literally signified "writing dance". To distinguish between the two and to create distinction from contemporary meaning(s), in what follows "choreo-graphy" will indicate the notational practice,<sup>3</sup> "choreo-grapher" the notation creator, and "a choreo-graphy" a specific

2 On these and other social functions of choreo-graphy see: Glon, Marie: Les "Danses Gravées" du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, ou la mobilité des frontières des arts de la scène, in: Martin, Roxane & Nordera, Marina (eds.): *Les Arts de la scène à l'épreuve de l'histoire. Les objets et les méthodes de l'historiographie des spectacles produits sur la scène française (1635-1906)*, Paris: Honoré Champion: 2011, pp. 253–260; Glon, Marie: Ce que la Chorégraphie fait aux maîtres de danse (XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle), in: *Corps 7* (2009), pp. 57–64.

3 Cf. Ann Hutchinson-Guest's term "choreo-graphics" in her book on notation: Hutchinson-Guest, Ann: *Choreo-Graphics: A Comparison of Dance Notation Systems from the Fifteenth Century to the Present*, New York: Gordon and Breach 1989.

notation. If contemporary expanded choreography challenges the essential association of choreography and dance-making, the *Chorégraphie* also implicates a dissociation between choreography (the period's dance masters' dance-making practice) and choreo-graphy (the practice of notating them). And, as expanded choreography challenges the necessity of choreography's corporeality, this chapter argues that the *Chorégraphie* may also implicate a second dissociation between the corporeal practice of baroque dance and choreo-graphic distance from embodiment. Oscillating between choreo-graphy's abstraction and objecthood, Feuillet's system displays an ambivalent relationship with dance's incarnation, which cannot be fully grasped by subsequent, still-dominant, embodiment-centred choreographic models.

### The ambivalent place of the body

In a 1728 treatise drawing from the Beauchamp-Feuillet system, Giambattista Dufort defines dance as '*un'arte di muovere ordinatamente il corpo, affine di piacere agli spettatori* [an art of ordinately moving the body, in order to please spectators].<sup>4</sup> But dance in the late-17<sup>th</sup> and early-18<sup>th</sup> centuries was not an isolated, compartmentalised practice of the body; rather, it was a corporeal experience inscribed in the social fabric. The *belle danse* that the *Chorégraphie* notated was an integral part of noble life, while life in court – beyond its balls – was intricately choreographed. In Nathalie Lecomte's account, it followed an etiquette which

*à la manière d'une chorégraphie, implique pour chacun, en fonction de son rang, tel type de geste à accomplir, telle façon de se présenter, de se déplacer, de saluer, etc. C'est pourquoi l'ensemble des divers épisodes de ce cérémonial peut être perçu comme un magnifique ballet dont la société toute entière constituerait le corps, le souverain et sa famille les principaux solistes* [like a choreography, implies for every one, in accordance with their rank, such or such type of gesture to carry out, such way of presenting oneself, of moving, of saluting, etc. That is why all the diverse episodes of this formal ceremony can be conceived as a magnificent ballet of which the whole of society would be the body, the king and his family the principal soloists].<sup>5</sup>

4 Dufort, Giovanni Battista: *Trattato del ballo nobile*, Naples: F.Mosca 1728, <https://archive.org/details/trattatodelballooodufo> (August 2020), p. 1.

5 Lecomte, Nathalie: *Entre cours et jardins d'illusion: Le ballet en Europe (1515-1715)*, Pantin: Centre national de la danse 2014, p.145.

Gestures, postures, and corporeal attitudes participated in a complex system that regulated court hierarchies,<sup>6</sup> possibly emulated by the rising bourgeois class. Dance was therefore part of a more widely-reaching corporeal discipline, complemented by regulation of the body and public affect, leading to an elaborate performance of the self.<sup>7</sup>

Beyond the corporeal praxis of dance being embedded in a wider “social choreography”<sup>8</sup> at the French court, dancing was perceived as an activity whose multiple use of, and effects on, the body rendered it a complex, multifaceted corporeal experience. Dance was seen as somatically beneficial. Taubert (German translator of the *Chorégraphie*) suggests it ‘prepares not only the male body for all chivalrous activities, but also refines the delicate female body and that of the small child’.<sup>9</sup> Louis XIV explicitly recognised that dance can ‘former le corps, & luy donner les premieres & plus naturelles dispositions à toute sorte d’exercices, & entre autres à ceux des armes [form the body and give it the first and most natural dispositions for all kinds of exercise, including those of arms]’.<sup>10</sup> In the German context in particular, dance was seen as having moral dimensions and pedagogical potentials as well. This can be illustrated by the expression “visible ethics”, used by Johann Pasch and Taubert to refer to the positive use of the body as ‘the outward expression of a disciplined spirit’.<sup>11</sup> Taubert also believed that the dancing body could be expressive: ‘to express oneself through the body, eyes,

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- 6 Cf. Elias, Norbert: *La Société de cour*, Paris: Flammarion 1985 [1969, trans. Pierre Kamnitzer & Jeanne Etoré], p. 71.
- 7 Cf. Devero, Lisa Christianna: *The Court Dance of Louis XIV as Exemplified by Feuillet’s ‘Chorégraphie’ (1700) and how the Court Dance and Ceremonial Ball were Used as Forms of Political Socialisation*, PhD thesis, New York: New York University 1991, p. 2; Elias: *La Société de cour*, pp. 107–108.
- 8 For the term see Klein, Gabriele: *Das Soziale choreographieren. Tanz und Performance als urbanes Theater*, in: Haitzinger & Fenböck: *Denkfiguren*, Munich: epodium 2010, pp. 94–103; Hewitt, Andrew: *Social Choreography: Ideology as Performance in Dance and Everyday Movement*, Durham/London: Duke University Press 2005.
- 9 Taubert, Gottfried: *The Compleat Dancing Master: A Translation of Gottfried Taubert’s ‘Rechtschaffener Tanzmeister’ (1717), Vol. 2: Translation*, New York: Peter Lang 2012 [1717, trans. Tilden Russel], p. 193.
- 10 Louis XIV: *Lettres patentes du roy, pour l’établissement de l’Académie royale de danse en la ville de Paris* followed by *Discours académique pour prouver que la Danse dans sa plus noble partie n’a pas besoin des instruments de Musique et qu’elle est en tout absolument indépendante du Violon*, Paris: Le Petit 1663, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k76291j/f1.image> (August 2020), BnF, p. 4.
- 11 Taubert: *The Compleat Dancing Master*, p. 420 (Taubert is quoting Pasch). On this topic see also Haitzinger, Nicole: *Vergessene Traktate – Archive der Erinnerung. Zu Wirkungskonzepten im Tanz von der Renaissance bis zum Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts*, Munich: epodium 2009, pp. 135–146.

arms, hands, feet, etc., instead of the tongue is a true masterpiece of art'.<sup>12</sup> In the English context, John Weaver (another translator of the *Chorégraphie*) writes of dance that 'fashions the Body, and unbends the Mind; it preserves the Health by its moderate Exercise; it is pleasing to the Young, agreeable to the Old and necessary for all, provided it be used modestly'<sup>13</sup> – and further accentuates embodied gesture's expressive potential as a precursor of the *ballet d'action*. Finally, dance praxis was a multisensory experience for the practicing bodies; in social dance, this mainly pertained to the need for an understanding of musical rhythm; in dances performed in spectacular contexts such as ballets, the auditory-musical modality was accompanied – as prefigured by the analysis of Saint-Hubert's treatise [Chapter 1]– by complex visual and textual elements.

Feuillet's treatise on choreo-graphy distances itself from these composite experiences of the dancing body, remaining silent on dance's social inscription, beneficial effects, expressive potential, or the full extent of its multisensory complexity. Even if choreo-graphies participated in a social life mediated by dance – in France and England, dances were composed, notated, and published in autumn, to be learnt for the upcoming season<sup>14</sup> – the system does not integrate dance's social dimension; communicative aspects (such as dancer relations) are only treated from the point of view of space (multiple, often gender-specific paths) and technicalities of hand-holding.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, there is no mention of somatically- or morally-beneficial effects; evocative movements, facial expressions, and imitative gestures of theatrical dance cannot be notated.<sup>16</sup> Information about a dance's context in its theatrical-spectacular framework is limited to its title, choreographer, original dancers, (sometimes) venue/instance

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12 Taubert: *The Compleat Dancing Master*, p. 451.

13 Weaver, John: *An Essay Towards an History of Dancing*, London: Tonson 1712, <http://content.lib.utah.edu/cdm/ref/collection/cjt/id/5439> (August 2020), p. 43.

14 Brainard, Ingrid: *New Dances for the Ball. The Annual Collections of France and England in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century*, in: *Early Music* 14/2 (1986), p. 165.

15 Cf. Feuillet, Raoul Auger: *Chorégraphie, ou L'Art de décrire la danse par caractères, figures et signes démonstratifs*, Paris: Brunet 1700, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b86232407/f1.im. age.r=feuillet%201700.langFR> (August 2020), BnF, pp. 93–96.

16 Rameau indicates that he invented signs for movements of comic characters in Rameau, Pierre: *Abregé de la nouvelle méthode dans l'art d'écrire ou de tracer toutes sortes de danses de ville*, Paris 1725, <https://digital.library.yorku.ca/yul-192921/abr%C3%A9g%C3%A9-de-la-nouvelle-m%C3%A9thode-dans-l-art-d-%C3%A9crire-ou-de-tra%C3%A7er-toutes-sortes-de-danses-de#page/1/mode/2up> (August 2020), p. 111.



of first performance,<sup>17</sup> and the generic ‘*salle ou théâtre* [room or theatre]’<sup>18</sup> where dancing may take place. The relationship between dance and music is discussed in the treatise, but contemporary historians note that its notation is not completely precise, and the combination of the two arts heavily relied on the performer’s musical understanding.<sup>19</sup> The body in the *Chorégraphie* is, in all these ways, distanced from the complexity of the corporeal experience of dancing. A certain level of abstraction and decontextualisation may, of course, be inherent in any dance-notational project, suggesting Feuillet’s reduction of a complex bodily experience is unextraordinary. At the same time, this reduction may reflect an ambivalent relationship with the body.

Feuillet uses the term “*corps*” [body] and refers to different body parts – including feet, legs, knees, ankles, arms, and hands – in his text. His notation also allows the body to enter the dance’s visual depiction. The signs indicating positions are based on the structure of the human foot, subdivided into heel, ankle, and *pointe* [Figure 3]. Some signs, based on the articulations of the wrist, elbow, and shoulder, are given to describe *ports de bras* [Figure 4] – although these are scarcer, often left to the dancer’s discretion.<sup>20</sup>

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17 See, for example, certain notations in Feuillet, Raoul Auger: *Recueil de dances contenant un très grand nombre des meilleures entrées de ballet de M. Pécour tant pour homme que pour femmes dont la plus grande partie ont été dancées à l’Opéra*, Paris 1704, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b85914682/f1/f1.item> (August 2020), BnF.

18 Feuillet: *Chorégraphie*, p. 3.

19 E.g. Hutchinson-Guest: *Choreo-Graphics*, p. 21. For Feuillet’s discussion of dance and music and of the specific topic of castagnettes in the notation, see Feuillet: *Chorégraphie*, pp. 87–91, 100–102. Feuillet adds a “treatise on cadence” and provides more information about music and duration in Feuillet: *Recueil de dances contenant un très grand nombre des meilleures entrées de ballet*.

20 Feuillet: *Chorégraphie*, pp. 6, 97; Feuillet also refers to the inner and outer parts of the foot, p. 13. For the use of the arms see also Tomko, Linda J.: *Dance Notation and Cultural Agency: A Mediation Spurred by Choreo-Graphics*, in: *Dance Research Journal* 31/1 (1999), p. 3.

Figure 3: A position of the foot drawn in terms of heel, ankle, and pointe in Feuillet notation. Source: Feuillet, Raoul Auger: *Chorégraphie, ou L'Art de décrire la danse par caractères, figures et signes démonstratifs*, Paris: Brunet 1700, p. 6, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b86232407/f1.image.r=feuillet%201700.langFR> (August 2020), BnF. No re-use without permission.

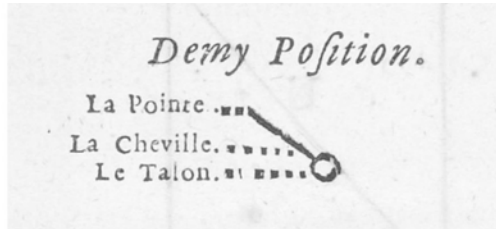
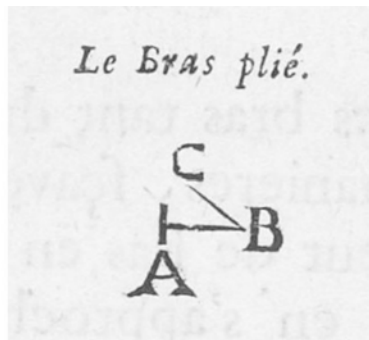


Figure 4: A bent arm, in Feuillet notation. Source: Feuillet, Raoul Auger: *Chorégraphie, ou L'Art de décrire la danse par caractères, figures et signes démonstratifs*, Paris: Brunet 1700, p. 97, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b86232407/f1.image.r=feuillet%201700.langFR> (August 2020), BnF. No re-use without permission.



This choreo-graphic conversion of the body is, however, only partial: the *Chorégraphie* does not indicate the positioning of the torso (generally assumed to stay upright), pelvis, or head. Importantly, this does not simply mean that these core body parts are not *depicted*, but also that no information is given about them through non-figurative symbols – apart from what is gleaned indirectly through the action signs (in comparison to, say, Labanotation, which gives information about a body’s members through abstract symbols, but does not iconically depict the body itself). The body as a whole is referred to in the beginning of each choreo-graphed dance, with a specific sign that indicates its “presence”, i.e. its orientation in relation to the dancing space. Beyond this

starting notation, however, the body and its movements are reduced to traces of the feet. Some choreo-graphies do include full-body figures,<sup>21</sup> but these are neither prescribed in the system proposed by the *Chorégraphie* nor are they integral parts of the notation. Inversely, they function as illustrative annexes that transmit corporeal information left vague by the notation. In this respect, it is interesting that the term “body” itself does not seem to refer to a clearly-defined entity in certain Feuillet-related sources; Tomlinson – in his *The Art of Dancing Explained* (1735) – uses the same word for the torso as an isolated unit.<sup>22</sup> The *Chorégraphie* therefore allows the body to make its appearance as part of the graphic dance, without being fully present, exhaustively analysed, and represented.

Related to the ambivalent choreo-graphic presence of the body is the silence of Feuillet’s work regarding technique, training, and instruction in *how* bodies were to execute dance steps. Dance masters of the early-18<sup>th</sup> century – in many cases working with/on the Beauchamp-Feuillet notation – provide a wealth of information about how the dance was to be embodied. Technical instructions pertained to full-body carriage – head upright, shoulders back, abdomen in, torso vertical – and to proper use of the limbs – legs straight, coordination between arms and legs, feet turned out, handling of arms and hands.<sup>23</sup> Such considerations indicate that not only was corporeal style a cornerstone of the *belle danse*, but also that the apparently-rigid uprightness of the baroque-era dancer was more akin to a coordinated and engaged upper body. In contrast, the *Chorégraphie* includes very little information about bodily style and technique, apart from verbal references to turnout/in when describing the positions of the feet or connections between steps and positions of a defined step vocabulary; the Beauchamp-Feuillet system provides no tools for the depiction of technical and stylistic aspects of embodied dance. Presumably, notations were used in combination with lessons with a dance master and/or experience in the *belle danse* style, which provided adequate knowledge of how the body and

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21 For instance in Feuillet, Raoul Auger: *L’Allemande dance nouvelle de la composition de Mons.r Pecour*, Paris 1702, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k8599296/f1.item> (August 2020), BnF.

22 Tomlinson, Kellom: *The Art of Dancing Explained by Reading and Figures*, London 1735, <http://www.loc.gov/item/20010870/> (January 2019), Library of Congress, digital collection ‘An American Ballroom Companion: Dance Instruction Manuals, ca. 1490 to 1920’, p. 22. Rameau, in his revision of the *Chorégraphie*, interprets the curve of the body-orientation sign (termed *presence* by Feuillet) as representing the back. Rameau: *Abregé de la nouvelle méthode*, p. 3.

23 See Rameau, Pierre: *Le Maître à danser*, Paris: Jean Vilette 1725, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8623292z> (August 2020), BnF, esp. Part 1 Chapter 2 and Part 2 Chapter 6; Taubert: *The Compleat Dancing Master*, esp. pp. 205, 360–361.

its movements have to be moulded in order to enter the dance correctly.<sup>24</sup> In this respect, practice – dominant style, dance masters' teaching, ball etiquette – may have contributed to shaping the body and its practice more than the written choreo-graphy.<sup>25</sup> At the same time, however, Feuillet's work may have indirectly influenced dance technique; the notation's decomposition of dance into units had an effect on subsequent dance training, posing certain bases for ballet training.<sup>26</sup> Through this influence Feuillet enters, once more, into an ambivalent relationship with corporeality, excluding technical aspects of dance's embodiment yet indirectly contributing to their fashioning.

Baroque dance masters supported their technical requirements by training the body; precursors of the ballet barre were proposed in the early-17<sup>th</sup> century and mirrors were suggested to help correct performance.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, dance masters identified anatomical features of the human body that played a role in the correct execution of technique; Rameau insisted on starting one's turnout from the hips instead of the knees or ankles (showing a grasp of joint function), while Taubert stressed the importance of anatomical knowledge for dance masters (even if he did not consider it indispensable).<sup>28</sup> Against this background, the *Chorégraphie's* treatment of anatomy is as ambivalent as its representation of the body or its relationship with technique. As indicated above, Feuillet organises some of his signs based on the structure of body parts (the heel and *pointe* of the foot) or their articulation (the joints of the arm). Nevertheless – and despite Feuillet's probable understanding of the joints<sup>29</sup> – the notation is not conceived from an anatomical perspective, as illustrated by the signs indicating types of actions, but not which body parts execute them. For example, a *plié* is a downward-diagonal stroke on the step sign, instead of a movement articulating parts of the leg around the knee joint; the link to the knee is established only discursively, when Feuillet defines a *plié* as '*quand on plie les genoux* [when

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24 In his revised version of the *Chorégraphie*, Rameau explicitly writes that he '*suppose que ceux qui feront usage de ce Livre, savent danser* [supposes that those who will make use of this book know how to dance]'. Rameau: *Abregé de la nouvelle méthode*, p. 50.

25 Cf. Glon, Marie: *Les Lumières chorégraphiques: Les maîtres de danse européens au coeur d'un phénomène éditorial*, PhD thesis, Paris: Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, 2014, p. 219.

26 Cf. Foster, Susan Leigh: *Choreographing Empathy: Kinesthesia in Performance*, Oxon/New York: Routledge 2011, p. 43; Foster, Susan Leigh: *Choreographies and Choreographers*, in: Foster, Susan Leigh (ed.): *Worlding Dance*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2009, p. 104.

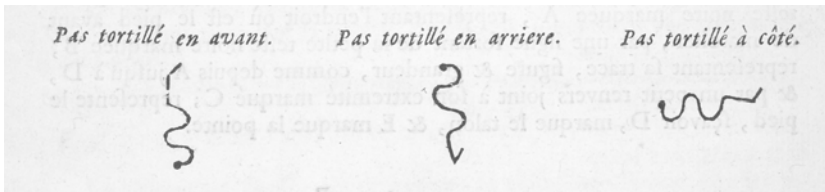
27 Lauze, François de: *Apologie de la danse et de la parfaite méthode de l'enseigner tant aux cavaliers qu'aux dames*, 1623, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k1040284n> (August 2020), BnF, p. 28; Taubert: *The Compleat Dancing Master*, pp. 863–864.

28 Rameau: *Le Maître à danser*, p. 5; Taubert: *The Compleat Dancing Master*, p. 817.

29 Feuillet compares the arm (shoulder/elbow/wrist) and leg (hip/knee/ankle) joints. Feuillet: *Chorégraphie*, p. 98.

we bend the knees]'.<sup>30</sup> Other actions, such as a *tortillé* step (in which the foot twists), are presented in terms of their form in space – a wavy line [Figure 5] – and not of their anatomical basis – the ankle twisting.

Figure 5: A *tortillé* step forward, backward, and sideward in Feuillet notation. Source: Feuillet, Raoul Auger: *Chorégraphie, ou L'Art de décrire la danse par caractères, figures et signes démonstratifs*, Paris: Brunet 1700, p. 10, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b86232407/f1.image.r=feuillet%201700.langFR> (August 2020), BnF. No re-use without permission.



Marie Glon notes:

[L]e point de départ n'est pas dans la forme du corps [...] mais bien dans le fait de se lancer dans des actions. [...] la désignation des actions remplace celle des membres [The point of departure is not in the body's form [...] but in the fact of launching oneself into actions [...] the designation of actions replaces that of body parts].<sup>31</sup>

The body's anatomy vies for attention, but does not fully gain it.

Similarly, kinaesthetic aspects of embodied-dance experience are relatively absent from the notation. Feuillet does introduce a kinaesthetic factor – weight and its relation to equilibrium – by referring to it in descriptions of steps (for instance, a *pas tombé* is when '*le corps est hors de son équilibre, & qu'il tombe par son propre poids* [the body is out of its balance and falls under its own weight]<sup>32</sup>). Nonetheless, choreo-graphic steps are not understood as transfers of weight but as displacements in space; Feuillet defines a step as '*ce qui marche d'un lieu en un autre* [what walks from one place to another]<sup>33</sup> and notates steps in which the

30 Ibid., p. 2.

31 Glon: *Les Lumières chorégraphiques*, p. 73.

32 Feuillet: *Chorégraphie*, p. 2.

33 Ibid., p. 2. Weaver translates this as 'the Motions of the Feet from one place to another': Weaver, John: *Orchesography or the Art of Dancing by Characters and Demonstrative Figures*, London: Walsh 1706, <http://www.pbm.com/~lindah1/weaver/orchesography/> (Au-

foot changes position without the body changing its weight (e.g. the step ends on a pointed toe, weight on the back leg).<sup>34</sup> Any further notation of kinaesthetic information and dynamics is minimal at best – in contrast to other systems, such as Rudolf Laban’s Effort notation [Chapter 8].

While the body is present in the notation – partly depicted, influencing the construction of certain signs – the Beauchamp-Feuillet system is not conceived in terms of the body – its anatomy, shape, or technique. This suggests the relationship between embodied dance and notation may be more complex than a direct translation of what the body does into graphic signs. In effect, the idea of a notation fixating an ephemeral bodily movement in written form in order to archive it for posterity is a post-17<sup>th</sup>-century one; Feuillet was primarily interested in creating a communicable form that would allow dances to circulate in their contemporaneity.<sup>35</sup> In other words, the fact that “choreography” meant “dance notation” in his context does not imply that “dance notation” meant precisely what it does today. A double-pole model postulating a direct relationship between an embodied practice of dance and a choreo-graphic representation of a (primarily) corporeal motion may be insufficient to grasp the complexity of the object that was the *Chorégraphie*. In contrast, an expanded-choreographic perspective – one in which human corporeality is not primordial – may provide an approach to this complexity. By reading Feuillet outside the framework of a later view of choreography that demands its incarnation, such a perspective also acts as a reminder that transhistorically-projected expectations about the corporeal nature of choreography result from a relatively-recent historical context, impregnated in experiential awareness, kinaesthesia, and the use of bodily sensation. Such a perspective on Feuillet thus allows one to identify notions of body that may be contemporary projections not adapted to his system, and, in a parallaxic<sup>36</sup> movement, presents current views of the (place of) body as historical contingencies that both the *Chorégraphie* and expanded choreography question.

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gust 2020), p. 2. Rameau defines a step as ‘porter le pied d’une position à une autre [bringing the foot from one position to another]’. Rameau: *Abregé de la nouvelle méthode*, p. 7.

34 Feuillet: *Chorégraphie*, p. 12; cf. Lancelot, Francine: *Ecriture de la danse le système Feuillet*, in: *Ethnologie française* nouvelle série 1/1 (1971), p. 31.

35 Cf. Haitzinger: *Vergessene Traktate*, p. 15; Clon: *Les “Danses Gravées” du XVIIIe siècle*, p. 259.

36 Cf. Foster, Hal: *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*. Cambridge/London: MIT Press, 1996, p. xii.

## The space of the dance

Feuillet notation privileges (over and above the writing of bodies) the representation of actions – a repertory of not-fully-anatomically-conceived choreo(-)graphic tasks to be given to bodies – and their formal results in space. Indeed, further insights into the ambivalence of the body in Beauchamp-Feuillet notation are found in the way it conceives of the dancing body's relationship with space – made all the more important because space is a primary organising factor of the notation, which was conceived to function as an almost-indispensable interface between the dancer and the space of the dance.

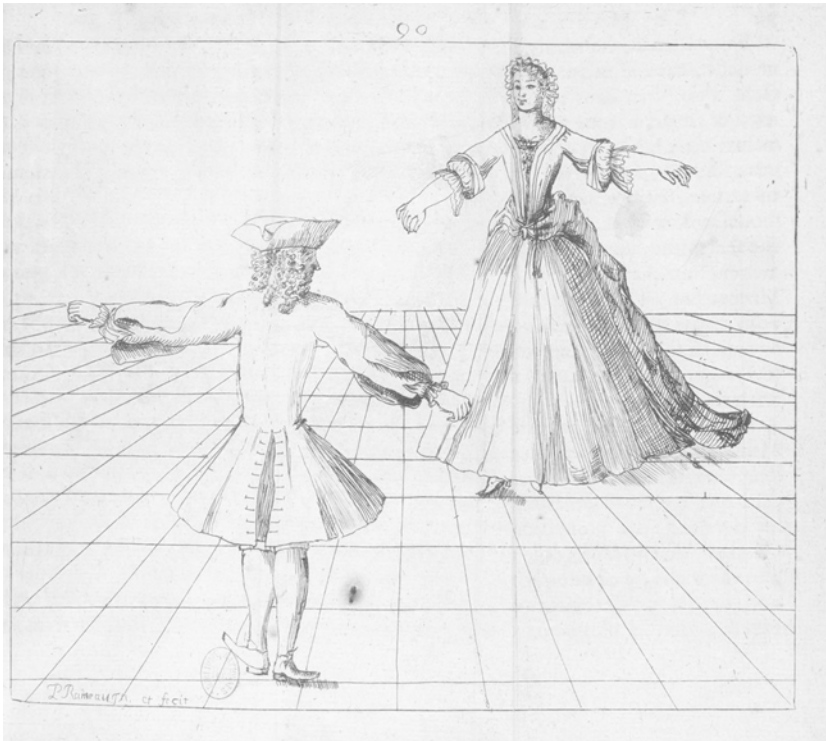
This choreo-graphic mediation between dancer and space is established by aligning the upper part of the notated page (its “top”) with the “top” of the room,<sup>37</sup> and requiring that the dancer follow this alignment. A “standard” notation page, however, includes no specific spatial indications; the path of the dance appears in an unmarked, abstract space the dancer refers to for their contextualised performance experience. The complexities that may have arisen in dancing in an abstractly-conceived space are reflected in treatises by dance masters of Feuillet's time; Tomlinson gives advice on how to use a dance-book in differently-shaped rooms and spatial contexts,<sup>38</sup> while Rameau's *Le Maître à danser* [The Dancing Master] (1725) includes a plate showing dancers in a space marked only by a square-grid on which they stand [Figure 6], which may have contributed to training dancers to situate themselves in an abstractly-conceived space. Choreo-graphy shows the *space* of the dance, but it does not show the *place* in which the body actually dances. This abstract space's relationship to the dancing body deserves further investigation.

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37 Feuillet: *Chorégraphie*, p. 33.

38 Tomlinson: *The Art of Dancing Explained*, pp. 18–21.

Figure 6: Dancers depicted on an abstract spatial grid in Rameau's *Le Maître à danser*. Source: Rameau, Pierre: *Le Maître à danser*, Paris: Jean Villette 1725, plate 90, <http://galli.ca.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8623292z> (August 2020), BnF. No re-use without permission.



The first element to consider in this relationship is the way in which space is measured. The length of a step in Beauchamp-Feuillet notation is determined through the *belle danse* foot positions; for example, the second position requires putting a foot's distance between the feet, and a step to the side corresponds to an opening to second position.<sup>39</sup> However, a single sheet of choreography may include signs for steps that seem shorter or longer than average. Feuillet reassures his readers that this should make no difference, since step size should always conform to the basic dance positions, defined in terms of the body (in this case, the foot).<sup>40</sup> But, when using the notation in practice, steps also need to be measured in proportion to the overall dance path, and (if applicable) the actions of a co-dancer. For the forms and symmetries of the dance path to

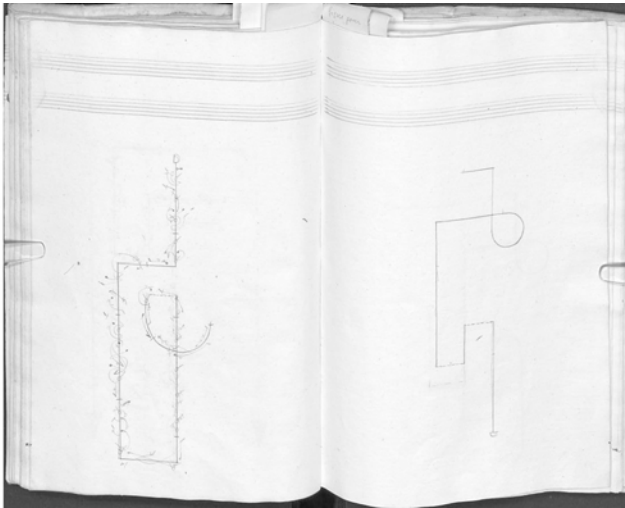
39 Feuillet: *Chorégraphie*, pp. 7, 43.

40 *Ibid.*, pp. 105–106.



be realised, steps have to be anchored in their corporeal definition, but also adjusted to the dance's overall figure in space. And, while the path can be considered the exact result of corporeal actions – actions of a body neutrally and universally construed, with no individual variations – the floor path is, in fact, the first written element of the notation (onto which steps are subsequently added<sup>41</sup>), indicating its importance as a measure of space *over* corporeal action. This precedence of path over steps is corroborated by archival material, such as an anonymous collection of Beauchamp-Feuillet notations conserved at the Derra de Moroda archive in Salzburg; certain unfinished notations show a fully-designed path without steps [Figure 7]. This suggests that step measurement was to adapt to path and not vice versa – bodily measurements introduced themselves into pre-set spatial ones.

*Figure 7: Two pages from an anonymous collection of notations in the Beauchamp-Feuillet system, undated.<sup>42</sup> Source: Universität Salzburg, Derra de Moroda Dance Archives, DdM 6750. No re-use without permission.*



41 Ibid., p. 103.

42 The online library catalogue attributes the date of 1680 to this document. The printed catalogue indicates, however, that it is printed on 18<sup>th</sup>-century paper. Further research on the document's origins is needed to ascertain the date and explain the collection's potential appearance before Feuillet's publication.

A second element of dance's spatiality to consider is orientation: the definition of directions in space. As the dancer is required to align with the notated page, and therefore the room, a spatial reference point situated outside of the body is created. Based on this, the dancer needs to organise their body around a vertical axis corresponding to the path of the notation, and to consider a "front" which may or may not coincide with their own front; indeed, as Frédéric Pouillaude points out, moving "forward" on the page does not necessarily mean the dancer moves forward in actual space.<sup>43</sup> The corporeally-counterintuitive – or counterintuitive to contemporary kinaesthetic experience – nature of this arrangement is further illustrated by Feuillet's complex instructions about how to perform turns without changing the orientation of the notation book, so as to always remain in relation to the artificial "top" of both the page and the room.<sup>44</sup> Susan Foster draws an illuminating parallel between a notation's spatial arrangement and the experience of navigating space by reading a map, based on the conflation of the terms "choreography" and "chorography" (a sub-field of geography related to mapping) in the title of a treatise by John Essex that applied the Beauchamp-Feuillet system to the English context.<sup>45</sup> A cartographic metaphor can indeed illuminate the *Chorégraphie's* un-corporeal perspective – as well as its distance from contemporary embodied experience. To grasp this point, compare the experience of following a map – aligning the map with the surroundings according to a specific reference point (North), keeping this alignment when turning, differentiating between one's own orientation and the one of the map – with the experience of following a GPS – which automatically assumes the embodied perspective of its user and shifts the orientation of the virtual map every time the user turns. In a GPS-like system of bodily perspective, the environment turns around the axis of the body (this is what happens in Labanotation,<sup>46</sup> a point that is of importance in Chapter 8); in Feuillet's

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43 Pouillaude, Frédéric: *Unworking Choreography: The Notion of the Work in Dance*, New York: Oxford University Press 2017 [2009, trans. Anna Pakes], p. 174.

44 Feuillet: *Chorégraphie*, pp. 33–34. The difficulty of this arrangement is also illustrated by Feuillet's notations of the dancer's ending orientation, to make sure they have correctly followed the score, as in: Feuillet, Raoul Auger: *IX. Recueil de danses pour l'année 1711*, Paris: Dezais 1711, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k8586968/f67.item#> (August 2020), BnF e.g. p. 69.

45 Foster, Susan Leigh: Chorography and Choreography, in: Haitzinger & Fenböck: *Denkfiguren*, pp. 69–75.

46 Hutchinson-Guest explains that in Labanotation '[t]he direction forward, established by the personal front of the performer, is that wall or corner of the room that s/he is facing when in the normal upright, untwisted position. [...] After each turn a new front is established and this becomes the new forward direction'. She notes that there is the possibility of using a "front" sign to indicate the performer's orientation in the room, but '[t]hese signs are placed outside the staff on the left at the start of a score':

mapping of dance, the body has to be placed in a pre-existing representation of space not following the embodied perspective of the dancer.

The bird's-eye-view format of choreo-graphies further implies that the dancer follows a pre-defined path by marking successive positions on it.<sup>47</sup> While physically being in the dance, the notation invites the dancer to disconnect from their situated perspective in order to imagine their body from an external (overhead) viewpoint, and conceive of their position in space in relation to all previous and following positions. This results in a perspective in which the embodied sensation of being in a specific place is combined with an external view of one's own body. A beautiful reflection of this can be found in *The Art of Dancing Explained*, in which plates show dancers on the choreographic path, projecting themselves onto the dance's form [Figure 8]. Choreography thus indicates a space not generated by the body, nor emanating from the dancer's embodied presence. Instead, a vision of spatiality is sketched out, in which the dance has a pre-existing spatial form wherein the body has to enter.<sup>48</sup>

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Hutchinson-Guest, Ann: *Labanotation: The System of Analyzing and Recording Movement*, New York: Routledge 2005, pp. 370, 374.

47 It may be possible to connect this source of directionality outside of the body with the social context in which the *belle danse* was initiated: Devero points out that 'in the court dance, the dancer was other-directed, rather than self-directed. It was a dance of the exterior. This was in keeping with the ethos of the court for, as Madame states: "I can only act according to the will of others"'. Devero: *The Court Dance of Louis XIV*, p. 103.

48 Cf. Foster: *Choreographing Empathy*, p. 79.

Figure 8: Dancers depicted on a notation path in Kellom Tomlinson's *The Art of Dancing Explained*. Source: Tomlinson, Kellom: *The Art of Dancing Explained*, London 1735, plate BI. PV, Library of Congress, digital collection 'An American Ballroom Companion: Dance Instruction Manuals, ca. 1490 to 1920', <https://www.loc.gov/item/20010870/> (August 2020). No re-use without permission.



An indication of such a non-primarily-corporeal space can be found in the *Chorégraphie's* conception of the dance path. In order to understand how this may have been conceived, consider Feuillet's distinction between the "chemin" and the "figure". The *chemin* is 'la ligne sur laquelle on dance [the line on which we

dance]’ – i.e. the drawn path – and the *figure* is defined as ‘*suivre un chemin tracé avec art* [following an artfully-drawn *chemin*].’<sup>49</sup> While the *figure* is defined as an act (following), it is also observable [e.g. ‘*observer cette figure*’] before being enacted;<sup>50</sup> one needs to see it on paper to follow it. The *figure*, therefore, seems to be the spatial form created when the dancer takes up three-dimensional space on the *chemin*. The correspondence between these elements can be seen from two perspectives in a model of notation that directly translates embodied dance to paper: the danced *figure* leaves a trace which takes the form of a *chemin* (on the notation) or, vice versa, the notated *chemin* is transposed into the ballroom as the *figure* (when danced on). While choreo-graphies allow both these processes to happen – the former in the notation of a pre-existing dance and the latter in performing with a notation at hand – it may be a conceptual leap to equate the *chemin* with a choreo-graphic trace or generator of the *figure* (itself equated with embodied action). This is because of Feuillet’s insistence – he comes back to this point at least three times in the treatise – that a *chemin* is both an indicator of the *figure* and, at times, a simple support for the writing of step signs.<sup>51</sup> This happens when the dancer is moving on the spot – the *chemin* continues in order for the steps to be written, but without displacement in space, no *figure* arises – or upon returning to a path already taken – a second *chemin* is drawn, parallel and connected to the first by dotted lines<sup>52</sup> [Figure 9]. In such cases, the *chemin* is not an exact trace of the embodied dance’s path. And, inversely, strictly following the *chemin* in real space would make for a mistaken *figure*. The Beauchamp-Feuillet system’s *chemin* thus allows an imaginary visualisation of the *figure*; one can see the postulation, but not the indexical trace, of a three-dimensional spatial form in the *chemin*. The *figure* is in a liminal position between the body in space and the graphic representation of space; comparable to an expanded choreography interested in spatial-kinetic patterns beyond their human incarnation, Feuillet’s *figure* is a spatial form materialised and instantiated by the body, and translated and represented by the notation – but is not reducible to either.

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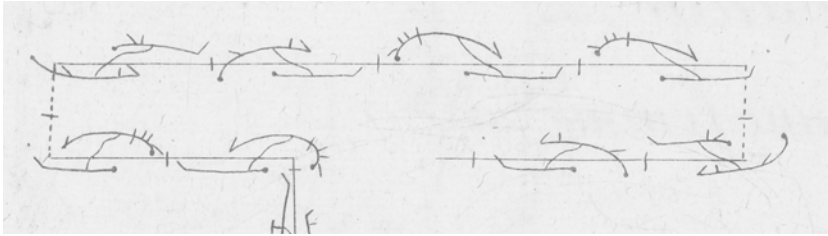
49 Feuillet: *Chorégraphie*, pp. 2, 4.

50 *Ibid.*, p. 95.

51 *Ibid.*, pp. 4, 95, 103–105.

52 *Ibid.*, p. 42.

Figure 9: Detail from a choreo-graphy. The dotted lines indicate a return upon a chemin already danced upon. Source: Feuillet, Raoul Auger: *Recueil de dances contenant un très grand nombres des meilleures entrées de ballet de M. Pécour tant pour homme que pour femmes [sic] dont la plus grande partie ont été dancées à l'Opéra, Paris 1704, p. 2, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b85914682> (August 2020), BnF. No re-use without permission.*



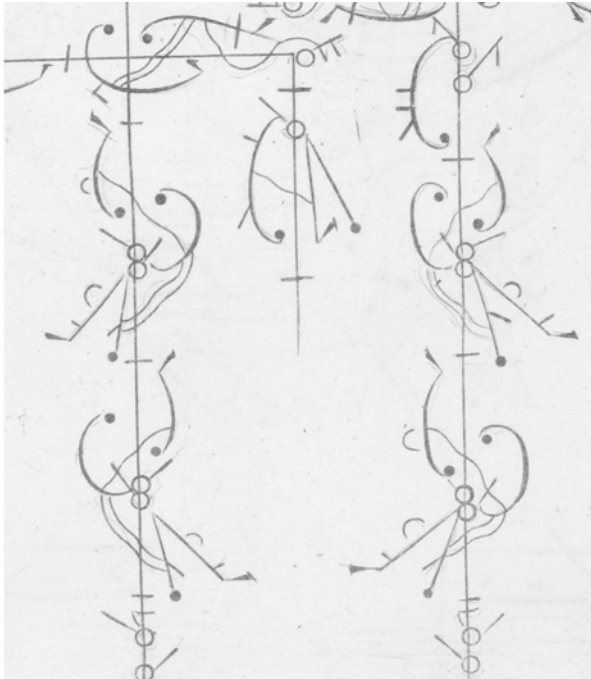
Feuillet's disconnections – between a spatial form of the dance to be mentally and imaginatively grasped and the physical position of body therein; between a universal, abstracted body and the reality of particular bodies implementing projected dance forms; between the disembodied eye of the self and its own executing body – were made at the close of the century that saw the publication of René Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641) and its qualitative division between body and mind. Feuillet's distance from the body can therefore be read as a symptom of his context's conception of corporeality. As such, it also manifests his distance from later approaches to the dancing body that countered precisely this conception, by insisting on incarnated experience as the proper trait of dance, thus contributing to the establishment of a physicalised view of choreography widely held today – and questioned by expanded choreography.

## A graphic dance on paper

If the *Chorégraphie* proposes a vision of dance not exclusively and fully attached to the human body, its notations can be seen and valued as objects in-and-of themselves, and not merely as secondary tools supporting and documenting the embodied practice of dance. In effect, when one looks into the notations' contents, one is first and foremost confronted with the signs as graphic elements that form page compositions, whose layout has an aesthetic interest, separate from its meaning-carrying function. While the *Chorégraphie* can be seen as developing a "language" of dance that one must learn to read, the signs used in it are graphically interesting – just like type-fonts pose a graphic interest beyond

their depiction of letters. Indeed, apart from possible variations in the notation of the same dance – potentially corresponding to diverging interpretations of it<sup>53</sup> – different graphic styles of notation are also discernible; for example, some notations have thicker lines, and more defined and angular forms than others [Figures 10 and 11]; a notation's graphic aspects have aesthetic specificities. Supporting this view of the notation, Marie Glon proposes that the elegance of such a '*composition graphique* [graphic composition]' played a role in the success of choreo-graphy.<sup>54</sup>

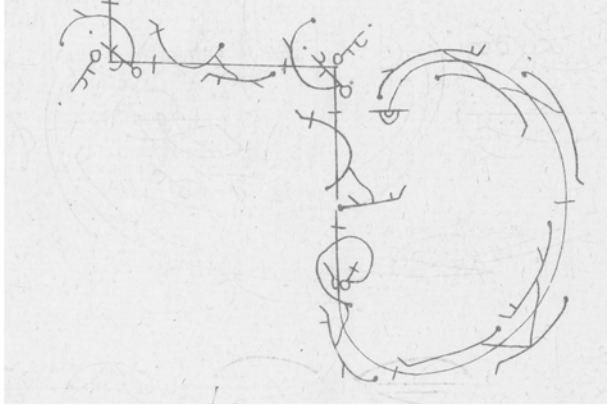
*Figure 10: Detail from a choreo-graphy. Source: Gaudrau, Michel: Nouveau recueil de Dance de Bal et celle de Ballet contenant un très grand nombres [sic] des meilleures [sic] entrées de ballet, Paris 1715, p. 16, <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8623248j> (October 2018), BnF. No re-use without permission.*



53 Glon: *Les Lumières chorégraphiques*, pp. 429–430; Cf. also Pierce, Ken: *Choreographic Structure in Baroque Dance*, in: Nevile, Jennifer (ed.): *Dance, Spectacle and the Body Politick 1250-1750*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2008, p. 185.

54 Glon: *Ce que la Chorégraphie fait aux maîtres de danse*, p. 57.

Figure 11: Detail from a choreo-graphy. Source: Feuillet, Raoul Auger: *Recueil de dances contenant un très grand nombres des meilleures entrées de ballet de M. Pécour tant pour homme que pour femmes [sic] dont la plus grande partie ont été dancées à l'Opéra, Paris 1704*, p. 2, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b85914682> (August 2020), BnF. No re-use without permission.



The importance of the *Chorégraphie's* “graphic” aspect is also discernable in the way it spoke to its users, not only as an abstract set of symbols, but also as an iconic presentation of the dance – identifiable in the dance paths and the depiction of the steps – if not the body. Feuillet himself stressed this aspect of the notation by choosing to subtitle his treatise *L'Art de décrire la danse* – referring to the art of describing (*décrire*) with graphic symbols, and not of writing (*écrire*).

Corresponding to this aesthetic importance of signs beyond their meaning-carrying function, the Feuillet system not only had the capacity to attribute authorship to dances through their notation, but was also protected as an authored entity itself. Indeed, the six-year royal privilege that gave Feuillet the right to engrave and print dances stipulated that no other notator reproduce the engraved dances, and that others could only use the signs themselves with Feuillet's permission;<sup>55</sup> choreo-graphy protects the authorship of choreography, and itself.<sup>56</sup> Relatedly, Glon identifies a double authorship through the practice of choreo-graphy – the dance master who created a choreography was not

55 Feuillet: *Chorégraphie*, unpaginated.

56 After Feuillet's death in 1710, Dezais continued his work, before other dance masters start publishing in choreo-graphy. Cf. Glon: *Ce que la Chorégraphie fait aux maîtres de danse*, p. 58. Taubert provides further evidence for this protectionism of the notation when he explains that French masters hid it from foreign pupils. Taubert: *The Compleat Dancing Master*, pp. 602–603.



necessarily the dance master who created the choreo-graphy.<sup>57</sup> The figure of the notator is prefigured, but can also be attributed a status of authorship which is, at times, absent from contemporary notational work. Like Saint-Hubert's master of order [Chapter 1], choreo-graphers of the early-18<sup>th</sup> century troubled the association of choreographic authorship with the sole making of dances.

Apart from being understandable as artistic works in themselves, notations were also objects treated as such, both as carriers of contents and in their proper materiality and aesthetic relevance. Notations could, in effect, be physically manipulated – they were objects with which to dance, if we are to believe the instructions about turning while holding the book (mentioned above). These objects – printed dance partners – had an aesthetic aspect, beyond their utility in teaching dance. Tomlinson goes so far as to suggest that the plates accompanying *The Art of Dancing Explained* (which include Beauchamp-Feuillet notations),

were originally designed not only for the better *Explanation & Understanding* of my Printed Book [...] but likewise to be proper *Furniture* for a *Room* or *Closet*, being of themselves an intire and independent Work, for if put in Frames with Glasses, they will not only show the variouss Positions or Postures at one View, but be very agreeable and instructive Furniture.<sup>58</sup>

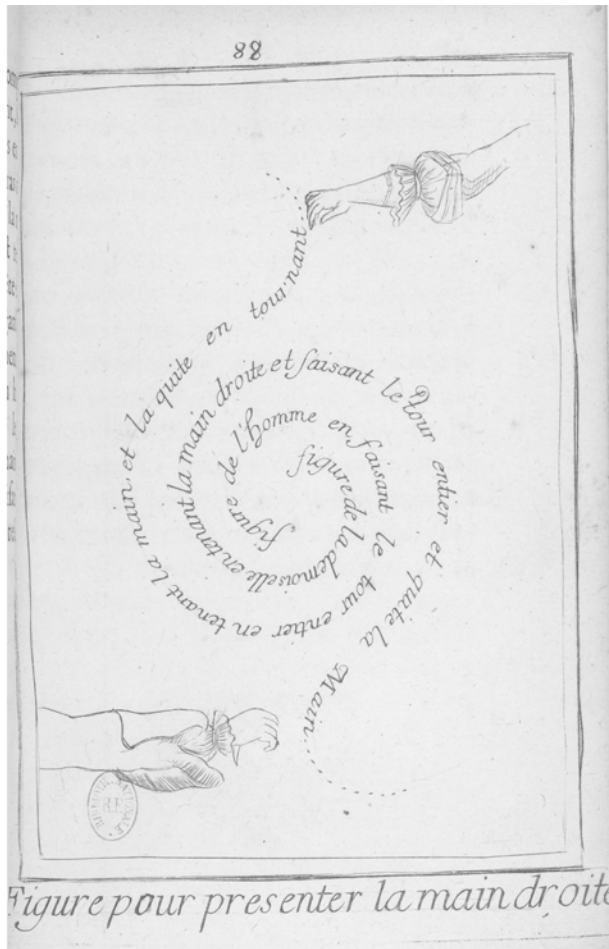
These points provide further support to the idea that choreo-graphy was not a secondary document of an essentially- and primarily-physical practice, but, rather, a manifestation of choreography in parallel, complementary media. This points to the possibility of dance's materialisation in different substrates. Imagery surrounding the *Chorégraphie* provides illuminating manifestations of this transmedia materialisation of dance; in Rameau's post-Feuillet *Maitre à danser*, for example, a series of plates presents writing in curves, following the shapes of movements referred to in the book [Figure 12]. Thus, the reader is invited to approach the text not only as a meaning-carrier, but also as a manifestation of movement-content. Both in Feuilletian figures and in Rameau's graphically-rendered texts, the reader interprets what is on the page, while simultaneously viewing it as a graphic dance. Choreo-graphies and associated illustrations thus represent but also, to a certain extent, perform dances; the representation of the dance on paper cannot be reduced to a secondary object referring to an "original", as it can also be seen as including a non-embodied dancerly quality that is printed.

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57 Glon: *Les Lumières chorégraphiques*, pp. 421, 429–30.

58 Tomlinson: *The Art of Dancing Explained*, frontispice to the plates.

Figure 12: Detail from *Le Maître à danser*. Source: Rameau, Pierre: *Le Maître à danser*, Paris: Jean Villette 1725, plate 88, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8623292z> (August 2020), BnF. No re-use without permission.



As paper versions of dances, notations seem to have had a specific life of their own. Beyond their immediate use as teaching and learning tools, notations circulated and travelled. It is Feuillet himself who connects this notation circulation with the separation from embodiment, when he notes in the introduction to the *Chorégraphie* that his system would allow dances to be 'envoy[ées]

dans une Lettre ainsi qu'on envoie un Air de Musique [sent in a Letter, like one sends a Melody of Music]'.<sup>59</sup> For Glon, choreo-graphy indeed provides

*la possibilité d'une autonomie de la danse gravée par rapport au corps: il ne s'agit plus seulement d'un outil annexe [...] mais d'un objet qui remplit, de façon autonome, sa propre fonction sociale. Et cette fonction reside, essentiellement, dans le fait de circuler [the possibility of an autonomy of the engraved dance from the body: it is not a question of an annex tool [...] but of an object that accomplishes, autonomously, its own social function. And this function essentially resides in the fact of circulating].*<sup>60</sup>

By circulating choreo-graphies, it was therefore possible to circulate choreographies but also to exchange objects which contained the dance in graphic form, rendering its transmission independent from human incarnation.

In effect, Feuillet's subtitle acts as a reminder that his system could be used so that the reader '*apprend facilement de soy-même toutes sortes de Dances* [easily learn by oneself all sorts of Dances]',<sup>61</sup> thus illustrating his hope that it could be employed without the intermediary translation of a dance master. While it is doubtful whether this idea was realised – notations were primarily used by dance masters, who were also capable of transmitting technical and stylistic information not included in choreo-graphies<sup>62</sup> – the notation seems to have been conceived with this possibility in mind. This autonomy of the dancer from the master through a potentially-direct interaction with the page was taken up by other dance masters in the Feuillet universe, notably Taubert and the anonymous author I.H.P., whose 1705 treatise *Maître de danse oder Tanz = Meister* [Dance Master]<sup>63</sup> includes a simplified version of the Beauchamp-Feuillet

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59 Feuillet: *Chorégraphie*, unpaginated preface. The musical parallel was also noted by external observers such as the *Mercure*, whose January 1700 issue repeats the possibility of using Feuillet's publication to decipher dance like notated music. *Mercure Galant*, January 1700, Paris: Brunet 1700, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k6262137b/f298.image> (August 2020), BnF, pp. 234–235. Weaver also takes up the musical metaphor, writing of '*Orchesography or the Art of writing down Dances in Characters, whereby Masters are able to communicate their Compositions [...] and which is brought to as great a Perfection as that of Musick*'. Weaver: *An Essay Towards an History of Dancing*, p. 171.

60 Glon: Les "Dances Gravées" du XVIIIe siècle, p. 259.

61 Feuillet: *Chorégraphie*, title page.

62 Glon: Ce que la Chorégraphie fait aux maîtres de danse, p. 62.

63 Taubert: *The Compleat Dancing Master*, p. 274; I.H.P.: *Maitre de danse oder Tanz=meister*, in: Schrödter, Stephanie, Mourey, Marie-Thérèse & Bennett, Giles (eds.): *Barocktanz im Zeichen französisch-deutschen Kulturtransfers. Quellen zur Tanzkultur um 1700*, Hildesheim: Olms 2008 [1705], p. 123.

system.<sup>64</sup> I.H.P. makes the relationship between dancer and page explicit, by presenting choreo-graphic books as graphic dance masters – as paper versions of the embodied act of showing, transmitting, teaching dance; ‘*What does this book contain?*’ The author rhetorically asks, only to answer, ‘A dancing master, who informs on paper’.<sup>65</sup>

If the student/dancer can do without a master by using the *Chorégraphie*, the master can also do without a student/dancer. The Beauchamp-Feuillet system conceptualises composition through inscription in the literal sense, instead of inscription in the human body that is subsequently transformed into a notation. Understanding and learning how to use the *Chorégraphie* was presented not only as a skill of deciphering and performing dances, but also as a tool for composing them. Feuillet argues that if one practices his notated dances, one ‘*acquerrera la facilité d’en écrire d’autres [dances] & même à en composer [will acquire the facility to write other [dances] and even compose them]*’.<sup>66</sup> Although, once again, its actual occurrence is doubtful, it is possible to not only compose *assisted* by choreo-graphy, but also to compose *in* choreo-graphy, without the intermediary of a dancer’s body. The author of the *Chorégraphie* did compose a dance – the *Madalena*, in 1703, to be offered to the duc of Mantua – which, seemingly, had not been danced before being put onto paper; additional dances may have been composed “for” paper as choreo-graphic gifts.<sup>67</sup> Bodiless composition was also entertained by other writers, one of whom proposed that dance masters be evaluated by sending the Royal Academy works they had composed on paper, alone in a room, like students during an examination.<sup>68</sup> This recommendation – championed by some in the early-18<sup>th</sup> century – would be ridiculed by Jean-Georges Noverre in the later 1700s; in his *Letter* on choreo-graphy, he writes of the

*erreur que de penser qu’un bon Maître de Ballets puisse tracer & composer son ouvrage au coin de son feu [...] Ce n’est pas la plume à la main que l’on fait marcher les Figurants [error of thinking that a good Ballet Master may trace and compose his work next to his fireplace [...] it is not with a pen at hand that one makes Figurants walk].*<sup>69</sup>

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64 Bennett, Giles: The Dance Book Authors as Transmitters of Dance Practice, in: Schrödter, Mourey & Bennett: *Barocktanz im Zeichen französisch-deutschen Kulturtransfers*, p. 465.

65 I.H.P.: *Maitre de danse*, p. 124.

66 Feuillet: *Chorégraphie*, p. 105.

67 Glon: Les “Dances Gravées” du XVIIIe siècle, pp. 258–259; *Les Lumières chorégraphiques*, pp. 283–285.

68 Laurenti, Jean-Noël: La Pensée de Feuillet, in: Louppe, Laurence (ed.): *Danses tracées: Dessins et notation des chorégraphes*, Paris: Dis Voir 1994, pp. 110–111.

69 Noverre, Jean-Georges: *Lettres sur la danse et sur les ballets*, Lyon: Delaroché 1760, <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k108204h/f1.item.texteImage.zoom> (August 2020), pp. 387–388.

The existence of notations as graphic and physical objects – as well as their potential use independent from the embodied process of transmission between master and student – supports the view that choreo-graphy implemented a choreographic politics of discipline; a dance master is not needed to normativise embodied practices, as printed signs can direct bodies. It is, however, doubtful that this disembodiment of choreographic discipline was successful. Glon goes so far as to suggest that the *Chorégraphie* offered a possibility of resistance to the technical, disciplinary control of dancing bodies:

*la Chorégraphie semble ouvrir une brèche: on peut la voir comme une voie concurrente, qui vient résister à cet encadrement (ou qui implicitement et peut-être même à l'insu de Feuillet et ses successeurs, ouvre une telle possibilité de résistance); ou encore comme un outil différent qui vient s'ajouter à une pratique de la danse réglée par ailleurs, par les soins d'un maître à danser [the Chorégraphie seems to open a breach: one can see it is a rival approach, which resists this framing (or that implicitly and maybe even without Feuillet and his successors' awareness opens such a possibility of resistance); or as a different tool that is added to a dance practice otherwise regulated by a dance master.]<sup>70</sup>*

In a comparable way, while the existence of dance on paper through choreography may have been intended as a means of propagating French national style and cultural supremacy in a colonialist context,<sup>71</sup> it is also possible it allowed bidirectional exchanges, less strictly-aligned to Louis XIV's preferences.<sup>72</sup> Taubert, for instance, notes that choreo-graphic tables were useful to a master

not only to teach himself easily those French dances that are composed every year in Paris at the *Académie royale de danse* by the best masters in the whole world and published in the form of certain symbols and figures but also to set down on paper dances learned elsewhere or composed by himself along with the music that goes with them and to mail them to distant places.<sup>73</sup>

In other words, the “fixation” of dance on paper opens the potential of an authoritarian, homogenising norm, but it is also in choreography's paper materiality (and the circulations thereof) that resistance to this norm may be found.

As graphic designs, paper dances, and objects of dance, Feuillet notations claim their autonomy from the performing body. Their capacity to mediate the transfer of dance knowledge, to form a territory for the negotiation of

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70 Glon: *Les Lumières chorégraphiques*, p. 219.

71 For instance, Laurenti: *La Pensée de Feuillet*, p. 108; Foster: *Choreographies and Choreographers*, pp. 103–104.

72 Cf. Glon: *Les Lumières chorégraphiques*, p. 315.

73 Taubert: *The Compleat Dancing Master*, p. 600.

choreographic politics or for the emancipation of student from teacher, is not there *despite* this autonomy, but as a *result* of it. Existing and manifesting their agency in several media, choreo-graphies can thus contribute to more recent, expanded-choreographic endeavours by providing glimpses of choreographic alternatives to physicality.

## A choreo-graphic logic

While it is doubtful that bodiless composition was applied in practice, its very formulation suggests that some practitioners considered that dance could be composed through choreo-graphy. To better understand this, it is useful to look into the tools that allowed composition through choreo-graphy, which provided the means for the analysis of dance and, therefore, its construction. Looking into these tools – while juxtaposing them with the ways in which practice may have bypassed or ignored them – is one last way in which the *Chorégraphie*'s not-fully-corporeal, abstract dance-thought, can be illustrated.

The Beauchamp-Feuillet notation is based on a decomposition of dance into basic constituent units, replacing the representation of entire steps or sequences (found in previous notational attempts) and forming a classificatory-analytical system. By combining steps with action types, varying the direction of steps, and creating compound movements, it is possible to develop a complex dance vocabulary. The reduction of dance to a restricted number of elementary units, capable of producing theoretically limitless variation, was a project explicitly recognised by Feuillet when he wrote that while dance steps were '*presqu'innombrable, on les réduit néanmoins à cinq, qui ne serviront icy que pour démontrer toutes les différentes figures que la jambe peut faire* [almost innumerable, we nevertheless reduce them to five, which will only serve here to show all the different figures that the leg can do]'.<sup>74</sup> The endless combinations were not lost on users and adapters of the notation; Tomlinson remarks that such units – position, sinking, stepping, rising, etc. – were 'of the very same Use in *Dancing* as the *Alphabet* in the *Composition of Words*'.<sup>75</sup> Certain dance masters seem to have adopted this analytical approach in their explanations of dance steps. For example, Rameau's *Le Maître à danser* (published in the same year as his book elaborating the Beauchamp-Feuillet system) includes verbal analyses of dance

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74 Feuillet: *Chorégraphie*, p. 9; cf. Laurenti: *La Pensée de Feuillet*, pp. 115–116.

75 Tomlinson: *The Art of Dancing Explained*, p. 23

steps that deconstruct complex steps into simple ones and simple steps into actions and displacements of the feet.<sup>76</sup>

However, several sources indicate that this analytical approach, grasped for the purposes of notation, did not fully transfer to practice; dance masters – including those using the notation – allowed their dance and that of their students to exceed this rigorous framework. Contrary to the Beauchamp-Feuillet system's analysis of elementary units, compound dance steps were generally referred to with a name (e.g. *pas de menuet*) that designated them as wholes, rather than as a result of (notational) decomposition; '[j]ust as a word is only one word, no matter how many letters or syllables [...] it consists of; so too each compound step is considered only one step no matter how many single steps [...] are included within it'<sup>77</sup> writes Taubert. Similarly, Edmund Pemberton's 1711 *Essay for the further Improvement of Dancing* provides a symbol that "summarises" a frequently-used, complex step.<sup>78</sup> Moreover, even if the *Chorégraphie* provided the means for potentially-infinite recombinations of steps, the actual *belle danse* repertoire included a limited number of steps, rather than a wealth of new inventions.<sup>79</sup>

By identifying elementary units capable of building an entire dance lexicon, Feuillet's classification points towards an exhaustiveness that can – in the manner of the classical *episteme*<sup>80</sup> – allow it to attain universality; it can define a universe bound by its representationability. In effect, Feuillet's treatise's very title promises to offer signs '[a]vec lesquels on apprend facilement [...] toutes sortes de Danses [with which one can easily learn [...] all sorts of dances]'.<sup>81</sup> Based on this potential exhaustiveness, steps could not only be known and

76 Rameau: *Le Maître à danser*; see, for instance, Part 1, Chapters XX and XXI on the *demi coupé* and the *pas de menuet*, respectively. For Marie Glon, the *Chorégraphie*'s list of actions did eventually manage to impose itself, approaching dance as a whole and not only its notation. Glon: *Les Lumières chorégraphiques*, p. 136.

77 Taubert: *The Compleat Dancing Master*, p. 430.

78 Pemberton, Edmund: *An Essay for the Further Improvement of Dancing*, London: Walsh 1711, [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=musdi&fileName=134//musdi134.db&recNum=0&itemLink=r?ammem/musdibib:@field\(NUMBER+@odt\(musdi+134\)\)&linkText=0&presId=musdibib](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=musdi&fileName=134//musdi134.db&recNum=0&itemLink=r?ammem/musdibib:@field(NUMBER+@odt(musdi+134))&linkText=0&presId=musdibib) (August 2020), Library of Congress, digital collection 'An American Ballroom Companion: Dance Instruction Manuals, ca. 1490 to 1920', unpaginated section "explanation".

79 Pierce: *Choreographic Structure in Baroque Dance*, pp. 184–185.

80 Cf. Foucault, Michel: *Les Mots et les choses*, Paris: Gallimard 1966, p. 76. Researchers including Marie Glon and Frédéric Pouillaude have drawn a link between Feuilletian thinking and Foucault's classical *episteme*. See Glon: *Les Lumières chorégraphiques*, pp. 119–120; Pouillaude, Frédéric: *D'une graphie qui ne dit rien. Les Ambiguïtés de la notation chorégraphique*, in: *Poétique* 137 (2004), pp. 109–110.

81 Feuillet: *Chorégraphie*, title page, emphasis added.

practiced, but also understood as parts of a system with an all-encompassing mode of function; the notation invites its users to see the ways in which dance is organised beyond the diversity of practice.<sup>82</sup> Indeed, the *belle danse* notated in choreo-graphies incorporated steps from foreign and regional dances which could be translated into choreo-graphic terms, smoothed out and homogenised – partially through the *Chorégraphie*'s standard lexicon – in what Foster illuminates as a quasi-colonialist project of cultural dominance.<sup>83</sup> The notation's potential exhaustiveness thus provided a springboard for the control of dance. Indeed, the *Chorégraphie*'s system's development is contextually associated with the *Académie Royale de Danse* – an institution founded by Louis XIV in 1661 that aimed to centralise power over dance matters, authorise censorship, and control the dance master profession in order to '*perfectionner, & corriger les abus & défauts* [perfect and correct the abuses and defects]<sup>84</sup> in dance activity.

But once again, contrary to the *Chorégraphie*'s posited exhaustiveness – and consistent with its resistance to an authoritarian choreographic politics to which it partly contributed – movements were practiced that fell outside its limits. New dance forms – developed in the following decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> century – were less adapted to representation in the Beauchamp-Feuillet system, although attempts were made to adjust it to the *contredanse*.<sup>85</sup> Even before the notation was completely eclipsed (due to changing dance practices), variations were present; Taubert claims that 'every dance, even the most insignificant, always undergoes a lot of variation from one place to another, indeed from one master to another who dances it differently as a result, sadly, of following the French instructions poorly',<sup>86</sup> thus pointing to the limits of notational homogenisation.

A final aspect of the *Chorégraphie*'s dance-compositional thinking is that it proposes a specifically dance-focussed set of signs, related to, but not amalgamated with, other information. This was most notable with music; dance and music's signs were juxtaposed but not fused – they were related to, but not bound with, each other.<sup>87</sup> The *Chorégraphie* may thus have contributed to a process in which dance's autonomy from other arts was associated with its specificity as a discipline. This idea was present in the treatise's publication

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82 Cf. Laurenti: *La Pensée de Feuillet*, p. 113.

83 Foster: *Choreographies and Choreographers*, pp. 101–104. See also Laurenti: *La Pensée de Feuillet* pp. 108, 113.

84 Louis XIV: *Lettres patentes du roy*, p. 8.

85 Already in: Feuillet, Raoul Auger: *Recueil de contredances mises en chorégraphie*, Paris 1706, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k1048519k/f1.item> (August 2020), BnF.

86 Taubert: *The Compleat Dancing Master*, p. 333.

87 Musical notation and indications of bodily movements only come somewhat closer in the proposed method for notating the *castagnettes*, a practice found between the two modalities. Feuillet: *Chorégraphie*, pp. 100–102.



context; Louis XIV's *Académie* was founded 'à l'instar de celles de Peinture & Sculpture [following the example of those of Painting and Sculpture]',<sup>88</sup> in a disciplinary – in both senses of the word – classification of dance. This classification was affirmed as an institutional recognition of dance practice and its non-subordination to *les violons*.<sup>89</sup> For Glon, Feuillet's work is '*l'un des éléments tendant à valoriser la partie de la danse qui n'est pas réductible à la musique, et les compétences propres à un spécialiste de cet art* [one of the elements that tend to valorise the part of dance that is not reducible to music and the skills proper to a specialist of this art]'.<sup>90</sup> Crucially, given the incorporeal nature of the notation, the irreducible traits of dance exemplified in the *Chorégraphie* are not found in its physical medium but, rather, in the systematic dance-thought mediated by its signs. Once again, however, practice did not fully follow such classifications, as the performance of the *belle danse* required an appreciation of music in relation to the steps, which was not exhaustively present in the notation.

Just like it is caught between the presence of the body and a potentially-disembodied view of dance, Feuillet's work is also caught between choreo-graphic thinking and lived praxis – between, one could argue, Cartesian rationalism and Enlightenment empiricism. This ambivalent position is captured by a fascinating passage towards the end of the book, in which Feuillet advises prospective notators that if they cannot notate a step, they can simply examine it to decide what type of step it is, then refer to the corresponding table in order to find its notation.<sup>91</sup> In other words, an experienced or talented notator can break down the step into the constituent parts (that will compose its notational symbol), but a less-able one can simply represent the empirically-known step name with one of the book's compound signs. The *Chorégraphie* offers both the translation of previously-named steps into signs, and the possibility of using notation to deconstruct steps and invent new steps and dances. In this way, Feuillet's text acknowledges that certain practitioners may decline adopting a choreo-graphic logic, *and* highlights the possibility of conceiving dance through it. While the practice of dance only partially adopted the combinatorial game

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88 Louis XIV: *Lettres patentes du roy*, p. 13.

89 The *Discours académique pour prouver que la Danse dans sa plus noble partie n'a pas besoin des instruments de Musique, & qu'elle est en tout absolument indépendante du Violon* [Academic discourse in order to prove that Dance in its most noble aspect does not need these instruments of Music and that it is in everything absolutely independent from the Violin], attached as an appendix to Louis XIV's *Lettres patentes*, explicitly distinguishes dance from the auditory-sensory modality of music. Appendix to Louis XIV: *Lettres patentes du roy*, p. 38.

90 Glon: *Les Lumières chorégraphiques*, p. 391.

91 Feuillet: *Chorégraphie*, p. 103.

proposed by Feuillet, the notation sketched out the possibility of conceiving of – and therefore composing – dance in terms of choreo-graphy.

Indeed, the very distance of the notation from practice confirms that it was not an indexical trace of lived, embodied action, but a system with a specific mode of thinking, through which dance could be understood and practice would – or not – follow. Reflecting this appreciation of the notation as a system of signs, in whose framework it is possible to think of dance, Michel Foucault writes that

[à] l'âge classique, rien n'est donné qui ne soit donné à la représentation [...] Les représentations ne s'enracinent pas dans un monde auquel elles emprunteraient leur sens; elles s'ouvrent d'elles-mêmes sur un espace qui leur est propre [in the classical age, nothing is given that is not given in representation [...] Representations are not rooted in a world from which they borrow their meaning; they open by themselves towards a space that is their own].<sup>92</sup>

In a comparable vein, the *Chorégraphie* can be seen as an invitation to think of dance *in* its representation. This is not to imply that choreo-graphic thought was, or could be, fundamentally disconnected from the reality its signs represented; choreo-graphic signs were not free-floating entities, completely detached from actual dance movements. It implies that the notation was a framework in which thought about dance movements could emerge independent from embodiment.

La tâche fondamentale du 'discours' classique, c'est d'attribuer un nom aux choses, et en ce nom de nommer leur être. Pendant deux siècles, le discours occidental fut le lieu de l'ontologie. [the fundamental task of classical "discourse" is to attribute a name to things, and in this name to name their being. For two centuries, Western discourse was the place of ontology]<sup>93</sup>

writes Foucault. Beauchamp-Feuillet notation can be seen as a (not fully-successful) ontological project; its terms, in Foster's words, 'authenticat[e] the existence of the step'.<sup>94</sup> Effectively conflating choreo-graphy and dance, Feuillet speaks in his preface of having provided '*l'explication des Principes & des Elemens* [the explanation of the Principles and Elements]<sup>95</sup> of dance itself – and not the signs referring to them. Similarly Weaver, in his English translation of the *Chorégraphie*, transforms the original title's *the art of describing dance* into *The Art of Dancing by Characters and Demonstrative Figures* – thus indicating that the notation may have occasionally blended with its object of representation in the minds of its

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92 Foucault: *Les Mots et les choses*, p. 92.

93 Ibid., p. 136.

94 Foster: *Choreographing Empathy*, p. 34.

95 Feuillet: *Chorégraphie*, unpaginated preface.

contemporaries. Conflating dance and choreo-graphy, the *Chorégraphie*'s "internal logic" proposes a system in which dance can be conceived through signs. Feuilletian dances are embodied by dancers and materialised in notations, but are also conceivable in their being-sign, as (expanded) choreo(-)graphic objects. In other words, the *Chorégraphie* may be – more than a notational system disembodimenting a corporeal dance practice – a system of choreo(-)graphic thinking that conceives of dance as a not-necessarily-embodied domain – like contemporary expanded choreography and contrary to an essentialism of a physicalised dance.

## Conclusion

The Beauchamp-Feuillet notation establishes an ambivalent relationship with corporeality and dance praxis. The *Chorégraphie* presents a dance practiced by bodies, partially conceived through corporeal characteristics, inscribed in a rich context of social uses of the body – but not wholly formulated in terms, or from the perspective, of the body. The choreo-graphic conception of dance therefore relates to and influences, but also enters in multiple frictions with, embodied dance practice – a practice that relies on training the body and exploring its anatomy; playing with dance codes, steps, and styles; and a very-real relationship between master and student. These frictions can be seen as the notation's attempt, and potential failure, to fully grasp a lived corporeal reality, in order to mould it into its own terms. But, from an expanded-choreographic perspective, they can also be seen as resulting from the fact that the *Chorégraphie* displays a conception of dance and choreography not emanating from, anchored in, and solely understandable through, reference to corporeal praxis.

If a modern(ist), body-focussed conception of choreography does not apply to the Beauchamp-Feuillet notation, subsequent notions of body and dance – the sensorial, physical, experiential, organic understanding of an embodied dance bequeathed by the 20<sup>th</sup> century – are not fully applicable either. A similar claim can be made about later concepts of notation, grounded in fixating a corporeal practice in a document that would be secondary to the practice itself. Comparatively, the Beauchamp-Feuillet system – neither reducible to a graphic transcription of what the body does nor to a disciplinary prescription of what it is to do – gives rise to notations that are authored works in themselves, in *other*, rather than secondary, media. Complexifying choreo(-)graphic authorship beyond the praxis of dance-making, such notations shift the terrain of choreographic politics onto paper and signs, turning them into sites of discipline as well as resistance.

Raoul Auger Feuillet's choreo-graphy is the vehicle of a transmedia and abstractable choreo(-)graphic practice. Producing forms that exist in both mental representations – in objects of thought, like a figured form in space or a combination of signs – and material entities – like ink and paper –, the *Chorégraphie* constitutes a deviation from, or subversion of, an essentially-physicalised dance; as such, it also constitutes a historical site where contemporary interrogations of what *else* choreography may be can find hints of a reply. Thus, Feuillet's publication acts as a reminder that all essentialisms that present-day choreographers are gradually undoing – about dance, corporeality, notation, choreography itself – are, in effect, post-18<sup>th</sup>-century constructs, thus anchoring contemporary expanded choreographical debates in a macro-historical framework.

## Chapter 3: Stillness in nature's dance: expanded choreographies of the Italian Renaissance

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Contemporary knowledge of 15<sup>th</sup>-century Italian dance largely comes from the writings of three figures: Domenico da Piacenza (knighted dance master); Guglielmo Ebreo [the Jew] da Pesaro, known as Giovanni Ambrosio after converting to Christianity (student of Domenico and also knighted dance master);<sup>1</sup> and courtier Antonio Corna(z)zano (another student of Domenico). Since Cornazano's dance treatise includes several notions already developed by Domenico, the focus here is on the latter's *De arte saltandi & choreas ducendi* (*Of the Art of Dancing*, 1450s, in A.W. Smith's Italian transcription and English translation), and Guglielmo Ebreo's *De pratica seu arte tripudii* (*On the Practice or Art of Dancing*, 1463, in Barbara Sparti's Italian transcription and English translation, at times juxtaposed to Smith's).<sup>2</sup> Domenico and Guglielmo's theories partially overlap, but also diverge; here, they are treated as complementary, non-mutually exclusive manifestations of 15<sup>th</sup>-century Italian-dance culture.

The two treatises are among the earliest written sources on Western dance, contributing to their canonical status in the historiography of Renaissance dance and their particular position in the pre-history of choreo(-)graphy. While other treatises of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries include material on notation (whereas Domenico and Guglielmo provide descriptive instructions), dance technique, and/or steps too, Domenico and Guglielmo's treatises are relevant here because they elaborate notions that refer to "expanded" aspects of choreography – for

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- 1 For a short biography see Sparti, Barbara: Introduction, in: Guglielmo Ebreo da Pesaro: *De pratica seu arte tripudii*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1993, pp. 23–25.
  - 2 Domenico da Piacenza: *De arte saltandi & choreas ducendi*, in: Smith, A. William (ed.): *Fifteenth-Century Dance and Music: Twelve Transcribed Italian Treatises and Collections in the Tradition of Domenico da Piacenza*, Stuyvesant: Pendragon Press 1995 [1450s, trans. A. William Smith], pp. 10–67; Guglielmo Ebreo da Pesaro: *De pratica seu arte tripudii*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1993 [1463, trans. Barbara Sparti]. The translation by William A. Smith in the edition indicated above was also used. The treatise attributed to Guglielmo should be seen as having been written by him in a non-literal sense; the actual writing was done by a scribe. See Barbara Sparti's introduction to her translation of *De pratica*, p. 6.

example, motionlessness. Through notions such as *misura* and *fantasmata* (analysed below), Domenico and Guglielmo allow one to distinguish early dance-historical sources' relevance to expanded choreography not through the contemporary focus on negation (e.g. the *lack* of motion) but as positively-defined parts of choreographic theory and practice.

The treatises are indeed composed of a combination of dance theory and practice – in the case of Guglielmo, a series of exercises – reflecting a permeability between them, and corresponding to their authors' multiple activities: teaching, theorising, choreographing, composing music, performing. Notably, the theoretical parts of the treatises enumerate the characteristics dance should display and skills dancers should acquire – presumably with the help of a dancing master. These include *misura* (analysed below), *memoria* (memory of movements), *concordantia* (Domenico) or *partire* (Guglielmo) *di terreno* (awareness of the dancing space and positions therein), as well as notions expressing stylistic and technical specifications, such as *maniera* and *aiere*. The texts then provide verbal descriptions of dances along with their music, which function as bases for contemporary reconstructions of Renaissance dance – even though they are not exhaustive (e.g. steps are named but not fully described), presumably because they assume pre-existing knowledge.<sup>3</sup> The most prominent type of dance represented is the slow and dignified *bassadanza*, but multi-rhythm compositions (*balli*) are also included.

The dances Domenico and Guglielmo refer to are those primarily practiced by the nobility of Italian Renaissance society. Vernacular forms were not documented with the same assiduity; however, a circulation of dance forms across socioeconomic classes can be hypothesised, beyond what the texts suggest.<sup>4</sup> In this context, the dances functioned, as Jennifer Nevile has explained, as a means for social marking and 'ritualised courtship'.<sup>5</sup> As the boundaries between

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3 Barbara Sparti considers the possibility that these descriptions may be mere "skeletons" to be enriched by ornamentation in practice: Sparti, Barbara (auth.), Giordano, Gloria & Pontremoli, Alessandro (eds.): *Dance, Dancers and Dance-Masters in Renaissance and Baroque Italy*, Bologna: Massimiliano Piretti 2015, p. 145. Cornazano does purport to set the dances down in writing '*che l'arte già insegnata non sia vana* [so that the art already taught might not be lost]': Cornazano, Antonio: *Libro dell'arte del danzare*, in: Smith (ed.): *Fifteenth-Century Dance and Music* [1465], p. 85.

4 Dances like the *piva* were practiced outside of the courts, but the fact remains that the dance culture not concerning the nobility is excluded from written sources. Sparti: Introduction, p. 58; Nordera, Marina: Pourquoi écrire la danse? Italie XVe – XVIe siècles, in: *La Notation chorégraphique: Outil de mémoire et de transmission: Etats généraux de l'atelier baroque*, Alfortville: L'atelier Baroque/Compagnie Fêtes Galantes 2007, p. 17.

5 Nevile, Jennifer: *Dance and Society in Quattrocento Italy*, in: Nevile, Jennifer (ed.): *Dance, Spectacle and the Body Politick 1250-1750*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2008, p. 81.

social and theatrical dance were not fully entrenched, these dances' steps may have been transferred to spectacular situations – such as dramatically-inclined *moresche*.<sup>6</sup> While Domenico and Guglielmo's dances characterise the 15<sup>th</sup> century, they remained in circulation until the early 16<sup>th</sup>; similarly, while they were mainly practiced in the courts of the Italian peninsula, the presence of Italianised Spanish and French *basses danses* in Guglielmo's collections – as well as the fact that his treatise was brought to France by Louis XII – point to a wider European circle of influence.<sup>7</sup>

By composing sequences of corporeal movements, Domenico and Guglielmo practiced choreography as an art of making dances. However, when referring to dance-making, they used the terms “*compositione*” [composition] and “*fabricatione*” [fabrication] (Guglielmo also speaks of “organising” and “preparing” celebrations including dance); they used the term “notation” (e.g. “*balli notati*”) for their writing.<sup>8</sup> Building on this discursive distance from “choreography”, this chapter adopts an expanded-choreographic perspective in order to investigate the gaps remaining in understanding courtly dance in Renaissance Italy, if “choreography” is understood as revolving around a physical body, the singularity of human creativity and performance, and the primacy of motion.

## Corporeal interstices and correspondences

Dance was an undoubtedly corporeal affair for the Italian Renaissance, as reflected in Domenico and Guglielmo's treatises – contrary to Raoul Auger Feuillet's one [Chapter 2]. The body often enters their discourse, with Domenico talking of the ‘*motto corporalle mosso da luoco a luoco* [bodily motion through space]’ or dance's ‘*motti corporali* [corporeal movements]’ and Guglielmo devel-

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- 6 Sparti: Introduction, p. 54, note 21. Sparti also reports that two of Domenico's choreographies include pantomimic gestures and facial expressions and Smith that Guglielmo also created more theatrical dances. Sparti, Barbara: Antiquity as Inspiration in the Renaissance of Dance: The Classical Connection and Fifteenth-Century Italian Dance, in: *Dance Chronicle* 16/3 (1993), p. 377; Smith (ed.): *Fifteenth-Century Dance and Music*, p. 109.
  - 7 Sparti, Giordano & Pontremoli: *Dance, Dancers and Dance-Masters*, p. 308; Wilson, David Raoul (ed.): *The Basse Danse Handbook. Text and Context: Seventeen Original Sources*, New York: Pendragon Press 2012, pp. 127, 129–130; Sparti: Introduction, p. 7.
  - 8 Domenico da Piacenza: *De arte saltandi*, pp. 12, 16, 26; Guglielmo Ebreo da Pesaro: *De pratica*, pp. 84, 104, 118, 176, 251. (Guglielmo's references to “organising” and “preparing” celebrations are found in a second treatise he published under the moniker Giovanni Ambrosio.) Barbara Sparti does use the label “choreographies” to name the verbal descriptions of the dances.

oping a principle he refers to as ‘*movimento corporeo* [body movement]’.<sup>9</sup> Both considered a healthy and able body to be a pre-requisite for dance. For example, in Guglielmo’s passage on the aptly-named *movimento corporeo*, he writes that

[I]e qual cose sonno molto piu facili & suave a chi dal summo cielo ha la sua natura & complexione gentile a cio disposta & ben proportionata colla sua persona libera. sana. & expedita senza alchuno manchamento di suoi membri: ma giovane. formoso. destro. legiero. & di gratia bene dottato: in cui tutte le preditte parti si possano con piu longa delectatione liberamente exercitando dimostrare. Impero che in persone de suoi membri defectose non possano haver luogho, come sonno zoppi. gobbi. stropiati. et simili genti: perche queste tal parti | vogliono & consisteno nello exercitio et movimento corporale [these things are far easier and more amenable for those whose nature and noble make-up have been disposed to it by the heavens above, and whose well-proportioned bodies are pliant, healthy and agile, with no feebleness of limb; that is, the young, the shapely, the nimble, the lightsome, and those well-endowed with grace, in whom all the aforesaid elements can, through liberal study, be demonstrated with more lasting delight. Thus there is no place for them in persons whose limbs are faulty (like the lame, the hunchbacked, the crippled, and such people), because these particular elements require and have their very essence in exercise and body movement].<sup>10</sup>

Domenico concurs:

[N]iuna creatura creata che habia in se de natura mancamento de questo motto zentille capace sia [...] zopi gobi guerci de tutti li ministerii aprensun sono Salvo che de questo operandose seria frusta. Adomque li bisogna prosperita de fortuna che e beleza [no creature who has natural defects is capable of this refined motion [...] lame, hunchbacked, or maimed people of all callings will not succeed in this. One needs good fortune – which is beauty].<sup>11</sup>

Stylistic and technical aspects of dance are also particularly connected to the body; for example, *aiere* [air] is presented as a rising motion of the body and *mayniera* [manner] as a turning of the body.<sup>12</sup> Guglielmo’s text includes a specific chapter on the proper bearing of female dancers as a ‘*humile & mansueto* [humble and meek]’ bodily movement, with a dignified carriage, head ‘*dritto suso & alla persona respondente* [upright, aligned with the body]’.<sup>13</sup>

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9 Domenico da Piacenza: *De arte saltandi*, pp. 10–13; Guglielmo Ebreo da Pesaro: *De pratica*, pp. 98–99.

10 Guglielmo Ebreo da Pesaro: *De pratica*, pp. 98–99.

11 Domenico da Piacenza: *De arte saltandi*, pp. 10–11.

12 Guglielmo Ebreo da Pesaro: *De pratica*, pp. 96–99.

13 *Ibid.*, pp.108–109.



But this body, however present it may be, is not a solely-physical entity. In a pre-dualist perspective – in which material and spiritual aspects of the person are not fragmented – reflections on the characteristics, postures, and capabilities of the body are complexified by references that expand beyond the physicality of a dancing corporeality. Guglielmo's text refers (apart from physical motions) to *movimenti spirituali* [movements of the soul] and to human spirits being moved,<sup>14</sup> widening the scope of his practice to the non-material. He presents the virtue of dance as '*una actione demonstrativa di fuori di movimenti spirituali* [an outward manifestation of the movements of the soul]<sup>15</sup> through physically-instantiated movements. According to *De pratica*, harmonic music can have an effect on a person's intellect and affections; these non-corporeal aspects of the person are put into '*dolci commovimenti* [sweet commotions],<sup>16</sup> which struggle to become exteriorised through action. Through Guglielmo's connection between outward physical motions and inner movements of the soul, dance becomes a sign of the dancer's inner nature:

*La quale aglinamorati & generosi cuori et agli animi gentili per celeste inclinazione piu tosto che per accidentale dispositione e amicissima & conforme. Ma aliena in tutto & mortal inimicha di vitiosi & mechanic plebei: i quali le piu volte con animo corrotto & colla scelerata mente la fano di arte liberale & virtuosa scienza : adultera & servile* [This [art of dancing] most favours and befits those whose hearts are loving and generous and those whose spirits are ennobled by a heavenly bent rather than by a fortuitous inclination. But it is completely alien to, and the mortal enemy of, vile and rude mechanicals, who often, with corrupt souls and treacherous minds, turn it from a liberal art and virtuous science into something adulterous and ignoble].<sup>17</sup>

At the same time, Guglielmo points to dance as functioning in the inverse direction – from outer action towards inner being; it is possible for external movement practice to influence the interior workings of the mover. In a short poem inserted between the theoretical and the practical parts of his treatise, he writes that '*Il bel danzar che con virtu s'acquista / Per dar piacer all'anima gentile / Conforta il cuor & fal piu signorile* [the beautiful dancing which with virtue is acquired / to give pleasure to the gentle soul / comforts the heart and makes it

14 Ibid., pp. 88–89, 106–107. This conception of movement between the incorporeal and the corporeal was shared by Renaissance practitioners of other arts, most notably Leon Battista Alberti: Procopio, Patrizia: 'Danzare per fantasmata': L'immagine del movimento nell'arte coreutica del primo Rinascimento, in: *Bruniana & Campanelliana* 16/2 (2010), p. 563.

15 Guglielmo Ebreo da Pesaro: *De pratica*, pp. 88–89.

16 Ibid., pp. 88–89.

17 Ibid., pp. 90–91.

more noble]'.<sup>18</sup> In his theoretical exposition about dance, the master accordingly argues that

*non solamente gli huomini virtuosi & honesti fa tornare gentili & pellegrini: ma anchora quegli sonno male acostumati & di vil conditione nati, fa divenir gentili & d'assai [not only does it ennoble and refine virtuous and esteemed men, but even the ill-mannered and the base-born become most noble minded].*<sup>19</sup>

Dance not only reflects the soul but also – if practiced properly – acts upon the person's interiority through physical actions. Between "movements of the soul" and outwardly-visible dance steps, the dancer's actions appear to be those of a multi-faceted, not-solely-material being. Similarly, dance itself – more than an organic, incarnated practice – is situated at the interstice of the physical and the spiritual.

It is crucial to take this interstitial position into account when attempting to understand the choreographic politics of the Italian Renaissance. Treatises like Domenico and Guglielmo's were aimed at social distinction and therefore social stratification; both focus on dances of the nobility, potentially contributing to a marginalisation and/or assimilation of dances practiced outside of politically-, socially-, and economically-dominant classes' context and aesthetics. Guglielmo claims that the lower socio-economic classes – the '*mechanici plebei* [rude mechanicals]<sup>20</sup> – are those whose vile nature leads them to practice a less-worthy – dangerous, even – dance:

*ne descendano molti homicidij. peccati. et altri mali, questo non niegho, & cio quando tal arte e fatta et exercitata da huomini dissoluti. mechanici. plebei. et voluptuosi. [...] Ma quando e exercitata da huomini gentili. virtuosi. & honesti, dico essa scienza & arte essere buona et virtuosa et di commendatione & laude digna [I do not deny that many murders, sins and other evils come of it; that is, when this art is performed and practiced by dissolute, vile, base and lecherous men [...]. But when it is practiced by noble, virtuous, and honest men, I affirm this science and art to be good, virtuous and worthy of commendation and praise].*<sup>21</sup>

As evidenced by the low economic status of certain dance masters in the Italian 15<sup>th</sup> century (at times holding multiple jobs), and the possibility that dances

18 Ibid., pp. 122–123, author translation based on Smith.

19 Ibid., pp. 114–115.

20 Sparti notes that *mechanici* is used as a synonym for "base", while Smith translates the expression as 'unimaginative underclasses'. Guglielmo Ebreo da Pesaro: *De pratica*, pp. 90–91 footnote 7; Smith (ed.): *Fifteenth-Century Dance and Music*, p. 128.

21 Guglielmo Ebreo da Pesaro: *De pratica*, p. 114–115. "Gentile" is not precisely associated with a noble class – Smith translates it as "gentle", and uses "noble" as the translation of "signorile": Smith (ed.): *Fifteenth-Century Dance and Music*, p. 152.

intended for noble circles were taken up by other social classes,<sup>22</sup> it is possible that the attempt to present a specific dance practice as characteristic of a noble nature and class did not wholly succeed. Be it successful or not, however, the function of dance as a social stratifier goes beyond its instantiation in the physical body; Italian-Renaissance dance culture did not read the body as a purely-material space of social capital projection, but, rather, as a manifestation of a person's inner moral and – or therefore – social worth.

The non-solely-physical nature of the body and dance in the treatises is paralleled, particularly in Guglielmo's text, by a non-dichotomy between the human being and non-human entities – a non-anthropocentric view of the human being. Guglielmo's treatise establishes a relationship of correspondence between the four voices of music, the four humours (yellow and black bile, blood, phlegm) of the human body, and the four elements (fire, earth, air, water).<sup>23</sup> In *De pratica*, he writes:

*quando [...] manca in noi una di queste quattro sustanze principale chiamate elementi, de li quali siamo composti et formati: subito mancharia la propria vita. [...] et cosi similmente le quattro voci principali & formative della dolce melodia intrando per lo nostro auditore quando hanno le sue debite & misurate concordanze porgeno a i nostri spiriti di singular dolceza una nuova et delectevole vita [if [...] one of these four principal substances called elements (of which we are composed and formed) should be lacking, then our life would cease at once. [...] And so likewise, when the four principal voices which form sweet melody have their proper and measured concordances they bring, entering our ears, a new and delectable life of singular sweetness to our spirits].*<sup>24</sup>

The correspondence between these tetrads – sometimes expanded to include the four seasons of the year – was widespread in Renaissance thinking, possibly through filtered Pythagorean thought.<sup>25</sup> Against this background, the writings

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- 22 Nordera: *Pourquoi écrire la danse?*, p. 19; McGowan, Margaret: *Dance in the Renaissance: European Fashion, French Obsession*, New Haven/London: Yale University Press 2008, p. 35; Sparti: Introduction, p. 58. Barbara Sparti has written on Guglielmo's multiple attempts to social ascent, which were not fully successful. Sparti, Barbara: *The Function and Status of Dance in the Fifteenth-Century Italian Courts*, in: *Dance Research* 14/1 (1996), pp. 49–50, 52.
- 23 Guglielmo Ebreo da Pesaro: *De pratica*, pp. 86–87, 106–107 see also footnote 5, p. 87 and Smith, A. William: *Structural and Numerical Symbolism of Fifteenth-Century Italian Dance*, in: *Fifteenth Century Studies* XIX (1992), pp. 246–247.
- 24 Guglielmo Ebreo da Pesaro: *De pratica*, pp. 106–107. On this topic see also Smith: *Structural and Numerical Symbolism* pp. 246–247.
- 25 Cf. Heninger Jr., S.K.: *Touches of Sweet Harmony: Pythagorean Cosmology and Renaissance Poetics*, San Marino: The Huntington Library 1974, in particular pp. 151–176; Rygg, Kristin: *Masqued Mysteries Unmasked: Early Modern Music Theatre and its Pythagorean Subtext*, New

of Guglielmo – like those of Leonardo da Vinci<sup>26</sup> – assume a continuity between the microcosm of human beings and the macrocosm of their surroundings, that is both ontological (the elements that compose a person) and structural (their relative quantities).

The non-corporeally-founded, non-anthropocentric dancing subject sketched out in these early Renaissance treatises is mirrored in later Renaissance dance writing, illustrating the conviction that dance, as well as music, were identifiable beyond the human realm. In 1528, Baldassare Castiglione wrote that ‘the universe was made up of music, that the heavens make harmony as they move, and that as our own souls are formed on the same principle they are awakened and have their faculties, as it were, brought to life through music’.<sup>27</sup> In 1550, Rinaldo Corso spoke of the universe as engaged in rhythmical dance in a *Dialogue on Dance*.<sup>28</sup> In 1588, Thoinot Arbeau incited his reader to ‘make yourself a worthy companion to the planets who are natural dancers’.<sup>29</sup> Eleven years later, Arcangelo Tuccaro argued that when humans dance, their movements resemble those of the celestial spheres.<sup>30</sup> For Guglielmo as well, music had ‘*al mondo fatto singularissimi effetti et maravigliosi movimenti* [wrought extraordinary changes and marvellous motions in the world]’;<sup>31</sup> the dancing master saw music as inciting spiritual and (therefore) physical motions in people, as well as enacting a transformative power upon non-human entities:

*È i sassi & i monti faceva per la sua gran dolcezza dalla propria sua natura ad altra piu benigna transmutare. Similmente si scrive dell'antichissimo Amphione: il quale chome vogliono i poeti, alla citta di Thebe col vago suono della sua cithara faceva le pietre da gli alti monti scendere: et quelle per se medesme nella fabricatione dell'alte mura*

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York: Pendragon Press 2000, pp. 89–92; Berghaus, Günter: Neoplatonic and Pythagorean Notions of World Harmony and Unity and their Influence on Renaissance Dance Theory, in: *Dance Research* 10/2 (1992), pp. 43–70.

26 Cf. Haitzinger, Nicole: Embodiment of Planetary Knowledge, in: BMfB (ed.): *Endangered Human Movements*, Volume 1, Vienna: Nadaproductions 2015, p. 274.

27 Castiglione, Baldassare: *The Book of the Courtier*, London: Penguin 2003 [1528, trans. George Bull], pp. 94–95.

28 Quoted in Berghaus: Neoplatonic and Pythagorean Notions, pp. 61–63.

29 Arbeau, Thoinot: *Orchesography*, Hampshire: Noverre Press: 2012 [1588, trans. Mary Stewart Evans], p. 195.

30 Quoted in McGowan, Margaret: *L'Art du ballet de cour en France 1581-1643*, Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique 1963, pp. 20–21. Several analysts also see, in the figured dance of early French court ballet and English court masques, a reflection and enactment of cosmic order on Earth. For example: Carter, Françoise: Number Symbolism and Renaissance Choreography, in: *Dance Research* 10/1 (1992), p. 26; Hening: *Touches of Sweet Harmony*, p. 178.

31 Guglielmo Ebreo da Pesaro: *De pratica*, pp. 88–89.

*miracolosamente comporsi* [The great sweetness [of music] also transmuted the very nature of rocks and hills into a more kindly one; as in the tale of Amphion of yore who, according to the poets, with the fair sound of his cithara, made the stones descend from the high hills and arrange themselves miraculously into the building of the high walls of the city of Thebes].<sup>32</sup>

Guglielmo uses mythological parallels to reinforce this view. He refers to how the lambs of Pan were '*quasi dalla forza di quella melodia commosse* [as if moved by the power of his melody]'; and how Pluto and other deities, animals, and beasts were soothed by the sound of Orpheus' music.<sup>33</sup> Humans may also employ music to intervene in realms that exceed humanity, including the divine:

*È in gran parte conforme per la virtù et | potenza della qual già si commosse il celestiale onnipotente idio dagli humani divotamente pregato: i quali nei sancti sacrificij con alta melodia cantando & con dolci instrumenti & sancti tripudij danzando obtegnevano la domandata gratia: chome già piu volte si chome si lege il sapientissimo Salamone fece quando contra lui & il suo populo vedeva l'alto idio turbato. & chome anchora fece il glorioso re David: il quale piu volte collo suo amoroso & sancto psalterio & agionto insieme il tribulato populo con festevole & honesto danzare, & col harmonia del dolce canto commovea l'irato & potente idio a piatosa & suavissima pace* [because of [music's] virtue and power almighty God in heaven was moved by the devout prayers of men who, by singing lofty music, [playing] sweet-sounding instruments, and tripping sacred dances during the holy sacrifices, obtained the grace they had beseeched. We read that wise Solomon did this many times when he saw God on high vexed with him and his people. And so also did glorious King David who, many times, with his lovely and sacred psaltery, drew the troubled people together with festive and decorous dance, and through the harmony of his sweet song moved an irate and powerful God to a merciful and most gentle peace].<sup>34</sup>

Dance and music, then, do not solely (or primarily) concern the human community; rather, the dance of the humans is part of a dance that exceeds them. Therefore, it is only possible to project "choreography" on Domenico and Guglielmo if that choreography recognises and conceptually encapsulates a corporeality that is not solely physical and not singularised in its humanity; a dance that is, similarly, not defined by its humanity or physicality; an art practice that is performed by, and has effects beyond, humans – in other words, an expanded choreography that accepts continuities with the non-human realm of which the

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32 Ibid., pp. 86–87.

33 Ibid., pp. 86–87.

34 Ibid., pp. 88–89.

person and their dance are part. This choreography's author and creator is, likewise, not a singular-, autonomous-, wholly-human being.

## The choreographies of music and of nature

The treatises' fundamental detachment of dance from the sole actions of human bodies particularly concerns its indebtedness to music. Guglielmo's "true" definition of dance includes music – and not the human body. His art '*altro non e, che un atto dimostrativo concordante alla misurata melodia d'alchuna voce overo suono* [is none other than an outward act which accords with the measured melody of any voice or instrument]'.<sup>35</sup> This anchoring is so essential that music is presented as the source of dance:

*danzare sia tratto & originato da essa melodia chome atto dimostrativo della sua propria natura. Senza la qual harmonia overo consonanza, l'arte del danzare niente seria, ne fare si poria* [dancing is drawn and born from this melody as outward show of its true nature; [and] without this harmony or consonance, the art of dancing would be nothing, nor would it be possible to do].<sup>36</sup>

Correspondingly, in a short passage providing advice for composition, Guglielmo suggests that dance-makers start their choreographic process by composing their work's music – and only then can they engage in other aspects, such as the partitioning of the ground.<sup>37</sup>

Guglielmo does admit that it is possible to dance without music:

*siando in un ballo otto o diece persone et ballando quelle coi passi concordatamente & misuratamente insieme senza suono e cosa naturale* [when eight or ten people are performing a ballo and are dancing without music but with steps which are measured and in accord with each other, this is something natural].<sup>38</sup>

However, this musicless dance – a collectively-rhythmed practice of human dancers – is 'something natural', juxtaposed to the author's conception of an artificial dance, based on music: '*sonando doppo il sonatore & misurando et concordando quelli ballano i lor passi col ditto suono e accidentale* [when the player plays and the dancers accord and measure their steps to the said music, this is artifice]'.<sup>39</sup> In this way, Guglielmo creates a dichotomy between the natural dance

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35 Ibid., pp. 92–93. See also the poem pp. 84–85.

36 Ibid., pp. 108–109.

37 Ibid., pp. 104–105.

38 Ibid., pp. 112–113.

39 Ibid., pp. 112–115.

that humans perform without musical assistance and the artifice that is possible through the contribution of music. Here “natural” dance can be associated with crudeness; for Sparti the term is associated with “*dolceza*”, meaning simple, instinctive, sensual.<sup>40</sup> The transformation of this raw activity into artifice occurs through the dancers’ accord with music, a process based on practice and intellectual engagement; recognising and following the musical *misura* ‘*e segno di buona intelligenza et principio della vera pratica* [is the mark of keen intelligence and the beginning of serious practice]’.<sup>41</sup> In other words, while both “natural” and “artificial” dance are human endeavours, it is the presence of, and accordance with, music that guarantees the artistic status of dance, rather than merely being a *human* activity.

At the same time, some passages by Guglielmo shed doubt on a dichotomy between a music-based artificial dance and a musicless, natural one. For instance, the master writes of the four musical voices that

*quando hanno perfettamente la sua com[p]ositione consonante & bene accordata colle debite & natural sue misure fanno agli ascoltanti commovere tutti i sensi in suavis[sima dolceza* [when they are so composed as to be in perfect harmony, and accord well with their proper and natural measures, they move all the senses of the listeners with the sweetest pleasure]<sup>42</sup>

– and lead them to dance. While he has established that the presence of, and concurrence with, music renders dance artificial (as opposed to natural, non-musically-accompanied dance), Guglielmo suggests here that the harmony of music leading to dance also depends upon “natural” measures. It is in the combination of naturalness and artificiality that the value of dance can be found; ‘*[e]ssendo tal scienza di danzare cosa naturale et accidentale adoncha e perfetta & meritamente commendativa* [since this science of dancing is something [both] natural and artificial, it is perfect and deservedly commendable]’.<sup>43</sup>

Placing dance in an interstitial realm between the natural and the artificial, such passages are informative about the position of the human being in the creation of dance. When Guglielmo speaks of the harmonisation of the musical voices according to their “natural” measures (above), he uses the same word – *compositione* [composition] – as when he speaks of arranging a dance and its music.<sup>44</sup> While he does not explicitly specify who composes the voices in question, it is plausible he is speaking of a process of human/artificial composition

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40 Sparti, Barbara: Glossary, in: Guglielmo Ebreo da Pesaro: *De pratica*, p. 223.

41 Guglielmo Ebreo da Pesaro: *De pratica*, pp. 100–101.

42 *Ibid.*, pp. 106–107, emphasis added.

43 *Ibid.*, pp. 114–115.

44 Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 104–105.

*guided by* natural, proper measures. In this reading, musical composition – and, by consequence, the choreography founded upon it – is “natural” through an (artificial) adherence to a natural harmony that exceeds or precedes the human practitioner. The passage is not detailed enough to confirm such a reading; nevertheless, several points do support the idea of an art-making guided by nature. Within the treatise, passages indicate a doubling of dance composition by a “natural” derivation from music; Guglielmo writes that

*diremo essa arte et scienza del danzare esser virtute et scienza naturale composta & naturalmente tratta & cavata della melodia over suono d'alchune concordante voci* [we can affirm this art and science of dancing to be a virtue and a natural science, composed and in a natural fashion derived and drawn from the melody or sound of some concordant voices].<sup>45</sup>

Elsewhere, he indicates that the postural presence of the dancer should be ‘*chome quasi per se medesme la natura insegna* [as nature itself – as it were – teaches us]’;<sup>46</sup> and considers technical aspects of the dance, such as *aiere* [air], to be necessary, lest the dance look ‘*imperfetto & fuori di sua natura* [imperfect and unnnatural]’.<sup>47</sup> Guglielmo also portrays nature as a creator when referring to birds’ song that results from ‘*gran maestra di natura* [Nature’s great mastery]’.<sup>48</sup> Other artists of the Italian Renaissance also believed that nature could be seen as a model for artistic creation; for example, both Leon Battista Alberti and da Vinci saw a guide, painter, teacher, and artist in nature.<sup>49</sup> This is supported by contemporary historians. Hartmut Böhme explains that even if this was not the sole paradigm of understanding nature in the Renaissance, certain practitioners held that

*[d]ie Natur ist ästhetische Ordnung. Davon lassen sich Künstler, Ästhetiker, Wissenschaftler, Ärzte, Astronomen, Ingenieure leiten [...] Artificielle Schönheit ist organisiert nach Regeln, in denen die Natur selbst concinnitas hervorbringt. Wenn Kunst wie die Natur operiert, dann heisst dies, dass sie wissenschaftlich und gesetzlich arbeitet* [Nature is aesthetic order. Artists, aestheticians, scientists, doctors,

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45 Ibid., pp. 108–109, emphasis added.

46 Ibid., pp. 108–109.

47 Ibid., pp. 96–97.

48 Ibid., pp. 88–89.

49 Alberti, Leon Battista : *De Pictura*, Paris : Allia 2010 [1435, trans. Danielle Sonnier], pp. 25, 43–44, 51; see also on Leonardo da Vinci : Wetzel, Michael : Autor/Künstler, in : Barck, Karlheinz, Fontius, Martin, Schlenstedt, Dieter, Steinwachs, Burkhardt & Wolfzettel, Friedrich (eds.): *Asthetische Grundbegriffe. Historisches Wörterbuch in sieben Bänden*, Vol. 1, Stuttgart: Metzler 2002, p. 507.



astronomers, engineers, are guided by this [...] Artificial beauty is organised according to rules in which nature itself produces concinnitas. When art operates like nature, that means that it works scientifically and lawfully.<sup>50</sup>

Here, the notion of nature is complexified, moving beyond its status as a counterpoint to artistic-, musically-measured dance, and towards an agent that has operant choreographic functions.

Domenico's use of the term "*naturale*" introduces a further nuance, compatible with human choreographic engagement with a "natural" order. Possibly reflecting an Aristotelian categorisation,<sup>51</sup> Domenico distinguishes between "natural" and "incidental" [*naturali / accidentalli*] movements.<sup>52</sup> "Incidental" movement can be translated – according to contemporary translators of Renaissance dance discourse – as accidental or incidental, but also as artful, artificial, man-made, ornamental, contrived; "natural" movements can mean basic (as in Guglielmo's first use of the term) as well as essential (which may correspond to Guglielmo's 'proper and natural measures').<sup>53</sup> *De arte saltandi* thus suggests that certain movements are "naturally" determined, with an essential character, while others '*non sono necessarij segonde natura* [are not necessary according to nature]'<sup>54</sup> – they are ornamental additions to the dance. Dance is composed of a set of "necessary", natural movements complemented by man-made, incidental ones; the essence or necessity of nature is complemented by human ornament.<sup>55</sup> Once again, it is in this complementarity that the goodness of dance is found. Domenico agrees with his student when he states that virtue is not only found in artifice, as

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50 Böhme, Hartmut: Natürlich / Natur, in: Barck, Karlheinz, Fontius, Martin, Schlenstedt, Dieter, Steinwachs, Burkhart & Wolfzettel, Friedrich (eds.): *Asthetische Grundbegriffe. Historisches Wörterbuch in sieben Bänden*, Vol. 4, Stuttgart: Metzler 2002, pp. 476–477. The author associates this view with a Platonic-, mathematically-, and geometrically-focussed conception of nature.

51 Nordera: Pourquoi écrire la danse?, p. 18.

52 According to *De arte saltandi*, the natural movements are nine and are performed on the musical "*pieno*" [whole; here: strong beat, down-beat]; inversely, the incidental ones are three and are performed on the "*vuodo*" [empty, void; here: weak beat, up-beat]. Domenico da Piacenza: *De arte saltandi*, pp. 14–15. For the explanations of the terms *pieno/vuodo* see Sparti: Glossary, pp. 223, 228.

53 Sparti: Glossary, pp. 217, 223; Procopio, Patrizia: *Il De arte saltandi et choreas ducendi di Domenico da Piacenza*, Ravenna: Longo Editore 2014, p. 132; Smith (ed.): *Fifteenth-Century Dance and Music*, p. 13 note 10. For Guglielmo's quote: Guglielmo Ebreo da Pesaro: *De pratica*, pp. 106–107.

54 Domenico da Piacenza: *De arte saltandi*, pp. 14–15.

55 For a more-systematic overview of the way in which the Renaissance and later periods developed ideas of mastering nature, and the progressive mechanisation of the concept of nature, see Böhme: Natürlich / Natur, pp. 475, 481–485.

‘[e]l savio Aristotele [the wise Aristotle] identified ‘in tutte le cosse e alcuna buntade naturalmente [in all things is some natural goodness]’.<sup>56</sup>

Both Domenico and Guglielmo’s treatises underline the importance of authorship in dance; the former explicitly states he composed all the dances in his work, while the latter places his own or his master’s name next to the title of each dance in his text. At the same time, however, an understanding of choreography as an art stemming from an autonomous human intention and (therefore) attributable to a human author’s will is not applicable to their writing.<sup>57</sup> Be it through the effect of music or a compositional/choreographic engagement with nature, the treatises suggest that choreographic authorship must be decentralised away from the human. Indeed, contemporary analysts of Renaissance dance support the idea that dance-making was conceived as a response to a realm exceeding the human practitioner. For example, Smith parallels Domenico’s list of twelve movements composing dance with the number twelve as a numerical value ‘seen to reflect a universal truth’.<sup>58</sup> A choreography is thus sketched out that is non-human-centred, illustrating Domenico and Guglielmo’s possible overlaps with a contemporary expanded choreography that also challenges that centredness.

## Choreography in a world of proportion

If nature is an artist – as Alberti and the idea of a “naturally-informed” dance suggests – then nature can give rise to art-making principles. This possibility is reflected in Domenico and Guglielmo’s notion of measure – one of the main notions a dancer-to-be needs to grasp. Indeed, the *misura* has its source in nature; Domenico claims that different measures acquire their arrangement from nature, while his student identifies measures that are ‘*debite & natural*

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56 Domenico da Piacenza: *De arte saltandi*, pp. 12–13.

57 It was during the transformations that secularisation and the introduction of the printing press gave rise to that the Renaissance view of human artists as mediators of divine creation progressively moved towards the idea of individual human authorship; Domenico and Guglielmo’s attribution of authorship while maintaining the guardrails of nature can be read against this background. Cf. Wetzel: *Autor/Künstler*, pp. 502–505.

58 Smith: *Structural and Numerical Symbolism*, pp. 248–249. Marina Nordera agrees that this number of movements is symbolic because the choreographies include more steps. Nordera: *Pourquoi écrire la danse?*, p. 18.

[proper and natural]'.<sup>59</sup> Both agree on the *misura's* importance, referring to it as the 'foundation' of dance.<sup>60</sup>

Measure is applied to dance in multiple ways. According to Domenico's explanation, one of its uses is to '*mexurare el movimento del corpo cum la prompta del pede* [measure the motion of the body with the footstep]';<sup>61</sup> his definition of *misura di terreno* refers to '*mexura legiera e questa e quella che fa tenere el mezzo del tuo motto dal capo ali piedi* [a subtle *misura* requiring that you maintain the middle of the motion from head to feet]'.<sup>62</sup> Cornazano also refers to a motion-directed *misura* when he writes that

*nel danzare non solamente s'observa la misura degli soni ma una misura la quale non e musicale anzi fore di tutte quelle che e un misurare l'aere nel levamento dell'ondeggiare cioe che sepre s'alci a un modo che altrimenti si romperia misura* [in dancing not only does one observe the misura of the music, but also a misura which is not musical and on the contrary lies beyond it. This is an orderly arrangement of the aire in the elevating of the ondeggiare, that is, one always rises in one way, otherwise one would destroy the misura].<sup>63</sup>

Guglielmo further applies the notion of measure to the spatial organisation of movement; a dancer must '*considerare il luogho ella stanza dove si balla: & quella nel suo intelletto ben partire & misurare* [tak[e] account of the place and room for dancing, and carefully *apportio[n]* and *measur[e]* it in one's mind]'.<sup>64</sup> Although these apply to the body and its placement in space, however, the *misura* is not solely concerned with corporeal motion.

In effect, as Cornazano's quotation suggests, measure is profoundly related to music. At a most literal level – but without exhausting the term's technical complexity<sup>65</sup> – it corresponds to the relationship between dance and music, based on the rhythm or metre of the latter:

*Misura [...] se intende una dolce & misurata concordanza di voce & di tempo partito con ragione & arte: il qual principalmente consiste nello strumento citharizante o altro*

59 Domenico da Piacenza: *De arte saltandi*, pp. 20–21, Guglielmo Ebreo da Pesaro: *De pratica*, pp. 106–107.

60 Guglielmo Ebreo da Pesaro: *De pratica*, pp. 102–103; Domenico da Piacenza: *De arte saltandi*, pp. 12–13.

61 Domenico da Piacenza: *De arte saltandi*, pp. 16–17.

62 Ibid., pp. 12–13.

63 Cornazano: *Libro dell'arte del danzare*, p. 90.

64 Guglielmo Ebreo da Pesaro: *De pratica*, pp. 94–95, emphasis added.

65 For further meanings of the *misura* see Franko, Mark: *The Dancing Body in Renaissance Choreography*, Birmingham: Summa Publications 1986, pp. 60–63. Combining rhythmical and physical aspects of the *misura*, Franko proposes that it refers to 'that motion in dance which rises slowly and drops back quickly', p. 63.

suono [...] bisogna che la persona che vuole danzare, si regoli et misuri, & a quello perfettamente si concordi nei suoi movimenti si et in tal modo, che i suoi passi siano al ditto tempo et misura perfettamente concordante, & colla ditta misura regulati [measure [...] means a sweet and measured accord between sound and rhythm, appor-tioned with judgment and skill, the nature of which can best be understood through the [playing] of a stringed or other instrument [...] the person who wishes to dance must regulate and gauge himself, and must so perfectly accord his movements with it and in such a way that his steps will be in perfect accord with the aforesaid tempo and measure and will be regulated by that measure].<sup>66</sup>

Renaissance dance is characterised by the prevalence of four *misure*, or rhyth-mical structures – *bassadanza*, *quadernaria*, *saltarello*, *piva* – each related to a corresponding movement and tempo. For Domenico, performing a movement in its ‘essential’ manner [*lo suo essere*] means performing it in time with the cor-responding rhythm; the essence of movement is dependent upon its alignment with musical measure.<sup>67</sup>

Characterising both music and dance, measure is itself characterised by proportion. Notably, Domenico established a system of proportional relations between the four *misure* of dance. For example, the *quadernaria* is ‘*piu stretta dela bassadanza uno sesto* [a sixth shorter in distance than that of the *bassadanza*]’ and the *saltarello* is ‘*piu stretta dela quadernaria uno altro sesto* [more narrow by a sixth than *quadernaria*]’.<sup>68</sup> Governed by calculable proportional relations, the *misura* can therefore be seen as a structural, numerically-analysable principle. As such, this principle is transferable across different types of phenomena – it can travel from the domain of musical rhythm to the field of corporeal movement. In effect, dance practitioners were invited to display their skill and demonstrate their grasp of the measured relation between music and movement by playing with this auditory and kinetic proportion, performing steps out of their “essential” rhythm; for example, combining *bassadanza* movement with

66 Guglielmo Ebreo da Pesaro: *De pratica*, 92–93. For more information about the associations of the *misura* with music see Sparti: Glossary, pp. 222–223.

67 E.g. Domenico da Piacenza: *De arte saltandi*, pp. 20–21 & note 7.

68 Domenico da Piacenza: *De arte saltandi*, pp. 16–17. Cornazano perpetuates this relational conception of the *misure* when he writes that ‘[t]utte le dicte misure si alternano e si fan l’una sul’altra al modo (dicto) [...] Quanto crescino et calino alterate al modo dicto per la figura della dicta Scala e manifesto [all of the aforesaid *misure* are exchangeable, and they are mutated in the manner described. [...] How much they increase or decrease when exchanged is evident by the aforementioned ladder.]’ Cornazano: *Libro dell’arte del danzare*, p. 93. Barbara Sparti, in her introduction to Guglielmo’s treatise, notes that both he and his master Domenico had ‘tried to notate *misura* relationships and changes of tempo’ and points to the use of proportion signs in musical notations. Sparti: Introduction, p. 69.

*quadernaria* rhythm, increasing the speed of the dance, or dancing counter to the musical measure to draw attention to its tempo.<sup>69</sup> Domenico used spatial terms when explaining the proportional relations between the four principal *misure* – the *bassadanza* is the '*piu larga* [widest]' *misura*, the *piva* is '*piu stretta* [narrower]'<sup>70</sup> – further illustrating the transferability and the double, musical-kinetic nature of measure. "Measured" movement may, therefore, be seen as indirectly resulting from music, but also sharing measure with music as a transversal characteristic. In effect, Guglielmo writes of dancers' gestures being '*alla ditta misura, et secondo il suono concordante* [in accord with the measure and music]',<sup>71</sup> implying that the *misura* can also be understood as a principle "external" to both. Measure, then, is neither primarily kinetic – it is not fundamentally defined in relation to movement or dance – nor primarily physical – it applies to the body as well as conceptions of space and music. In other words, if the *misura* is a major choreographic principle in the treatises, it is a principle of a choreography that is not fully defined by – and, therefore, not fully understandable through – the body in motion. Rather, it is transmedially applicable, allowing compositional translation between different artistic fields.

In effect, the principle of measure applies to more than art's physical-kinetic and auditory modalities; through measure, dance movement enters a wider frame of reference shared with other domains (including, but not limited to, music). Guglielmo explicitly claims that the *misura*'s practice in the dance realm fosters '*ogn'altra scienza alla qual s'apertegna di havere misura* [every other science where mensuration has a place]';<sup>72</sup> measure was shared with other artistic disciplines of the Italian Renaissance, such as painting.<sup>73</sup> Further transferring the notion from art practice to a performance of virtue, Domenico rhetorically asks: '*operando questo dilecto per fugire tristezza e molesta domque e virtu ma non sapiamo noi che la mexura e parte de prudentia et e nele arte liberale* [using this art to escape sadness or boredom therefore is a virtue. Don't we know that the *misura* is part of prudence and of the liberal arts?]'.<sup>74</sup>

Moreover, the *misura* is linked to phenomena beyond human activity. Nevile summarises this expanding sense of the *misura* when she writes of it as

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69 Domenico da Piacenza: *De arte saltandi*, pp. 22–23; Guglielmo Ebreo da Pesaro: *De pratica*, pp. 100–101.

70 Domenico da Piacenza: *De arte saltandi*, pp. 16–17.

71 Guglielmo Ebreo da Pesaro: *De pratica*, pp. 92–93.

72 *Ibid.*, pp. 102–103.

73 Alberti, for instance, saw the *misura* as the basis of perspective: Sparti, Giordano & Pontremoli: *Dance, Dancers and Dance-Masters*, p. 102.

74 Domenico da Piacenza: *De arte saltandi*, pp. 14–15. Prudence or *phronesis* is an Aristotelian notion seen as a path to truth, related to both measure and memory. Sparti: *Antiquity as Inspiration*, p. 376.

a proportioning of the space around a dancer's body through the movements of the body, a proportioning of the ground on which the floor patterns were traced out, and a proportioning of the music. It is this concept of proportion that linked the art of dance (and the other arts) to the Pythagorean and Platonic idea of the nature of the cosmos.<sup>75</sup>

Given the prevalence of Pythagorean thought filtered through to the Renaissance, the proportionality of measures might be related to Pythagorean principles of numerical proportion, according to which music expressed ratios and harmonies governing the cosmos.<sup>76</sup>

This supra-human “governance” also applies to choreographic politics; the social stratification reflected by dance is mirrored by the non-dance-specific, structural principle of measure. For example, when Domenico orders the *misure* in a diagram, he starts with *bassadanza* as their ‘*regina* [queen]’, followed by the *quaternaria*, the *saltarello*, and finally the *piva* – the ‘*piu trista* [saddest]’ of the *misure*.<sup>77</sup> This hierarchy directly parallels the inequalities in the world experienced and lived by the treatises’ authors and readers. The *piva*, notes Domenico, is the saddest of the *misure* because it is practiced by villagers; in contrast, the *bassadanza* is only accessible to a select few – presumably those who have access to a dance master.<sup>78</sup> Cornazano agrees with his master in observing a hierarchy between *misure*, and provides an illustrative diagram too; once again, it is the *piva* that is at the base and the *bassadanza* at the top of the hierarchy. Cornazano explains that one must ascend from one level to the next by increasing one's skill (again, this presumably requires access to master-mediated knowledge). Cornazano similarly describes the *piva* as ‘*tanto minore* [lesser]’ because it is a country dance, derived from the hornpipes of the shepherds; it is only through the refinement of the intellects that it could be practiced by dancers of his age and context.<sup>79</sup>

The principle of the *misura* replaces the specificity of the physical or the kinetic in choreography by traversing different media. At the same time, it points

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75 Nevile, Jennifer: *The Eloquent Body: Dance and Humanist Culture in Fifteenth-Century Italy*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2004, p. 78.

76 Sparti: *Antiquity as Inspiration*, p. 376 (at the same time, however, Sparti has also referred to ‘[t]his unusual proportion, purely notional for some scholars, based on Pythagorean ratios for others’, Sparti, Giordano & Pontremoli: *Dance, Dancers and Dance-Masters*, p. 102); Nevile, Jennifer: *The Relationship between Dance and Music in Fifteenth-Century Italian Dance Practice*, in: Nevile: *Dance, Spectacle and the Body Politick*, p. 158; Nevile: *The Eloquent Body* p. 110.

77 Domenico da Piacenza: *De arte saltandi*, pp. 18–21. The diagram is reproduced in the same edition, p. 4.

78 *Ibid.*, pp. 18–21.

79 Cornazano: *Libro dell'arte del danzare*, pp. 91–92 and p. 68 for the diagram.

towards a choreography governed by artistic and aesthetic principles as well as ethical and possibly-political ones. In these ways, it illustrates a choreography – and a dance – that is not delimited by the autonomous realm dreamt by modernism. As examples of a pre-modernist choreographic practice, Domenico and Guglielmo's treatises posit the contingency and (therefore) reversibility of that dream – the direction to which contemporary expanded choreography is also tending.

### Choreographies of the non-kinetic

The not-primarily-physical, not-primarily-kinetic principle of the *misura* introduces a parameter to dance that casts further doubt on dance's kinetic focus. This is found in a short section of Domenico's text that has generated a great deal of research interest; it is the injunction that one

*bisogna danzare per fantasmata e nota che fantasmata e una presteza corporalle la quale e mossa cum lo intelecto dela mexura dicta imprima disopra facendo requia acadauno tempo che pari haver veduto lo capo di medusa como dice el poeta cioe che facto el motto sii tutto di piedra in quello instante et in instante mitti ale como falcone che per paica mosso sia [needs to dance according to fantasmata. Note that fantasmata is a physical quickness which is controlled by the understanding of the misura first mentioned above. This necessitates that at each tempo one appears to have seen Medusa's head, as the poet says, and be of stone in one instant, then, in another instant, take to flight like a falcon driven by hunger].<sup>80</sup>*

According to Sparti, *fantasma* – in contemporary Italian, “ghost” – is etymologically connected with the Latin word for “image” and derives from the Greek “to appear”<sup>81</sup> (Patrizia Procopio translates *per fantasmata* as ‘con l'ausilio delle immagini [with the aid of images]’<sup>82</sup>). Multiple, non-mutually-exclusive interpretations have been given of this metaphorical, imagery-filled term. Cornazano presents his teacher's idea by talking of an *ombra phantasmatica* (translated by Smith as a ‘ghostly shadow’), in which the dancer follows a tempo of motionlessness with an ‘aeroso modo quasi come persona che susciti da morte a vita [airy style like a person who revives from death to life]’.<sup>83</sup> In the field of contemporary dance history, Procopio has focussed on *fantasmata* as an exteriorisation of the soul's

80 Domenico da Piacenza: *De arte saltandi*, pp. 12–13.

81 Sparti: *Antiquity as Inspiration*, p. 377.

82 Procopio: *// De arte saltandi et choreas ducendi*, p. 137.

83 Cornazano: *Libro dell'arte del danzare*, p. 88.

state through movement.<sup>84</sup> Other scholars have concentrated on how *fantasmata* describes the performance of movement itself; for Nevile, it refers to ‘an infinitesimal pause at the end of a step, and then a resumption of movement in an incredibly light and airy manner’;<sup>85</sup> for Sparti, it describes a ‘holding and releasing of breath or energy’;<sup>86</sup> for Mark Franko, it is ‘an alternation of motion and pose in which one is constantly overtaking, indeed invading, the other, both sequentially and spatially’,<sup>87</sup> drawing connections between *fantasmata* and measure.

The first impression given by *fantasmata*, then, is that of an oscillation between movement and pose or pause; an alternation between displacement (the darting falcon) and stillness (the petrifying medusa). Domenico’s choreographies include two steps – *posa* and *posada* – which can be interpreted as a conventionally-understood pau/ose; Ingrid Brainard relates these to *fantasmata*.<sup>88</sup> But, arguably, *fantasmata* has a wider reach than these choreographed pau/oses; *posa* and *posada*’s relatively-limited occurrence – they appear in seven out of 23 choreographies in *De arte saltandi*, sometimes placed towards the end of the dance or phrase – differentiates them from *fantasmata*, which is presented by Domenico (and contrary to Cornazano) as a general principle of ‘*spirando el corpo* [placing the body]’ to be practiced ‘*acadauno tempo* [at each tempo]’, i.e. throughout the dance.<sup>89</sup> Thus, Domenico describes a quality imbuing the dance itself, instead of specific steps. In effect, the phrase “*danzare per fantasmata*” can be translated as “to dance through or with *fantasmata*”. This interpretation inscribes the stilling of motion in the dance’s form; dance is not a practice of motion, but an alternation between motion and its absence – it can be present where movement is not.

It may be possible to add a further layer to this reading, in which movement and stillness are not opposed components of the dance. Indeed, while the definition of *fantasmata* suggests performing stone-cold stillness and flight of movement consecutively and alternately, the fact that it instructs to do so

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84 Procopio: *Il De arte saltandi et choreas ducendi*, p. 137.

85 Nevile: *The Eloquent Body*, p. 70.

86 Sparti, Barbara: ‘Artistic’ Theory of Dance in Fifteenth-Century Italy, in: *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 35 (2003), p. 184.

87 Franko: *The Dancing Body in Renaissance Choreography*, pp. 63–64.

88 Brainard, Ingrid: *Die Choreographie der Hoftänze in Burgund, Frankreich und Italien im 15. Jahrhundert*, PhD thesis, Göttingen: Georg-August-Universität 1956, p. 285.

89 Domenico da Piacenza: *De arte saltandi*, pp. 10–13. For the references to *posa* and *posada* in the choreographies, pp. 33, 45, 57, 59, 61, 65; a further possible reference may exist in the dance *Zoglioxa*, p. 67, cf. footnote 2. For a further discussion of the relation between pause and pose see Franko: *The Dancing Body in Renaissance Choreography*, p. 64, commenting on Brainard.



'*acadauno tempo*'<sup>90</sup> – Franko translates this as 'each bar'<sup>91</sup> – implies both occur in a single musical unit. Several scholars correspondingly suggest *fantasmata* allows a non-oppositional view of motion and stillness. Brainard discerns a dynamic pose interval, in which the silencing of movement brings new energy and preparation for the next pose. While she sees a contrapunctual opposition between silence and movement, she presents their *Spannungsverhältnis* [relationship of tension] as allowing a liveliness to enter into pose and a statuary plasticity to imbue movement – accentuating both, instead of mutually erasing them.<sup>92</sup> Nicole Haitzinger analyses Cornazano's *ombra fantasmatica* by metaphorically opposing death/revival in movement; '[d]ie strukturell gedachte Bewegungsformierung bleibt trotz eines Augen-Blickes des Stillstandes im Fluss [the structurally-conceived movement formation remains in flow despite the instantaneous stillness]'.<sup>93</sup> Franko speaks of *fantasmata* as an interstitial, transitional territory:

Measure signifies the relationship between movement and the pose which is neither one nor the other but each in their transition to the other. This transitional moment is called "fantasmata" by Domenico. [...] *fantasmata* is not a quality peculiar to either movement or the pose, but rather one inherent in their interplay [...] *Fantasmata* denotes movement as the phantom of itself, about to stop but not yet in stasis.<sup>94</sup>

In a more abstract interpretation, Rudolf zur Lippe sees a kinetic equivalent of a dialectic process in this alternation of pause-in-movement and movement-in-pause, in which pause is not an *interruption* of motion but a *synthesis* of consecutive movements. For zur Lippe as well, the falcon does not contradict the medusa; the bird is motionless but perpetually prepared for movement – dance can be found in the moments where no (externally-visible) motion can be seen.<sup>95</sup> In this sense, stillness can be viewed as related, not opposed, to movement: a movement suspended, but still there, or a stillness that includes motion potential. Cornazano, explaining his master's concept, points to a *pau/ose* without referring to immobility *per se*: he speaks of '*tacere* [silencing, omitting]' a tempo and '*star lo morto* [being as if dead]'.<sup>96</sup> Both expressions approach the notion

90 Domenico da Piacenza: *De arte saltandi*, pp. 12–13.

91 Franko: *The Dancing Body in Renaissance Choreography*, p. 64.

92 Brainard: *Die Choreographie der Hoftänze*, pp. 288–292.

93 Haitzinger, Nicole: *Vergessene Traktate – Archive der Erinnerung. Zu Wirkungskonzepten im Tanz von der Renaissance bis zum Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts*, Munich: epodium 2009, p. 66.

94 Franko: *The Dancing Body in Renaissance Choreography*, pp. 64–65.

95 Lippe, Rudolf zur: *Naturbeherrschung am Menschen I. Körpererfahrung als Entfaltung von Sinnen und Beziehungen in der Ära des italienischen Kaufmannskapitals*, Frankfurt am Main: Syndikat 1974, pp. 167, 169, 172.

96 Cornazano: *Libro dell'arte del danzare*, p. 88, author translation.

of stillness – a silencing, turning-off of kinetic flow, a lifeless state – without explicitly affirming an absence of movement; they instruct to still movement without establishing a clearly oppositional view of (im)mobility. Thus, *fantasmata* could refer to a proximity between movement and stillness, the tension of a stillness ready to move and a movement on the verge of being contained – instead of one's emergence depending on the other's absence.

In a “weak” sense, then, *fantasmata* could point to a dance that remains present in the absence of movement; a dance not founded upon incessant motion. In a “strong” reading, *fantasmata* could imply that momentary lack of displacement is not dichotomously opposed to movement. Domenico's references to the concept are too scarce for solid interpretation; in both cases, however, *fantasmata* casts doubt upon the association of dance – and choreography as dance-making – with constant displacement and the necessary performance of *kinesis*. Occupying the interstitial space between stillness and motion, *fantasmata* questions the dichotomy that turns stillness into a refusal of dance – or even movement. Renaissance dance-making conceives of a dance that is founded not on incessant bodily motion or a refusal of movement, but on a non-dichotomous blending of the two. This reading is supported by how movement terms are used in the treatises. Certain occurrences of the term “*moto*” in *De arte saltandi* seem to correspond to dance in general, with the author referring to ‘*questo motto zentille* [this refined motion]’ or ‘*questo motto de danzare* [this motion of dancing]’ in a generic sense.<sup>97</sup> Uses of the term “*movimento*” similarly refer to the way in which the body acts in dance in general; practitioners are advised by Guglielmo to ‘*perfettamente si concordi nei suoi movimenti* [perfectly accord [their] movements]’ with the musical tempo.<sup>98</sup> Nevertheless, instances of Domenico and Guglielmo's movement-related terms also indicate that dance was equivalent to a succession of steps, not to a process of unfolding undifferentiated movement.<sup>99</sup> “*Moto*” and “*movimento*” function as generic signifiers of “step” – in the sense of codified assemblages of actions – or denote specific types of steps, such as the “*moto quadernario*” or the “*moto del Saltarello*”,<sup>100</sup> therefore contradicting the idea of undifferentiated, generic motional flow. In this sense, movement is at interplay

97 Domenico da Piacenza: *De arte saltandi*, pp. 10–11, 16–17.

98 Guglielmo Ebreo da Pesaro: *De pratica*, pp. 92–93.

99 Three manuscripts relating to Guglielmo's theory even include a definition of dance as a succession of discrete steps; arguably, dancing (*ballare* or *danzare*, depending on the source) consists of knowing the steps making up the dance (*continentie, riprese, sempi, doppi...*), as well as the way and *tempi* in which they are performed. Smith (ed.): *Fifteenth-Century Dance and Music*, p. 200.

100 Domenico states that *memoria 'e texonera de tutti Li motti corporali* [stores all of the corporal movements] and enumerates the twelve “movements” of the art of dance. At times, *movimento* also corresponds to a particular step unit in Domenico's text, one Guglielmo

between continuity – the “motion of dancing” – and discreetness – its steps. The treatises provide a glimpse of reconciling discreetness with flow in movement.

This refusal of fully-fledged motion acquires an ethical aspect. Domenico's description of *agilitade* and *maniera*, for instance, advises dancers not to go extremes but

*tenire el mezzo del tuo movimento che non sia ni troppo ni poco (ma) cum tanta suavitate che pari una gondola che da dui rimi spintan sia per quelle undicelle* [maintain the mean of your movement that is – not too much nor too little. With smoothness, appear like a gondola that is propelled by two oars through waves].<sup>101</sup>

In these ways, Domenico and Guglielmo's texts question the primacy and essential place of the kinetic in choreography, admitting principles that reduce, regulate, and contain motion without following a specifically-motional logic. In this construal, a notion of choreography – even one expanding beyond the human – which is founded on its kinetic character and the performance of motion may not be fully adapted to *De pratica* and *De arte saltandi*. An expanded notion of choreography can inversely draw attention to Domenico and Guglielmo's dance's pauses as non-kinetic – but nevertheless choreographic – material.

## Conclusion

Choreography – if choreography is understood as dance-making – was practiced by Domenico da Piacenza and Guglielmo Ebreo da Pesaro, *balli* abounding in their writings and their students' ballrooms. But, if choreography conceives of dance as an activity that is disconnected from other human endeavours, it cannot grasp dance as a practice of ethics – targeting beauty as much as virtue – and as a socially-embedded practice which actively participates in definitions – or at least negotiations – of social stratification. And, if choreography is a practice of putting the human body into motion, then choreography was, again, practiced by Domenico and Guglielmo through specifications of corporeal technique and style, and combinations of steps and figures. But if choreography is assimilated to a solely physical/organic bodily practice, specific to its human performers, or to the authoring gesture of an autonomous human agent, it cannot grasp the spiritual in dance, the treatises' supra-human conception of

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takes up and sometimes refers to as *scosso*. Domenico da Piacenza: *De arte saltandi*, pp. 12–15, 22. Cf. also Sparti: Glossary, p. 223.

101 Domenico da Piacenza: *De arte saltandi*, pp. 12–13. The notion of moderation, here in its kinetic version, is associated by Domenico with virtue: ‘*per la mediocritade [...] sia conducta questa virtu singolare* [through moderation [...] this exceptional virtue is found]’, pp. 14–15.

*anthropos*, or dance creation guided by nature. And, if that choreography is founded upon the particularity of the kinetic, it excludes the treatises' trans-media principles and their embracing of stillness. In all these ways, *De Pratica* and *De arte saltandi* illustrate the shortcomings of essentialised conceptions of (physicalised) dance, (necessary) motion and the (human) body that have crept into choreographic discourse until today.

As is the case in certain manifestations of contemporary expanded choreography, Domenico and Guglielmo's distance from a choreography based on human corporal motion is not the result of a refusal of the body, human element, movement, or dance. Instead of a focus on the physical or spiritual, the treatises occupy a non-dualist territory, where both the former and the latter are concurrent aspects of the dancer and of dance. Instead of a unique focus on the human being or what lies beyond it, the treatises expand the human body and place the person in a universe structurally and qualitatively continuous with them. Instead of existing uniquely in movement or resisting movement, the treatises relativise the place of the kinetic as a performance mode and as a principle of choreographic creation. Between the physical and the spiritual, the human and the natural, motion and stillness, Domenico and Guglielmo's choreography illustrates a profoundly-ethical position that avoids extremes; an expanded-choreographic perspective thus points to and deconstructs the dichotomies projected upon their texts. This reading of the two dance masters acts as a reminder that if contemporary choreographic production is drawn to the non-human (as opposed to anthropocentrism), stillness (rather than motion), interdisciplinarity (as an alternative to medium specificity), or a decentralised-horizontal authorship (rather than singular authorial intention), this is also because it is bound to respond to constructed dichotomies that need not be. Pointing to a non-anthropocentric performance and authorship, the potentiality of translations between different media and fields, and a conception of motion that does not exclude its containment, Domenico and Guglielmo invite expanded choreography today to enter into a game of relationalities, correspondences, and transversalities, rather than one of negation – be it of dance, motion, or human corporeality.

## Conclusion to Part 1

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In 15<sup>th</sup>-century Italy, Domenico da Piacenza and Guglielmo Ebreo da Pesaro made dances for the nobility and developed dance technique to be embodied by human movers; in 17<sup>th</sup>-century France, Saint-Hubert wrote about ballets with dances performed by human beings embodying steps and gestures; a little over half a century later, Raoul Auger Feuillet's *Chorégraphie* notated (and possibly composed) dances, referring to certain body parts and motions in its graphic signs. Domenico, Guglielmo, Saint-Hubert, and Feuillet are thus relevant to choreography as dance-making and to choreography as a practice of the human body in motion. But, choreography's association with dance diverts attention away from Saint-Hubert's multimedia, heterogeneous view of ballet; his non-identification of dance and ballet; and the role of practitioners – such as the “master of order” – who were creative forces without being “choreographers”. Further, choreography's association with human corporeality diverts attention away from Feuillet's imagining of a dance residing on paper, and the *Chorégraphie*'s logic of space representation, not conceived from the perspective of the embodied subject. And, finally, this vision of choreography diverts attention away from Guglielmo and Domenico's *misura* as a fundamental dance-making principle which is not, however, essentially kinetic; Domenico's notion of *fantasmata* and the containment of movement as part of dance; as well as Saint-Hubert's *sujet*, a non-physical and non-kinetic basis for ballet-making. While the texts analysed here do not negate a dance-, movement-, and/or human body-based conception of choreography, they are not fully describable by it either.

To use the same examples as Part 1's introduction, the claim that 16<sup>th</sup>-century pavaues or early-17<sup>th</sup>-century court ballets were choreographed is not historiographically problematic because it is an anachronism; rather, it is historiographically problematic if it is a dominant anachronism that obscures the complexity of historical practices. Proposing an expanded-choreographic

framework for reading such practices preposterously (in Mieke Bal's terms<sup>1</sup>) activates contemporary ideas as tools to decentralise that dominance. To be sure, Domenico, Guglielmo, Saint-Hubert, and Feuillet are part of choreographic history because – even if they did not use the word “choreography”, or its later meaning(s) – their work was related to bodily, kinetic, dance practices. At the same time, contemporary expanded choreography widens what choreography may be, and what “counts” as choreography, thus suggesting that the sources studied here are also part of choreographic history because this history is *not* limited to such practices. It therefore points to Saint-Hubert's intermedia spectacle, Feuillet's figured abstraction, and Domenico's performance of stillness as choreographic in themselves, rather than as peripheral aspects of a primarily-dancerly, -physical, or -kinetic choreography.

Beyond drawing attention to these sources' multiple inscriptions in choreographic history, an expanded choreographic perspective illustrates their relevance for contemporary (expanded) choreography. In his book *Dance as Text: Ideologies of the Baroque Body* – which greatly contributes to an awareness of the relevance of pre-18<sup>th</sup>-century dance practices in contemporaneity – Mark Franko notes: “[t]he historicist tendency to see the old in the new is characteristic of reconstruction. Its master conceit is to evoke what no longer is, with the means of what is present. [...] Seeing the new in the old, on the other hand, is a pinpointing of radical historicity in former production.”<sup>2</sup> The possible links between Domenico, Guglielmo, Saint-Hubert, Feuillet, and expanded choreography are not meant to imply that there is “still” a trace of the Renaissance or the baroque in contemporary choreographic expansions; dance practices from several centuries ago do not necessarily transmit a fragment of their authenticity to the present. Rather, such links suggest that certain pre-18<sup>th</sup>-century dance practices were as radical as (certain) contemporary ones – and that contemporary choreographic expansions, without necessarily bearing traces of the past, can branch out and find their place in relation to it. The historiographic and artistic importance of this fact is non-negligible; it implies that expanded choreography should be placed in a macro-historical framework, and that its practice can inscribe itself in vertical, transhistorical networks beyond horizontal and synchronous ones.<sup>3</sup>

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1 Bal, Mieke: *Quoting Caravaggio: Contemporary Art, Preposterous History*, Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press 1999.

2 Franko, Mark: *Dance as Text: Ideologies of the Baroque Body*, New York: Oxford University Press 2015 [1993], p. 133.

3 On the interaction of these axes see Foster, Hal: *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*. Cambridge/London: MIT Press, 1996, p. xii.

Placing contemporary expanded choreography in such macro-historical frames of reference highlights common problematics in historically- and contextually-distant sources, and in so doing constructively feeds contemporary debates. In the context of a contemporary choreographic field affirming – in practice and performance, but also in funding applications and institutional requests – its desire for interdisciplinarity, one must remember that modernist discipline classifications in the arts are – recent – historical constructs; that in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Saint-Hubert and his fellows did not doubt the intermedia nature of performance and the interdisciplinary work of its creators. In the context of a contemporary choreographic practice and theory grappling with the subversive, yet relieving, effects of staged stillness, one might consider the quantity of ink dedicated to understanding Domenico's inclusion of danced pose and pause as a symptom of later ideological changes that equated dance with motion.<sup>4</sup> In the context of contemporary choreography being transferred to non-corporeal media – for example, William Forsythe's *Synchronous Objects* (2009), which responded to an all-too-physical view of dance – one is reminded of Feuillet's choreographic figures, conceivable without the body. In the context of a contemporary expansion of choreography pushing against the prevalence of human bodies or physicalised dances, an expanded choreographic perspective on pre-18<sup>th</sup>-century sources indicates that this oppositional dialectic is the result of essentialised and entrenched, but *contingent*, dichotomies; it is an undoing of what had not yet been done, and that, as such, can become the making of something else.

A corollary to questioning these contingencies is the variability of the terms with which “choreography” has been co-defined in the sources considered here and the dance cultures surrounding them. If a dancerly, physical, or kinetic conception of choreography is not fully applicable to these texts, this is because this specific conception of choreography's entanglement with dance and/or bodily motion is only partly adequate, but also because the terms that define this conception vary in their context. Saint-Hubert's conception of dance as a non-autonomous part of a multimedia whole is as symptomatic of his context's pre-modernist approach to performance as a modernist “autonomous” dance is symptomatic of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Feuillet's dualist body is as much a marker of his peri-Cartesian French framework as current organic and sensorial conceptions of the body are markers of a response to such a framework. Guglielmo's human being reflects a pre-industrialised rapport with nature, just as pushbacks to this rapport are relevant in today's world facing ecological urgency.

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4 Cf. Lepecki, André: *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the Politics of Movement*, Oxon/New York: Routledge 2006.

Beyond recognising the plurality of choreographic history and feeding into contemporary interrogations, the decentralisation of a prominent choreographic conception – through an expanded choreography perspective – in the reading of these sources points to future directions within the historical study of choreography. These necessitate undoing the expectations imposed by subsequent, entrenched choreographic mentalities (i.e. a physicalised nature of dance, an organic nature of the body, the necessity of visible displacement in dance, or the medium specificity of both choreography and dance). This undoing need not imply a focus on the absence that meets such expectations, but, rather, a push towards the development or reactivation of terms that name and describe what is present. Rather than looking for motion or its absence, look for *fantasmata*; rather than looking for embodiment or disembodiment, look for a choreographic *figure*. Such a shift reconsiders the study of choreography, so as to examine composite performances where intermedia relations are prioritised over medium-specific creation, or transfer and translation processes across artistic formats, as choreographic material. It re-evaluates who the agents practicing that choreography may be, incorporating mediators of interdisciplinary work like the *maître d'ordre* and creators of non-corporeal formats like choreographers. Additionally, it rethinks choreography's frame of inscription, broadening it to encompass performance and aesthetics but also politics and ethics. It is such choreographic histories that an expanded-choreographic perspective on these sources develops; and it is in such histories – rather than in a break from them – that the contemporary works examined in Part 2 are inscribed as well.



## **Part 2: Expanded choreographies of the now**



## Introduction to Part 2

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Choreography goes beyond the production and performance of dance. Money follows choreographic paths in its endless exchanges from person to person (Peter Stamer and Daniel Aschwanden have tracked its choreography in *The Path of Money*, 2008). Information forms choreographic patterns in its spread. A car engine is choreographed by its designers. Religious rituals give rise to collective choreographies. Smartphone users execute the swiping and tapping gestures choreographed by their devices. Thoughts move around in choreographic – improvised or not – circles, jumping from one idea to the next, in a cognitive interiorisation of the hyperlink. Groups of fish migrate, water flows, and air forms currents in an endless choreography of nature. This entrance of choreography into diverse, expanded domains is recognised by multiple voices in the dance field. Gabriele Brandstetter asks:

What could a choreography beyond dance look like? [...] Choreography – a moving arrangement of bodies in space and time: the formation and movement of a procession or parade, the decoration of a gala dinner, the curatorial organisation of space for an exhibition's visitors, or the ebb and flow of people in a city's streets and public spaces.<sup>1</sup>

Susan Foster provides another possible response:

Sometimes designating minute aspects of movement, or alternatively, sketching out the broad contours of action within which variation might occur, choreography constitutes a plan or score according to which movement unfolds. Buildings choreograph space and people's movement through them; cameras choreograph cinematic action; birds perform intricate choreographies; and combat is choreographed. Multiprotein complexes choreograph DNA repair; sales representatives in call centers engage in improvisational choreography; families undergo-

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1 Brandstetter, Gabriele: *Choreography Beyond Dance: A Dance Promise*, in: Basteri, Guidi & Ricci: *Rehearsing Collectivity*, p. 45.

ing therapy participate in choreography; web services choreograph interfaces; and even existence is choreographed.<sup>2</sup>

This expansion of choreography is not only a metaphorical activation, but symptomatic of an interrogation of choreography's boundaries, applicability, and relevance. One response to this interrogation is the insistence on the physical and kinetic nature of choreography in continuity with its recent history. This is supported by responses to the 2007 CORPUS survey that suggest choreography is 'organization of movement in time and space' (Tim Etchells), 'the arrangement of movement in space' (Michael Stolhofer), 'the organisation of elements in space-time, that is, the organisation of movement' (Thomas Lehmen), 'Operationalisation of Body Movement' (Claudia Jeschke), 'a set of rules which organises body movement in time and space' (Julia Wehren).<sup>3</sup> These definitions consider choreography to be a physical and kinetic practice that may or may not participate in fields beyond dance. Another response takes the path of widening, through choreographic expansions, what the posited "dancerly", "kinetic", or "physical" nature of choreography may be – what *counts* as dance, motion, and a body. After the years-long debates in which the European dance field engaged with (and critiqued) such terms as "conceptual dance" and "non-dance" – insisting that dance encompass (what is normativised as) its Other, incorporate non-human performers, or engage with immobility – the expansion of choreography contributes to a diversification of the very terms that form part of choreography's essentialised definition. Inversely, another response is to negate the necessity of choreography's relation with corporealities and motions, as reflected in the programmatic Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA) text that pushed the term "expanded choreography" into the discursive forefront and claimed that (expanded) choreography was becoming 'disconnected from subjectivist bodily expression'.<sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless, beyond such an interplay of choreography expanding *as* a corporeal, kinetic practice, or in a negation of that very practice, a multiple choreographic history is a reminder that choreography is not only defined in relation to these notions. This implies a step away from applying existing conceptions of choreography to new kinds of entities and contexts – to objects and thoughts, urban spaces or architecture, animals or information – *and* from

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2 Foster, Susan Leigh: *Choreographing Empathy: Kinesthesia in Performance*, Oxon/New York: Routledge 2011, pp. 2–3; see p. 219, note 1 for the sources from which these terms come.

3 All quoted in CORPUS: Survey What does "choreography" mean today?, 2007, <http://www.corpusweb.net/introduction-to-the-survey.html> (Archive copy from October 2015).

4 Expanded Choreography. Situations, Movements, Objects..., Conference presentation, MACBA 2012, <http://www.macba.cat/en/expanded-choreography-situations> (August 2020).

negating, in a closed-circuit dialogue, those conceptions. In other words, a multiple choreographic history invites consideration not of the expandability of a stably-defined choreography, but the expandability of what choreography can be, how it can itself change. Part 2 of this book seeks *this* expanded choreography, by allowing non-dancing, non-moving, and/or non-human bodies to trouble what choreography itself is and does. Choreographic history is a reminder that if choreography changes, it does so in a non-linear collection of diverse and, at times, synchronous paradigms. Correspondingly, looking at expanded choreography from the perspective of a multiple choreographic history implies looking not for a new-but-stable definition, but for multiple, small or large shifts. Thus, Part 2 explores the diversity of “what else” (expanded) choreography may be – its multiple, coexisting, and interlinked (but not identical) expansions.

An understanding of choreographic history as multiple also reminds us that different historical configurations of choreography do not linearly succeed each other, but, rather, recur, adapting to new cultural, artistic, and aesthetic contexts. Current expansions cannot be understood as ruptures, or new “chapters” of choreographic history that replace previous ones. Rather than being disconnected from previous models, they are, in their contemporary specificity, relatable to choreographic histories. In effect, if a reading of Saint-Hubert, Raoul Auger Feuillet, Domenico da Piacenza, and Guglielmo Ebreo da Pesaro through an expanded choreographic lens prompts the development of alternative choreographic histories [Part 1], it is also true that contemporary expanded choreographies – gazed at parallaxically<sup>5</sup> from the past they help conceive – can appear both as challenges to dominant and entrenched choreographic models, and as parts of these alternative choreographic histories. In this sense, Parts 1 and 3 of this book are the result of an expanded choreographic perspective, while also feeding into view(s) of the present developed in Part 2. This bidirectional connection between the present and the past does not imply a history of continuities, re-creations, or exact reflections; what today’s choreographic expansions perform are *other* responses to questions that historical expansions pose about the necessity of a dancerly, kinetic, physical choreography.

Part 2 fleshes out these responses through three case studies that illustrate contemporary, theoretical and practical, shifts in choreography and their historical relatability. Chapter 4 examines a series of videos made with a kinect camera by French artist Mathilde Chénin – pieces where the moving human body appears in the process of production and then disappears, to be replaced by lines and planes on a screen. Drawing from contemporary choreographic

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5 Foster, Hal: *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*. Cambridge/London: MIT Press 1996, p. xii.

theory – including Stamatia Portanova’s view of a radically-disembodied choreography resulting from digital culture and Márten Spångberg’s programmatic views on the media expansion of choreography – Chapter 4 seeks the choreographic within the videos and their digital-creation process. Arguing for an ontological multiplication of choreography in diverse materialities, Chapter 4 constitutes a potential contemporary response to Feuillet’s construal of choreographies as more-than secondary, peripheral, documentary elements [Chapter 2]. Chapter 5 looks at a stage work by Spanish choreographer Olga Mesa, in which the choreographer/performer’s moving, dancing body is caught in a multimodal network of sounds, texts, objects, screens, reflections, music, and light. Here, contemporary activations of assemblage theory in the analysis of choreography – by Petra Sabisch and Rudi Laermans, among others –, Ana Vujanović’ identification of the choreographic between (non-dance) media, and theorisations of choreography’s proximity to dramaturgy, allow present reconfigurations of Saint-Hubert’s ballet’s problematics [Chapter 1] to appear. Finally, Chapter 6 considers a public-space installation created by U.S.-born choreographer William Forsythe, embodied by apparently-immobile plants and water. Referring, among others, to concepts of Deleuzian philosophy that Erin Manning introduced in the analysis of (his) choreographic installations, the chapter reads Forsythe’s work as an ecology performing virtual motion – thus branching out to Domenico and Guglielmo’s non-anthropocentric, non-primarily kinetic, choreographic compositions [Chapter 3]. Like their historical counterparts, these chapters move beyond choreography’s general expandability – for example, as a result of its association with omnipresent motion – or an undifferentiated description of its being – for example, as a result of its negative definition as *not* (only) dance or *not* (only) kinetic – towards a collection of distinct, but interrelated, specificities.

Chénin, Mesa, and Forsythe’s works are related to choreography in diverse ways; in some cases nominally, by being referred to as choreographic by their creators; in others contextually, by being related to choreographic training and pedagogy, having been presented in choreographic institutions and venues, and being related to other choreographic works; conceptually, by being related to ideas relevant to choreographic practice; and/or practically, by being produced by artists engaging with choreographic praxis. Based on the heterogeneity of expanded choreography and its non-authoritative function as a term, the selection of these works was not limited to pieces that are called “expanded choreographies”, thus resisting the transformation of a malleable notion into a stable grid or a categorical “labelling”. These three works illustrate three different modes of being of (expanded) choreography – as a stage performance (Mesa), a physically-present but not-theatrically-framed installation (Forsythe), and a (digital) screen

work based on a mass of data (Chénin) – thus also illustrating the multiplicity of choreographic expansion.

Since these works were available to be watched or visited, Part 2 shifts the focus of analysis from written documents (treatises) to choreographic works. Nevertheless, the possibility of “directly” experiencing these pieces troubles notions of liveness and physical co-presence as bases for accessing choreography – while Mesa’s work is a performance and experiencing Forsythe’s piece means visiting the installation, walking around it, touching it, and being in it, in the case of Chénin, there is an “indirect” experience of watching the work online, in a small web-video window. The chapters that follow are therefore not construed as analyses of staging or performance (as opposed to analyses of text), but engage with the works’ different materialities and medialities, including text when relevant (e.g. in Mesa’s piece, text is spoken). In these non-exclusively performative or corporeal sources, what follows identifies the relationality of the present with a past whose paper and textual sources are as much indicators of an embodied dance praxis as they are illustrations of a choreography that outflanks it.





## Chapter 4: Programming (as) choreography: a series of kinect videos by Mathilde Chénin

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A simple video format is presented online – no transfer to monitor or large-scale projection for an exhibition space, just a link, a click, and a small-sized window typical of video-sharing web platforms. White, flat backgrounds. On them, coloured lines appear and disappear, sometimes too quickly for the eye to follow. They join to temporarily form planes that will twist, shift, and disband, replaced by a different form a few seconds later. The shapes constantly change but do not radically vary, remaining in a state of continuous but undifferentiated novelty, neutralising any appreciation of new-ness. No sound accompanies their movements, which end as abruptly as they start after a few minutes of activity.

In the early 2010s, visual artist Mathilde Chénin was interested in certain aspects of choreographic practice – most notably scoring – and in ‘*pratiques algorithmiques* [algorithmic practices]’,<sup>1</sup> including programming in object-oriented languages.<sup>2</sup> These concurrent interests led her to explore their interrelations in a series of video works using kinect cameras: *Prototype distance* (2011), *Danse pour deux dans la cuisine, petit déjeuner* (2012), *Danse pour deux dans un escalier, un dimanche* (2012), and *CLOb* (Collective Large Object, 2013).

As a visual artist, Chénin is an example of the choreographic field’s expansion, integrating practitioners that come from educational/training backgrounds that are not (solely) corporeally and kinetically focussed. In this way, her work exemplifies how (expanded) choreography has migrated towards artistic fields beyond dance, as well as the methods, approaches, and aesthetic paradigms implicated by such a migration. This migration can be understood in a context which has seen choreography come closer to the visual arts, resulting in novel formats, modes of presentation, and production/reception processes. Therefore, while Chapters 5 and 6 investigate expanded works by artists firmly anchored within a choreographic frame of reference – be it through their education, biography, artistic methods, or presentation formats – Chénin’s positionality

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1 Cf. for instance Chénin, Mathilde: Untitled Research Project, undated, unpublished, p. 1.

2 Chénin, Mathilde: Interview with the author (July 2016 and September 2017).

provides insights into translations that occur when choreography is reactivated but also *transformed* within other artistic fields. As outlined below, her series of kinect videos touches upon cornerstone notions in choreographic history and theory – notably scoring, notation, and writing – thus manifesting the way such notions may be interrogated from an interdisciplinary position.

Kinect cameras are motion-sensing and motion-capture devices; they were mainly conceived as commercial technology (e.g. for gaming), but they have been appropriated in ways that deviate from commerce-related applications. They collect data on movement in two ways: skeleton tracking – the camera recognises a human skeleton and follows its movements across time – or the creation of “depth maps”.<sup>3</sup> To create a depth map, the kinect camera emits an infra-red laser beam that hits and bounces back from objects; the camera can then infer the distance and hence the position of the object in space. Doing this for all surfaces in its scope, a kinect camera generates a “map” with coordinates of depth-positions. To create her series of videos, Chénin placed people moving in front of (a) kinect camera(s) and programmed the camera(s) to collect different kinds of information – including the position of specific parts and limit-points (i.e. the highest, lowest, further right and left points) of each body – and to update this information as long as the bodies remained within its/their scope.<sup>4</sup> In her videos, this information is translated into visual forms made of lines and planes. These forms may represent the distance between points within a single body – e.g. neck to wrist joint [Figure 13] – or what the artist calls the ‘*espace limite* [liminal space]’ of bodies – i.e. the form defined by the highest, lowest, furthest-right and furthest-left points of a single body; or the distance between the bodies of two different users [Figure 14].<sup>5</sup>

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3 Technical information about kinect cameras was provided by Mathilde Chénin and only relates to the version of the kinect she used. Kinect cameras also have RGB sensors. Ibid.

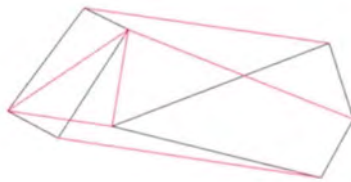
4 Ibid.

5 Chénin, Mathilde: Email to the author, June 2016.

Figure 13: Video still from Mathilde Chénin's *Prototype distance*. A central point (head or neck) is connected to other body parts. Source: Chénin, Mathilde: *Prototype distance*, 2011 variable durations, <http://www.mathildechenin.org/proto/prototype-distance/> (August 2020). No re-use without permission.



Figure 14: Video still from Mathilde Chénin's *Danse pour deux dans un escalier, un dimanche*. The planes formed by the black lines represent the “liminal space” of each user, while the red lines represent the distance between the two users. Source: Chénin, Mathilde: *Danse pour deux dans un escalier, un dimanche*, Québec: *La Chambre Blanche* 2012, 01:47, <http://www.mathildechenin.org/proto/danse-pour-deux-dans-un-escalier-un-dimanche/> (August 2020). No re-use without permission.



Therefore, the source of the videos is the human body and its actions; at the same time, however, the result presents no anthropomorphic form and, without knowledge of the production process, it is possible to completely overlook the connection to a human body figure. The works are related to dance nominally (through the titles of two of the videos), but their performance of dance remains metaphorical, replaced by low-key, abstract video art. Based on these discrepancies, this chapter interrogates how Chénin's series of videos are choreographic and, consequently, what conception of choreography is ac-

tive within them. Drawing on an analysis of the videos themselves – as well as a series of discussions with the artist and a review of her writings – it presents the works as enacting a qualitative transformation of choreography through its existence in media including, but not limited to, the (dancing) body – rather than through a focus on the loss, absence, or technological mediation of corporeality. This transformation uncouples choreography and embodiment by investing in a multiple choreographic ontology, also displayed by Feuilletian choreo-graphies in their multiple, (im)material forms [Chapter 2].

### **A corporeal source of reference that is lost**

The starting point for all the videos considered here is bodily movement. In *Prototype distance* and *Danse pour deux dans un escalier, un dimanche*, these movements are simple improvisational dance motions performed by Chénin herself and an uncredited second person [the “users”]. In *Danse pour deux dans la cuisine, petit déjeuner*, as may be expected, they are “everyday” motions of two people taking breakfast. In *CLOb*, they are the movements of a group of people collectively trying to build a dome structure out of individual pieces [Figures 15 and 16].

*Figure 15: The dome of CLOb in construction. Photograph: Ouidade Soussi-Chiadmi and Pierre Friour. Source: Chénin, Mathilde: CLOb (Collective Large Object), undated, <http://www.mathildechenin.org/clob/clob-collective-large-object/> (August 2020). No reuse without permission.*



Figure 16: The completed dome of CLOb. Photograph: Ouidade Soussi-Chiadmi and Pierre Friour. Source: Chénin, Mathilde: CLOb (Collective Large Object), undated, <http://www.mathildechenin.org/clob/clob-collective-large-object/> (August 2020). No re-use without permission.



In the case of *Prototype distance*, the camera “knows” that the objects in its optic field are human bodies, as the programme Chénin created requires the kinect to track skeletons. Here, the camera recognises human bodies by following their joints’ movement across time; this includes how each person’s joints relate to each other and to another person’s joints in space.<sup>6</sup> Even when skeleton recognition is not active – i.e. when the camera only registers the body as one more volume that bounces back laser beams – the videos contain information drawn from the bodies that acted in front of the camera, including how the “limit” points of each person form geometric shapes (*Danse pour deux dans un escalier, un dimanche; Danse pour deux dans la cuisine, petit déjeuner; CLOb*), or via the form created in the space between two different bodies (*Danse pour deux dans un escalier, un dimanche; Danse pour deux dans la cuisine, petit déjeuner*). Chénin confirms this basis in the movements of the human body by connecting her thinking when developing her programmes with Rudolf Laban’s notion of the kinesphere – a visualisation and conceptualisation of the space around the body.<sup>7</sup> A Labanian influence is also identifiable in the notion of the “*espace limite*” – the two-dimensional plane occupied by a single body and defined by its extremities – that is visually similar to Laban’s vertical and horizontal planes.

Even if the videos are based on people moving, some of them expand to also capture the movement of non-human, inanimate presences in the kinect camera’s field. For example, in *Danse pour deux dans la cuisine, petit déjeuner*,

6 Chénin: Interview.

7 Chénin: Untitled Research Project, p. 5.

objects used in breakfast were captured by the camera even if this was not Chénin's intention.<sup>8</sup> In *CLOb*, it was one of the work's aims to introduce inanimate objects and record their interactions with human users; the artist and her collaborators Bachir Soussi-Chiadmi and Sarah Garcin programmed the camera to also capture the positions of the coloured sticks manipulated by the participants in order to form the dome.<sup>9</sup> Such simultaneous treatments of animate and inanimate, human and non-human performers reveal the kinect's camera's telling confusions between the two. In the case of the breakfast scene – where objects were not purposefully recorded – the camera sometimes interpreted them as extensions of a human body, amalgamating them with their user. In other words, since its skeleton tracking system was off, it could not tell whether or not the object in question was a human being. Even when the skeleton tracking system is on, the camera can miss the human figure; in order for it to recognise a body in an unusual position – for instance bent in two or performing a headstand – it would have to track its movements from a standard starting position (standing upright with arms in the air).<sup>10</sup> In the case of the dome construction, the double interest in the motion of human and non-human entities was translated into practice by instructing the camera to use different programmes for each; it projected its infra-red beam to create a depth-map recording human movements, while simultaneously applying a colour-recognition programme to capture the sticks – a complex procedure whose results were not fully representative of the scene.<sup>11</sup> In other words, in the world of the kinect – especially in cases where no skeleton recognition is used – the limits between animate and inanimate bodies, human and non-human ones, are fuzzy.

Apart from bringing the representation of human and non-human movements closer, the creation of the visualisations includes dephysicalisation; the movement in the videos is detached from the material, organic, living medium which initially moved. Consequently, the videos marginalise the purportedly-fundamentally corporeal mode of reception that emerges in response to dance as a bodily act, relating to what John Martin termed “metakinesis”.<sup>12</sup> The videos' disembodiment render corporeally-empathetic processes of reception inadequate. Moreover, the videos display a depersonalisation of motion through abstraction; the users are visualised by generic lines, with no correspondence to their specific identities or situations. While using motion-capture technology,

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8 Chénin: Interview.

9 Chénin: Email.

10 Chénin: Interview.

11 Chénin: Email.

12 Martin, John: *The Modern Dance*, Princeton: Dance Horizons 1989 [1933], pp. 12–15.

therefore, the videos are opposed to one of the main traits of choreographic applications of such technologies, as explained by artists Martine Epoque and Denis Poulin:

[M]otion capture (Mocap) makes it possible to cut off dance from one of its fundamental characteristics: the obligatory presence of [sic] physical human body. But if Mocap permits to release the dance of the dancer's body, undoubtedly it does not allow releasing the dancer himself. On the contrary, while making it possible to extract his "motion signature", which is quite as specific and representative as his figure, it restores his presence not by his morphology but by his particular way of moving.<sup>13</sup>

Here, not only is the physical body absent, but the individual "signature" – the specificity of the performer – that Epoque and Poulin describe is deviated from as well. Any expression, individual colour, or mood in the movements of the kinect's users are erased in the final product. In these ways, the videos both undo a vision of dance as a primarily-embodied practice and respond to a view of expanded choreography as being 'disconnected from subjectivist bodily expression, style and representation. [...] not a priori performative, nor [...] bound to expression and reiteration of subjectivity'.<sup>14</sup> Through dephysicalisation, depersonalisation, and abstraction, the videos are distanced from the initial corporeal medium. This distance is a concern present in dance notation and scoring, implicating the translation of corporeal motion into, for example, drawing, graphic sign, or letter/text (notation) and vice versa (score). However, while the videos share this consideration with scores and notations, their relationship with embodied (dance) action reveals that they are not reducible to either.

The first reason why the videos fail to function as documentations or notations of corporeal actions is that they *cannot*; quite simply, the kinect camera makes far too many mistakes for a reliable notation.<sup>15</sup> At times, as described above, the camera cannot differentiate between separate objects, creating amalgams of users and their object-extensions (the same issue may arise if two people move in very close contact). At other times, the camera mistakes elements in the background for humans, tracking users who are not there or, inversely, misregistering that a user has left its field of capture when they

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13 Epoque, Martine & Poulin, Denis: Nobody Dance. An On-screen Choreography Introducing 'Dance Without Body', in: Tercio, Daniel (ed.): *TeDance - Perspectives on Technologically Expanded Dance*, Cruz Quebrada: Faculdade de Motricidade Humana 2009, p. 74.

14 Expanded Choreography. Situations, Movements, Objects..., Conference presentation, MACBA 2012, <http://www.macba.cat/en/expanded-choreography-situations> (August 2020).

15 Information about these technical limitations was provided in Chénin: Interview.

have only increased their distance from the camera. The light illuminating the scene, the number of background objects creating visual noise, and high-speed movements can all interfere with the camera's function too. Other obstacles of accurate representation are not related to the camera as hardware, but to the visualisation of its data; the "original" movement speed cannot, for example, always be reliably translated in the video due to technical-display limitations. By concealing the exact durations of the movements, the video is incapable of transmitting their dynamics, replacing them with the dynamics of its own geometrical performers.

These issues may be due to the limited technical knowledge of the artist – who is not a specialised kinect user – and may have been resolved in more-recent and technically-advanced cameras. Nevertheless, even if there was technical proficiency and capacity to accurately represent the actions in front of the camera, Chénin has made specific choices that indicate this was not her aim; the videos are not notations also because they purposefully undermine movement reconstructability. The lines and planes in the works do not visually resemble the body's forms; this may be a characteristic of several notation systems – Labanotation being a prime example – but, in contrast, Chénin's de-anthropomorphised forms do not allow us to *infer* the body's posture, either. Visualisations connecting different joints of a single body provide no information as to which parts of the body are concerned – and therefore thwart reconstructing the body's position. Similarly, a plane defined by the highest, lowest, furthest-left, and furthest-right points of a body provides no information about the position the body is in. A rhombus-shaped plane could correspond to a figure defined by a head, two spread arms, and two feet together on the ground; or to a figure with one arm over the head, one arm spread to the side, one foot on the ground and one leg lifted to the other side. The artist sees this vagueness as positive – valuing the fact that each shape could correspond to multiple postural possibilities – since the representation of corporeal posture is not her goal: *'le corps n'est pas représenté dans les vidéos justement pour brouiller la hiérarchie habituelle des parties du corps* [the body is not represented in the videos precisely in order to blur the habitual hierarchy of body parts]'.<sup>16</sup> Beyond postures, the videos also render it impossible to understand the body's positions in space: in Figures 17 and 18, black lines draw the liminal spaces of users and red lines connect body parts of one user to another. In Figure 17, one cannot know if the small plane means that one user is behind their fellow user. Figure 18 could mean that the two users are directly in front/behind one another (their liminal spaces coinciding), or that one user has left the camera's field.

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16 Chénin: Email.



Figure 17: Video still from Mathilde Chénin's *Danse pour deux dans un escalier, un dimanche*. Source: Chénin, Mathilde: *Danse pour deux dans un escalier, un dimanche*, Québec: *La Chambre Blanche* 2012, 01:47, <http://www.mathildechenin.org/proto/danse-pour-deux-dans-un-escalier-un-dimanche/> (August 2020). No re-use without permission.



Figure 18: Video still from Mathilde Chénin's *Danse pour deux dans un escalier, un dimanche*. Source: Chénin, Mathilde: *Danse pour deux dans un escalier, un dimanche*, Québec: *La Chambre Blanche* 2012, 01:47, <http://www.mathildechenin.org/proto/danse-pour-deux-dans-un-escalier-un-dimanche/> (August 2020). No re-use without permission.



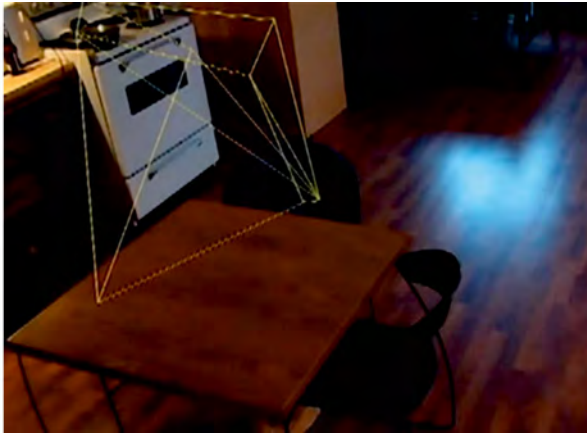
To intensify the viewer's incapacity to reconstruct movements, Chénin purposefully decontextualises her moving forms, presenting them in most cases against a white background, without any indication of scale.<sup>17</sup> Only in *Danse*

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

*pour deux dans la cuisine, petit déjeuner* – in which the kinect principle is applied to having breakfast – is the video superimposed on a photograph of the “real” breakfast table; the moving forms becoming foreign to their context [Figure 19].

Figure 19: Video still from Mathilde Chénin's *Danse pour deux dans la cuisine, petit déjeuner*. Source: Chénin, Mathilde: *Danse pour deux dans la cuisine, petit déjeuner*, Québec: *La Chambre Blanche* 2012, 01:50, <https://vimeo.com/39841965> (August 2020). No re-use without permission.



Therefore, the videos are the result of what bodies are doing, but are not accurate or complete representations of these actions. They contain neither a deincarnated visualisation of their movement – an iconic representation based on resemblance – nor a symbolic encoding of information that allows access to the “original” action. In other words, the videos’ forms do not function as bodily signifiers.<sup>18</sup> Rather, they function as quasi-signs; their capacity to signify and represent is not fulfilled, yet they exist as disconnected references to body parts and to relations between body parts or bodies.

Just as they are not notations, the videos are not scores, either – even if Chénin’s creative process did consider that the pieces could function in a generative way, like scores: ‘*mouvement données { objets partition } interprétation*

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18 In effect, the artist takes care to differentiate between her visual forms and language, since she does not consider their capacity to signify, or ‘code’ reality, is sufficiently precise: all occurrences of each sign (point, line, or plane) of this could-be language do not correspond to the same signified, therefore making it impossible to fully decode/read the videos’ content. Chénin : Interview.

*mouvement*] [movement data { objects score } interpretation movement]'.<sup>19</sup> This interest in scoring parallels the artist's desire to reduce the importance of subjective expression in her choreographic work:

*La contrainte, la règle qui dit quoi faire – et non pas comment faire – permet de désubjectiviser la pratique quelle qu'elle soit. Au sein d'une pratique d'improvisation chorégraphique [...] la contrainte, la règle, la partition permettent de créer des états de corps et de présences différents de ceux qui sont produits par une improvisation complètement libre, et qui en arrive presque inévitablement à une primauté de la sensation personnelle, du ressenti. [The restriction, the rule that says what to do – and not how to do – allows a de-subjectivisation of the practice, whatever that practice may be. In the framework of a practice of choreographic improvisation [...] the restriction, the rule, the score, allow creation of corporeal and presence states different from those that can be produced through completely free improvisation, and which thus almost inevitably leads to a primacy of personal sensation, of feeling].<sup>20</sup>*

But the idea of using the videos' lines and planes as scoring material was never realised, partly due to the artist's hesitations about the artistic interest of interpreting visual forms through movement.<sup>21</sup> This choice points to the fact that the criterion for the (non)use of the videos as scores – moving from images back to bodily physicality and performance – was not their initial connection with the body, but, rather, the specificity of the videos' forms as a new *kind* of (visual) material to be interpreted by dancers.

The videos, then, are not notations – if notations represent the body or its actions, and form reliable bases for the reconstruction of corporeal movement – and they are not scores – they do not aim to generate incarnated movements. They exist neither as a preliminary causal source nor as an aftereffect of physically-embodied performance; they are not secondary to performance. In this sense, the issue here is not the loss or postulation of embodied, phenomenologically-accessible performance, but the possible creation of a new type of object, not subordinated to its relationship with the body. The videos, in this reading, are not choreographic because they represent or mediate the choreography performed by a body, or because they generate choreography in bodies; they are – expanded – choreographic works capable of existing in multiple media. As such, they reflect contemporary interrogations about the necessity of choreographic embodiment – such as William Forsythe's question whether 'choreographic practice is not destined for another domain, not exclusively live

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19 Chénin: Untitled Research Project, p. 4.

20 Chénin, Mathilde: *Ici: un titre*, MA thesis, Cergy: Ecole nationale supérieure d'arts de Paris-Cergy 2011, upaginated.

21 Chénin: Untitled Research Project, p. 5.

performance'.<sup>22</sup> But they also reflect Feuilletian choreo-graphies' own distance from the necessity of embodiment. Feuillet notations cannot be understood through a contemporary view of notation; they are not documentation of an essentially-corporeal practice [Chapter 2]. And, it is precisely this latter view that the kinect videos reject, forming a critical response to a post-Feuilletian conception of (choreography as) notation, one to which Raoul Auger Feuillet's choreo-graphy also provides an alternative.

### Body, video, code - multiple choreographies

If the videos' forms as signifiers lose their link to the body, this is partly because they do not represent the body *per se*, but, rather, relations developing within it (one body part to another) or between it and other bodies. Similar to how the physicality and specificity of the body's action may seem lost in the realm of video, such relations may seem abstract as well – as illustrated by the last work in the series, *CLOB*. In this project, the artist was primarily interested in creating and observing a moment of participants being-together, and a moment between participants and materials. Invited to cooperate on the construction of a dome (based on designs by architect and author Richard Buckminster Fuller) – which would become a collectively-run greenhouse for a garden in northern Paris – participants interacted and exchanged, were and did together, and took part in a common space.<sup>23</sup> It was the reality of these interactions – this state of being together – that led to the work being the last in the kinect series. Apart from its multiple technical difficulties, the motion capture procedure did not detract from the experience of actually *being* together by drawing attention to the abstract representation of this togetherness.<sup>24</sup> The embodied, lived relationality thus seems ungraspable by the digital procedure. Yet, the video choreographies' relations are not devoid of reality.

In effect, while the experience of interpersonal (or object-personal) relations may be absent in the videos, there is a form of between-ness – of relationality – that is present in them. Paradoxically, this is not most evident in the video resulting from *CLOB*'s collaborative format – it does not trace lines among participants or between participants and objects – but in older pieces, where

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22 Forsythe, William & Hennermann, Célestine: Interview 11/2012, in: Hennermann, Célestine & deLahunta, Scott (eds.): *Motion Bank: Starting Points & Aspirations*, Frankfurt am Main: Motion Bank/The Forsythe Company 2013, p. 14.

23 Cf. Chénin, Mathilde: *CLOB (Collective Large Object)*, undated, <http://www.mathildechenin.org/clob/clob-collective-large-object/> (August 2020).

24 Chénin: Interview.

interactions may have been unintentional. The lines connecting body parts of different people in *Danse pour deux dans la cuisine, petit déjeuner* and *Danse pour deux dans un escalier, un dimanche* define a space that is not seen by the artist as “negative” or empty, but fully concrete and real; these lines mark a territory filled with a relation. Two people coexisting in space are not, in this perspective, divided by a gap; their being together creates a new form, a new volume in space, which, although immaterial or projected, bears witness to their interaction.<sup>25</sup> The videos make this immaterial, relational reality visible through a plane or a line; they show what is there, present between two physical beings – a fully real, but invisible, entity. In this sense, when a line appears in the video, it represents *and* embodies the relation between the kinect users. Relations – as Brian Massumi, referring to William James, would have it – ‘are no less fundamentally given, no less directly given, than discrete objects and their component properties. That they are directly given means that they are directly perceived. Relation is immediately perceived *as such*.’<sup>26</sup> The videos make the existence of the relation-as-such visible – often to the detriment of representing its poles. Consistent with this, while Chénin stopped working with kinect cameras – partly because her interests shifted towards collective forms of being – she does not see this move as a negation of, or in opposition to, her kinect experiments.<sup>27</sup> In other words, the relations that the kinect works visualise can be seen as building blocks for pieces focussing on experiences of *actually* being together. The lines in the videos – far from being empty abstract shapes – are ways of thinking of co-presence and co-being, of relation as something real.

If the forms in the videos represent, or even perform and embody, a reality, they may also have effects in their viewer’s experienced reality. In an unrealised elaboration of her kinect cameras series, Chénin planned to help spectators actually feel their existence in this in-between relational territory. For this project, she imagined an immersive space, wherein kinect cameras would collect positional data from a group of people moving in a room. Abstract visual representations of the inter-personal, dynamic space would be projected on the walls: ‘[l]es lignes apparaîtraient alors reliant littéralement les corps des personnes présentes dans l’espace de la pièce [the lines would therefore appear to be literally connecting the bodies of the people present in the space of the room]’.<sup>28</sup> If this project had been realised, it would have provided a feeling of the reality of

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25 Ibid.; Chénin : Email.

26 Massumi, Brian: *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*, Durham: Duke University Press 2002, pp. 230–231.

27 Chénin : Interview.

28 Chénin: Untitled Research Project, p. 9.

relational movement. However, the four videos studied here are mediators of real experiences too, their forms acting less as traces of an absent – because of being mediated, digitised, virtual – body and act, than as presences that can make new forms emerge.<sup>29</sup> This possibility is based on rupturing the strict relationship of signification between video forms and body; since the lines and planes do not function as a stable system of reference to bodily actions, they acquire an openness of interpretation, allowing unintended and unexpected action/relation images to appear. A quotation concerning scoring from one of Chénin's texts helps elaborate this thought:

*Je propose [...] des partitions chorégraphiques, gestuelles ou relationnelles, qui peuvent ou non donner lieu à des interprétations collectives. Ces dernières existent avant tout comme des textes-objets, des textes-dessins, contenant dans leur matière même l'ensemble des possibles auxquels ils peuvent donner corps [I propose [...] choreographic, gestural or relational scores, which can or not give rise to collective interpretations. These exist first and foremost as text-objects, text-drawings, containing in their very matter the totality of possibilities which they can engender].*<sup>30</sup>

Applying this perspective to the videos, the focus is not on what actions they have (not) given rise to, but on the actions or relations that *could* be generated from them – a choreographic practice that allows relational choreographic options to appear, whether or not the body ever incorporates them. This idea shifts focus from the videos as actual generators of real action/relation – viewed from the perspective of their tangible results – towards the videos as containers of – equally real – potential action/relation.<sup>31</sup> In this sense, the videos affect reality by generating real experiences of non-realised relation and/or action, as opposed to real experiences of real relation and/or action.

If Chénin's pieces take their starting point in real, experiencing, (dancing) bodies, they themselves depict the reality of an immaterial relation and may, furthermore, have effects in the real. Describing her work through these two poles, however, excludes a further, equally-real and -active, component: the code. Indeed, while Chénin's series of kinect works are video choreographies, the project has very little to do with video as a medium; as mentioned above,

29 Cf. for instance *ibid.*, p. 2.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 3, emphasis added.

31 Chénin sees these potential actions as virtualities residing within scores: '*le virtuel ne s'oppose pas au réel dans le sens où le corps y serait absent, mais il constitue au contraire une structure nouvelle – qui répond à ses propres règles et possède ses propres objets – dans laquelle le corps peut s'inscrire et s'investir* [the virtual does not oppose itself to the real in the sense of the body being *absent*, but on the contrary constitutes a new structure – which follows its own *rules* and possesses its own *objects* – in which the body can inscribe and engage itself'. Chénin: *Ici: un titre*, unpaginated. On the concept of virtuality see also Chapter 6.

the pieces are not framed as video works, but are only available online – more as illustrations, one is led to think, of the process that gave rise to them. It is in this respect that, despite the resulting video format, the kinect project is not essentially or primarily a choreographic-video work, but a choreographic-algorithmic one. The transformation of moving bodies to visual video forms is the result of combining kinect technology – the way in which the camera-object functions – and algorithmic “instructions” – what the artist has programmed the camera to do. Chénin very explicitly refers to choreographic and algorithmic *practices*,<sup>32</sup> indicating her focus on the process of programming, rather than the specific medium in which the programme is manifested. And, while an algorithm does need an interface to present results, it can also be considered independently of these results – in whatever medium they manifest. This is the proposition of Stamatia Portanova and Luciana Parisi, who argue for an aesthetic valourisation of code beyond its generative capacities, and beyond the ways in which it is perceived through an interface. Against an insistence on the productivity of code, ‘an operative mode of thinking “in” and “through” matter, in the sense of presupposing a corollary of material realizations [...] where an abstract code is always in need of being concretely *doing something*’,<sup>33</sup> the two researchers suggest concentrating on

the autonomy of code, “code in itself” [...] the very possibility for digital algorithms to be seen as what they primarily are, i.e. mechanisms for the processing and calculation of quantities of data, rather than instruments for the production of qualities/effects. It is mainly to this quantifying capacity that we ascribe the aesthetic value of software, a value that we want to associate not to sensorial perception but to something that we define as “thought”: a thinking not related to any subjective or conscious reflection but to the automated, abstract dimension of numbers.<sup>34</sup>

The possibility of concentrating on the code itself as choreographic material is supported by Chénin; she has expressed interest in presenting her algorithms themselves, and not their video-rendering. There are obstacles to this, mostly practical; many audiences cannot read code, raising questions of accessibility, and the programme includes code passages that are under protected copyright

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32 For example Chénin: Untitled Research Project, p. 1.

33 Parisi, Luciana & Portanova, Stamatia: Soft Thought (in Architecture and Choreography), in: *Computational Culture* 1 (2011), <http://computationalculture.net/soft-thought/> (August 2020), emphasis added.

34 Ibid.

(and therefore not openly publishable).<sup>35</sup> However, barring these issues, Chénin's works could be presented as lines of code to be read themselves, rather than videos resulting from lines of code. This would allow the reader to understand how their syntax can be generative of visual forms and how the algorithm arrives at its results. It would also allow an appreciation of the code for its own aesthetic and choreographic value. As Portanova and Parisi put it, numbers (and algorithms) 'do not have to produce something, and do not need to be transduced into colours and sounds, in order to be considered as aesthetic objects'.<sup>36</sup>

Just as the code's abstract existence and aesthetic value can be recognised, the algorithm's presence in the real is discernible too. This is again possible through a reflection on the code as a score which never functioned as one; the algorithm's generativity is the source of the video's multiple virtual, dormant options. It is interesting to consider the way in which these options may be grasped *as such* – not as physically-instantiated and accessible, body-residing events, but as abstract entities, which are nonetheless *there*, within the code. The experience of code and its content "as such" is compatible with Parisi and Portanova's incitation to focus on 'the numerical aesthetic of code with a more "abstract" kind of feeling, the feeling of numbers indirectly felt as conceptual contagions, that are conceptually felt but not directly sensed'.<sup>37</sup> It can also be related to Chénin's own writings, which indicate an interest in an experience of the abstract, the immaterial, by asking: '*[q]uelles sont les conséquences kinesthésiques, sociologiques, culturelles et politiques, du rapport inédit avec des données immatérielles [...]?*' [what are the kinaesthetic, sociological, cultural and political consequences of the novel relationship with immaterial data [...]?].<sup>38</sup> By being open to experiencing an abstract, immaterial – but, nonetheless, existing – entity, the multitude of possibilities of relation within the code's structure can be grasped. In this construal, the algorithmic choreography is not opposed to an embodied, lived reality, but has a reality of its own; it is not relegated to an inaccessible realm of incorporeal abstractness, waiting for embodiment in order to become real, but may be sensed as a purveyor of real experiences of potential relation. The programmes are not scores generating actual action, but territories in which virtual potentials can be experienced as such.

In this view – like how Feuillet notations circulated between bodies, pages, and signs [Chapter 2] – Chénin's works are tripartite, and oscillate between

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35 Chénin: Interview. Chénin has, similarly, been interested in scores as "plastic forms" in themselves. Chénin: Untitled Research Project, p. 1.

36 Parisi & Portanova: *Soft Thought*.

37 *Ibid.*

38 Chénin: Untitled Research Project, p. 8.



body, video, and code. And, like paper choreo-graphies were used by bodies and carried signs that communicated motions, the three parts of Chénin's kinect works are interconnected and influence each other, too: the camera has technical particularities limiting the code, the programme tells the camera what to do, the body provides input... However, while certain hierarchies do exist in Chénin's project – the body and code are “effaced” by the video – if one follows the above argument about the non-subordination of the video to bodily action; or Portanova and Parisi's arguments about the non-subordination of code to its (here, visual) expressions; or, for that matter, Feuillet's contemporaries' conception of choreo-graphies as aesthetic objects valid in themselves, beyond their communication value towards dancers; then choreography seems to equally exist in three different media, as three distinct, yet interconnected, entities. All three – body, video, code – are examples of choreography's multiplicity – manifestations of a plural choreographic ontology. A choreography can exist in bodies, videos, graphic/visual shapes, or code; these are not shadows of each other but parallel, interconnected, *different* ways of choreography's being that place it in a transmedia plane, undoing post-Feuilletian choreographic-corporeal essentialisms.

## Adaptive choreographic data

The multiplication of choreographic media seen in Chénin's work has been prominent in the years surrounding the appearance of a notion of expanded choreography. The choreographic field has seen the emergence of choreographed books (Dalija Acin, *Exercise for Choreography of Attention – “Point of no Return”*, 2012), choreographed exhibitions (Xavier Le Roy, “*Rétrospective*”, 2012-; Mathieu Copeland, *Chorégrapheur l'exposition*, 2008),<sup>39</sup> choreographed texts and ideas (Noé Soulier, *Idéographie*, 2011), choreographed postcards (Emilia Gasiorek, *Ghostcards*, 2014),<sup>40</sup> and choreographed sounds (MAMAZA & Nikel Ensemble, *The Nikel Project – Songs & Poems*, 2012). Similarly, the “foundational” MACBA text on choreographic expansion proposed that choreography ‘needs to remain inclusive’ of those choreographic artists who are ‘expanding towards cinematic strategies, documentary and documentation and rethinking publication, exhibition, display, mediatization, production and post-production’.<sup>41</sup> Choreographer Rasmus

39 Cf. Cvejic: “*Rétrospective*” par Xavier Le Roy; Copeland, Mathieu (ed.): *Chorégrapheur l'exposition*, Dijon: Les Presses du réel 2013.

40 Cf. Gasiorek, Emilia: *Ghostcards*, in: Caspao, Paula (ed.): *The Page as a Dancing Site*, Lisbon: Ghost Editions 2014, pp. 23–32.

41 Expanded Choreography. Situations, Movements, Objects...

Ölme has noted that '[c]horeography can engage in curating, production design, dramaturgy and image making'.<sup>42</sup> If choreographers can practice such an expanded choreography, their role as creative agents also becomes multiple, like choreo-graphers of the early-18<sup>th</sup> century – some of whom were dance makers, dancers, notators, editors, and graphic artists all in one [Chapter 2].

The process of choreographing varying media – be it a video, exhibition, sound, text, or (beyond the examples given above) a building, piece of clothing, or furniture – implicates applying knowledge, practices, and methods based on dance and the body in motion to media not habitually associated with dance and choreography. It is in this sense that one of the central claims of the MACBA text on expanded choreography – characterised as an 'open cluster of tools that can be used in a generic capacity'<sup>43</sup> – can be understood; and it is in this way that some of the works referred to above function. While applying a physical-kinetic choreographic thinking to other fields has been widely emphasised, the inverse contributions of other media and materialities to choreography's thinking modes can also be examined. Portanova's *Moving without a Body: Digital Philosophy and Choreographic Thoughts* (2013) studies how technology – notably, digital technologies – may think, or incite thinking, choreographically;<sup>44</sup> it therefore, in the present case, invites an investigation of what kinds of choreographic thinking a camera and a code may generate. It is these contributions that are examined in the remainder of this chapter, as a basis for understanding the "being-choreographic" of Chénin's videos.

The passage from bodily movement to kinect recording to algorithmic processing to video visualisation implicates successive transformations, in which the links between steps are partly lost. The physical body moves, but what the kinect camera "sees" (especially when not using skeleton-tracking) is not a moving body, but a collection of points forming volumes and repositioning themselves in spacetime. In this initial transformation, corporeal movement loses its inscription in a coherent body image, its possible gestural signification, and its eventual intentional expressivity; it becomes volume and points. The position points registered by the camera then enter a second transformation through the artist's programme; they are turned into lines, forming planes from which knowledge about volumes or positions in space is only partly recoverable. Each stage of transformation follows a particular logic; the units – from body

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42 Ölme, Rasmus: *From Model to Module: A Move towards Generative Choreography*, PhD thesis, Stockholm: DOCH University of Dance and Circus/Stockholm University of the Arts/KTH Royal Institute of Technology 2014, p. 40.

43 Expanded Choreography. Situations, Movements, Objects...

44 Portanova, Stamatia: *Moving without a Body: Digital Philosophy and Choreographic Thoughts*, Cambridge/London: MIT Press 2013.

part to position points to two-dimensional form – are processed differently in each stage.

This transformation has implications about how choreography is processed at each stage as well. When people see bodies moving, most think in terms of persons, limbs, actions, intentions, and gestures; when the camera sees bodies moving, it “thinks” in terms of position coordinates and points, and therefore does not – unless using skeleton tracking – see *bodies* moving. In effect, without skeleton tracking, the camera’s only way of knowing a body is present is through a process of “background subtraction”, wherein it distinguishes the pixels of moving figures from the pixels of an immobile background.<sup>45</sup> Similarly, if the camera thinks in terms of position and points, the video resulting from the code functions in two-dimensional geometrical forms – sets of lines – and only makes those forms visible. Kinect technology conventionally creates three-dimensional representations of the captured scenes; here, in contrast, the programme explicitly diverges from this and shifts the resulting image towards abstract forms. Each step of the transformation thus implicates a different way of thinking choreographically, rather than an exportation of physical thinking to new media.

Indeed, in discussions with Chénin, she frequently referred to the ways in which the kinect “thinks”, “sees”, or “perceives”; the user does not simply “make” the camera “do” things, but also needs to follow the camera’s logic, seeing material from its perspective. While kinect devices augment the range of what it is possible to do with the capture and recording of bodily movement, they also impose their own rules and limits on motion capture practices. There are three important points that emerge from this. Firstly, if the videos are expanded choreographies going “beyond” the human body, this is not only due to the dancing bodies being dematerialised and transformed; it is also partly because the human artist loses their position of control with respect to the media they utilise. In other words, it is not only the dancing subject that is abstracted and de-subjectified; it is also the author-subject that becomes multiple and partially non-human. Secondly, as a corollary, the influence of the kinect on the transformation of choreography draws attention to the limitations imposed by any medium, including the body. The idea that the artist has more control over the process by working with a body is a partial illusion, undone by the experience of working with the camera. Thirdly – and most importantly in the present discussion – the agency and effects of the kinect (the fact that it imposes its own particular logic) imply that choreography follows a logic that takes into account the camera’s specificities, behaviours, reactions, limits, capacities – and its mode of functioning, or “thinking”. Introducing discreteness into movement

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45 Chénin: Email.

is one such specificity of the kinect (and other cameras); it registers a series of separate motion-instants, therefore “cutting up” a continuous flow of motion into chunks or “kinetic snapshots”. This is a feature shared with cinema that has gently haunted movement concepts since Eadweard Muybridge’s photographic studies, here transposed into a digital process.<sup>46</sup> In the case of Chénin’s videos, the camera needs to decide, from a continuous train of motion, when to update data about bodies’ positions; the moments when the depth map will shift its landscape, creating *its own* train of motion. This occurs no matter how close the kinetic snapshots may be to one another in time; movement still needs to be cut into discrete bits for the depth map to update. Interestingly, the camera both imposes a “snapshotting” of movement before data is extracted, and partially determines the frequency at which this will happen: while the user can define the frequency at which the depth map’s coordinates will be “refreshed”, the choices are limited by the camera’s technical constraints.<sup>47</sup> The programmed camera, then, “sees” movement differently from human observers, transforming this movement into numerical information, and gathering and processing this movement information as discrete objects, rather than motional flow. The camera “thinks” in chunks, and it is this thinking that is visualised in the videos. Thus, the work “thinks” choreographically in a way introduced by the camera, and invites the viewer to do so as well.

If the camera thinks choreographically, the algorithm can do so too. Chénin has been interested in the ways in which computational processes, or algorithms, can become choreographic logics or ways of thinking. Notably, she has considered how algorithmic principles themselves organise thought, and how that information can be used choreographically. An example of this is her reflection on the transposition of programming syntax (based on Boolean connectives) to action, considering the possibilities of enacted responses to the “AND”, “OR” or “NO” values used in programming.<sup>48</sup> In a comparable way, one of media artist Mark Coniglio’s projects thought of choreography through principles drawn from computation, rather than merely adding computer technology to an already-defined choreographic practice.<sup>49</sup> For the 2009 piece *Loopdriver* – developed with the company Troika Ranch – a filmed dance sequence was processed, complexified, and lengthened with a looping tool software; the numerically-looped version was given as a score to dancers to perform with/in their bodies.

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46 Portanova: *Moving without a Body*, pp. 57, 74.

47 Chénin: Email.

48 Chénin: Untitled Research Project, p. 4.

49 Coniglio, Mark: Conclusion. Reflections, Interventions, and the Dramaturgy of Interactivity, in: Sutil, Nicolas Salazar & Popat, Sita (eds.): *Digital Movement: Essays in Motion Technology and Performance*, Basingstoke/New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2015 [2013], pp. 280–281.

Comparable to Chénin's reflection on choreographing through Boolean connectives, Coniglio 'adopted a rigorous process of composition that was, down at its core, technological in nature'<sup>50</sup> – one that thought choreographically through an algorithm, even though it was not performed by technological agents.

What is being sketched out here is a shift from choreography *using* digital technology to choreography functioning *through* modes of thinking attributable to computing – to a camera and code. Reflecting the need for such a shift, Coniglio has formulated a severe critique of “technologically-enhanced” dance, precisely because ‘it has not led us to any significant shifts in choreographic practice’; it has not allowed choreographers to conceive of their practice differently, but merely to ‘rely on an established choreographic practice and attempt to “splice in” the technological elements’.<sup>51</sup> In contrast, the process of successive transformations implicated in the production of Chénin's videos allows choreography to change, penetrated by the functioning and thinking of video and algorithms. Here, the technology is not an add-on to a corporeal choreographic practice, but is a medium through which choreography is invited to think anew. The skills necessary for choreographic practice are correspondingly modified; an acquaintance with the body and technical corporeal work are de-centralised, while an experience with, or knowledge of, non-corporeal, non-kinetic media (such as coding) becomes an expanded-choreographic skill.

Such shifts in choreographic thinking and practice are not, of course, limited to the digital; they apply to any medium or materiality that could contribute to an expanded choreographic practice. In this sense, choreography is un-attached to any specific medium and therefore applicable and adaptable to diverse ones. Mårten Spångberg provides a notion that resonates with this conception of the choreographic when he notes that ‘it's not a question of mixing and collaborating across media and disciplines, but *specifically doing choreography by way of* other media and disciplines’<sup>52</sup>; to describe such a practice of choreography, he proposes “media-multi” replace the term “multimedia”. Choreography is thus not (only) multimedia, but is also expanded by its adaptive capacity to take diverse forms *in* different kinds of media and materials.

This adaptability of choreography does not implicate its dissolution into “other” media, as expected by equating the choreographic with the posited, original, embodied practice; rather, it is the basis for a necessary shift in our

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50 Ibid., p. 281.

51 Ibid., p. 276.

52 Quoted in: Hoogenboom, Marijke: Who's Afraid of (Art) Education? Some Indecent Proposals, in: Melzweg, Ulrike, Spångberg, Mårten & Thielicke, Nina (eds.): *Reverse Engineering Education in Dance, Choreography and the Performing Arts*, Berlin: b\_books 2007, p. 76, emphasis added.

conception of choreography itself. Chénin's transfer from bodies to points and from points to geometrical forms is not a translation of a fixed choreographic structure in non-bodily media – turning an entity that would be choreographic into an “other” entity. Rather, it is an extraction of choreographic *data* which can be processed differently in various media. The specificity of the kinest choreographies is not found in any one type of manifestation – be it body, video, or code – effaced by others, but in the informational content they carry. Thus, choreography is not a physical practice transformed *into* non-bodily media, but an art whose products comprise bundles of information – data that can be materially manifested *in* diverse media.

Again, in this respect, Chénin's work is comparable to contemporary choreographic projects, such as the exemplary 2009 interdisciplinary initiative *Synchronous Objects*,<sup>53</sup> which collected data from Forsythe's dance piece *One Flat Thing, reproduced* (2000) and used them to create digital visualisations of its complex, contrapuntal choreographic organisation. Specific pieces of information about the embodied performance of *One Flat Thing* – including positions in space and cueing between dancers – were gathered and transmitted to/by non-corporeal media. While some of the “synchronous objects” provide simple visualisations of the dance's organisation, others use the dance's data as material for creating new *kinds* of objects (akin to Chénin's project). For example, one named *Performative architecture* takes the choreographic organisation of the dance as a starting point for the invention of dynamic furniture models.<sup>54</sup>

Along with this contemporary inscription, Chénin's work is once more also comparable to Feuilletian choreo-graphy, which is both a process of transferring dance onto paper – thereby causing the loss of physical choreographic attributes – and a system of transferability of information between forms of embodiment and a language of signs [Chapter 2]. Chénin's work translates information conceived from the perspective of the digital, using numerical data points, while Feuillet's choreo-graphy translated a taxonomic *episteme*, using classifiable

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53 Cf. *Synchronous Objects for One Flat Thing, reproduced* by William Forsythe, 2009, <https://synchronousobjects.osu.edu/> (August 2020).

54 Stephen Turk explains the thought process behind such objects as a search ‘for a way to make a non-literal translation of the table dance [i.e. *One Flat Thing*] by taking into account the effects of the piece and finding parallel architectural phenomena in which they could be re-inscribed. Our goal was not to produce a simple one to one transposition between the notational and contrapuntal analyses and an architectural object but rather to produce a space that was performative and combinatorial in a resonant way with *One Flat Thing, reproduced*’. Turk, Stephen: *Tables of Weights and Measures: Architecture and the Synchronous Objects Project*, 2009, <https://synchronousobjects.osu.edu/assets/object%2Fs/furnitureSystem/TurkTablesOfWeightsandMeasures.pdf> (August 2020).

formal units; their differences are found *within* their conception of choreography as abstractable material transferable across media.

## Conclusion

Just a link, a click, and a small-sized window. Mathilde Chénin's kinect series is related to choreographic practice but does not conform to the expectations habitually associated with it. Her videos may find their source in the moving and, at times, dancing human body, but through multiple processes of transformation they lose their connection to it, refusing to become signifiers of corporeality or secondary generators of action. This transposition of choreography from body to video is characteristic of a contemporary expanded choreographic field in which films – as well as sounds, books, exhibitions, and buildings – can be choreographed.

A body dancing but never seen; a video, and a code presentable in its own right. Chénin's work implies no subordination of digital moving image to live performance, or of algorithmic source to digital performance in video. Rather, her work develops three concurrent, connected, but different choreographies; choreographic expansion becomes synonymous with plurality. The kinect works thus display a non-hierarchical, horizontal, multiple choreographic ontology that spans bodies as well as other (im)materialities and (in)tangible entities, and that decentralises choreographic authorship away from dance-specific skills. A body dancing but never seen; a video and a code presentable in its own right: three choreographic entities, each with its own mode of existence, anchored in the real.

Transformed into non-signifying visual forms, choreography enters the video format. In this process, it changes: its speed and dynamics become subject to the technical limitations of internet connections and streaming software; discrete chunks are cut from the continuous flow of motion experienced by, or seen in, the body, inviting a recognition of motion's equally-multiple conceptions; its forms are algorithmically translated into the two-dimensionality of a screen. In the process of these transformations, the units, functioning, and mode of thinking of choreography shift as well, allowing new medialities to interfere with its conception, authoring, and performance: choreography thinks and develops through the material limitations and technical particularities of the camera, screen, and programmes. In this way, the videos illustrate that applying choreography to non-dance products and non-corporeal or -kinetic media may include the transfer of a choreographic structure – of a dance-, motion-, or body-based mode of thinking – to a new materiality, but can also implicate an exploration of how the specific materiality and mediality of a

code, book, sound, video, installation, or drawing may transform choreographic practice and thinking. This *adaptive* choreography – entering, interacting with, influenced, and transformed by different materialities and technologies – constitutes a shift in the very conception of choreography, from practice inscribed in (any) mediality to *informational content* transferable across different media.

In its refusal to be aligned with either score or notation as a secondary document subservient to embodied performance, Chénin's series of videos echo early-18<sup>th</sup>-century conceptions of Feuillet notations as paper dances [Chapter 2]. In their tripartite nature and circulation between embodiment, video, and code, the kinect works echo Feuillet's dances' own circulation between dancing body, page, and signs. In their widening of choreographic skill from corporeal technique and dance composition to coding, they form an echo, too, of choreographers' functions as notators, dance-makers, teachers and, at times, editors. In their thinking of choreography in non-corporeal ways – extracting data out of a physical performance – Chénin's works echo the possibility of using Feuillet notations for abstract choreographic thinking in a choreo-graphic language. Avoiding an illusory historiographic teleology, these echoes are not indications that Feuillet was a determinist precursor of Chénin. They are, first and foremost, results of a juxtaposition of heterogeneities that allow unexpected relevance to emerge. But, this relevance is, in itself, an indication of a contemporary choreographic practice expanding away from an essentialised choreography, which the early-18<sup>th</sup> century had not yet fully internalised; contemporary expansions and early-18<sup>th</sup>-century choreo-graphies therefore both serve as counterexamples to that essentialisation. The common problematics identifiable in a largely-successful, early-18<sup>th</sup> century, European system of dance writing and three online videos made by a contemporary artist are neither coincidental nor causally related; they indicate that both are inscribed in common macro-historical frameworks, that both are outliers to entrenched conceptions of choreography, and that both could be part of common alternative choreographic histories. Adopting an expanded choreographic perspective led to the identification of the potentially-neglected, disembodied aspects in the *Chorégraphie* – and as the notions of the parallax (Hal Foster) and preposterous history (Mieke Bal) warn,<sup>55</sup> this perspectivalisation implicates a return of the historical gaze towards the present, by activating a distant past in the reading of a present not isolated from it.

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55 Foster, Hal: *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*. Cambridge/London: MIT Press, 1996, p. xii; Bal, Mieke: *Quoting Caravaggio: Contemporary Art, Preposterous History*, Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press 1999.



## Chapter 5: A choreography of the in-between: Olga Mesa's *Solo a ciegas (con lágrimas azules)*<sup>1</sup>

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As the spectators enter the performance space, a still, sole figure is standing on the foremost part of the stage, her eyes closed, seemingly concentrating and taking in the situation. Once the audience is seated, she opens her eyes and goes to the side of the stage – a stage practically bare, save for a light console, microphone, a few objects, a film projector without a screen, and a set of mirrors. ‘Can I start?’ she asks; an invisible man’s voice replies ‘Whenever you want’. She starts speaking into the microphone slowly, calmly.

*[...] Y justo en ese momento comienzo mi práctica preferida no visible. Cierro los ojos, y me preparo a hacer el gran salto. Veo lo imposible, y esto me recuerda que la luz puede apagarse, de repente, como un blackout. Y respiro, y me tumbo en una esquina. Me imagino observando una guerra en miniatura. A menudo pienso en mi cuerpo atraído por los espacios que desaparecen; en mis gestos, aun no, constituidos; y en el sentimiento importante, que me gustaría traer a esta historia. Siento el deseo de escribir en la oscuridad [At that very moment, I start my favourite practice of non-visibility. I close my eyes and prepare myself to take the great leap. I see the impossible, and this reminds me that the light can suddenly be turned off, like a blackout. And I breathe and lie in a corner. I imagine myself watching a miniature war. I often think of my body, attracted by spaces of disappearance; of gestures that are not yet constructed; of the important feeling that I would like to bring into this story. I feel the desire to write in obscurity.]<sup>2</sup>*

In the approximately one hour that follows, much of this will be translated onto the stage: the solo figure will play with the limits of visibility – at times

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- 1 Some first thoughts about this chapter were developed in: Leon, Anna: Now and Then. Contemporary and Historical Instances of Intermediality on the Choreographic Stage, in: Haitzinger, Nicole & Kollinger, Franziska (eds.): *Überschreitungen: Beiträge zur Theoretisierung von Inszenierungs- und Aufführungspraxis*, Munich: epodium 2016, pp. 14–21 (e-book).
  - 2 Mesa, Olga : *Solo a ciegas (con lágrimas azules)* [DVD], Cie. Olga Mesa/Association Hors Champ – Fuera de Campo 2008, 41:19.

her actions will escape the audience's view; she will spend time in stillness, breathing, and explore gestures and movements. The lights will black out; sounds of war will be fleetingly heard. And, the figure will dance – some movements will be classifiable in a widely-construed “contemporary dance” vocabulary, others will stem from Argentinian tango. She will shout and resemble a fable creature – half woman-half animal, wearing a goat mask. Sounds will emerge from unknown sources, texts will be read, the light will change multiple times, film images will be shown.

The spectators will find themselves faced with what Olga Mesa – the lone figure on stage and choreographer of the piece – has described as an ‘*objet dramaturgique inattendu* [unexpected dramaturgical object]’.<sup>3</sup> *Solo a ciegas (con lágrimas azules)*, created in 2008, is unexpected, in a very literal sense. The spectator has little to help them navigate what is shown, and needs to connect sometimes-startlingly diverse elements in order to follow the piece. The work is dedicated to the choreographer's grandfather Antòn – “*El Argentino*” – but no clear biographical line is discernible; the artist seems to draw material from diverse sources and memories to construct its universe. The piece contains excerpts from Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Uccellacci e uccellini* (1966), the persistent humming of the *Coro a bocca chiusa* from Giacomo Puccini's 1904 opera *Madama Butterfly*, Robert Walser's 1901 rendition of *Snow White* read in voiceover by Sara Vaz, and tango songs such as Celedonio Esteban Flores' *La Comparsita* – all parts of a fleeting, kaleidoscopic whole.

Mesa is a figure that is dually inscribed in the continental European contemporary-dance scene at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. On the one hand, her work is relevant to choreographic approaches that were – not wholly aptly – termed “conceptual” dance: questioning the posited limits of dance; anchoring the work in both sensorial and theoretical understandings of the body; integrating text and immobility; and focussing on the relationality with, and acknowledged co-presence of, the audience. On the other hand, her approach exemplifies the integration of technology and multimedia dispositifs by implicating artistic methodologies and tools from other (here, cinematographic) artistic disciplines; through corresponding strategies of dephysicalisation of the body; and, in certain pieces, presenting installation works outside of the theatrical context. *Solo a ciegas* makes this dual inscription manifest; firstly, as a theatrical presentation of a layered and socio-politically-framed embodied subject engaging in more-than-kinetic ways with its audience, and secondly, as a multimedia endeavour, reframing a technologically-mediated bodily presence. Looking for the expanded

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3 Cie Olga Mesa – Association Hors Champ/Fuera de Campo: Publicity Material for *Solo a ciegas (con lágrimas azules)*, 2008, unpaginated.

choreographic aspects of this piece is a way of identifying expanded choreography's positionality within the turn-of-the-century dance landscape, situating it between a "conceptual" challenge to the limits of dance and the use of (new) technologies to reconsider choreography's relationship with corporeality, physicality, and presence.

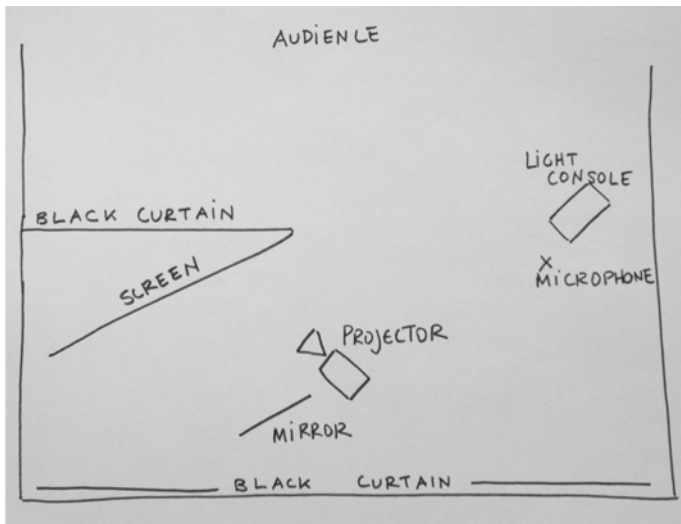
*Solo a ciegas* includes danced phrases, some of which challenge what dance could be; several sequences minimise movement or remove it altogether, and there is a great emphasis on media other than the human body. Watching the piece does involve watching the actions of a human body in movement, but cannot be reduced to that; in creating the piece, Mesa's choreographic activity cannot, similarly, be reduced to the arrangement of corporeal movements. In these ways, the *Solo* performs a decentralisation of dance in a composite performance framework that aligns with Saint-Hubert's multimedia ballet [Chapter 1], and undoes subsequent conflations of dance and choreography. Against this background, and in order to identify what "else" choreography may be in Mesa's work, this chapter draws from the performance itself (both as experienced in the theatre and in video recording), production and press material around the work, a series of discussions with the artist, and secondary sources about her. Reading *Solo a ciegas* as a relational arrangement of materials, actions, subjects, temporalities, and locations out of which a fragile universe is built, this chapter identifies an expanded choreography not characterised by the kinds of entities (human-corporeal or other) that it applies to, but by the act and process of assembling a multifaceted whole, made from heterogeneous relations between heterogeneous elements.

### **Body, text, sound, film, lights - in relation**

*Solo a ciegas* has an unmistakably corporeal aspect. In Mesa's acts – breathing audibly; rolling, running, and kicking; placing herself in proximity to the spectators, physically acknowledging co-presence; using her voice to emit cries – the performer constantly reaffirms her bodily experience of the piece and the situation. Her corporeality is at the same time found – like dancing bodies in Saint-Hubert's ballets [Chapter 1] – in a framework composed by the presence and action of multiple media. There are moving images; a video-projector on stage transmits film material to a screen outside of the spectators' view, who have only indirect access to the – sometimes blurry, sometimes unidentifiable – images through an on-stage mirror [Figure 20]. There is text, spoken by the performer but also emitted through speakers that the audience cannot see. There are non-linguistic sounds: those produced by the performer's actions and emitted through her body, and those that come from invisible speakers (a light

tap of footsteps, music), blending with the sound of the film. There is light and subtly-changing colour, which extinguishes itself in blackouts. The light is active and present – white lights combine with projectors fitted with blue filters; some lights periodically dim.<sup>4</sup> There are objects that, once used, affirm their presence as indispensable parts of the work; and there are objects that are constantly active – for example, small mirrors placed on different parts of the stage, reflecting both aspects of the action and members of the audience.

Figure 20: The main elements of the on-stage scenographic-technical setup of *Solo a ciegas* (con lágrimas azules). By the author based on production notes. No re-use without permission.



The human body and other media are put into coexistence, interaction, and relation within the *Solo*. In this process, the body does not shadow other media, but, rather, brings attention to them as such. By passing in front of the projector and casting her shadow on the mirror image, manipulating the light console in real time on stage, and breathing into the microphone, Mesa's physicality becomes a reminder of the presence and mode of function of the diverse media on stage. Beyond accentuating the physicality of other media through the dancer's body, there are moments in *Solo a ciegas* when – despite its direct presence – certain body actions are partly mediated. After her prologue, the

4 Mesa, Olga: Interview with the author (August 2017).

performer makes her first reference to war by alluding to Paul Verlaine's poem *Chanson d'automne* – which was used, after being slightly transformed, as a radio signal to the French resistance during the Allied landing in Normandy. Mesa announces 'I will tell you the words of the secret code' – but the altered code words are only secondarily spoken. They are firstly written in a notebook held so close to the microphone that the audience can hear the sound of tracing words on paper; this plays with their long-since-lifted secrecy, and provides a moment of intimacy that is only partly and indirectly accessed through the mediation of writing into the microphone. In other moments, Mesa's body's actions are taken up by non-human performers – the sound of her footsteps and words are, for instance, repeated by the speakers. The sound re-performs Mesa's actions, re-inserted at moments when she has moved on, dividing her presence into a visible body and an invisible sound source. (In each performance venue where *Solo a ciegas* is presented, the sound of Mesa's footsteps is recorded, to be added to the soundtrack and double her actual footsteps as a mediated shadow.<sup>5</sup>) The '*temps réel* [real time]' of the body's actions is blended with the '*temps différé* [delayed time]' of the recording,<sup>6</sup> blending present and past and inscribing the body's actions into the depth of memory. At other moments, the body is effaced by the media surrounding and mediating it. Mesa moves behind a black curtain which also hides the screen from view, and her actions become accessible only indirectly, on the opposite mirror, where the film is also projected; she is superposed and blends with the film, exiting the definite space of the stage and moving towards a space that is not entirely concrete. Or, she performs small, subtle movements while a weak spotlight provides mere glimpses of her. Through projection, light, and sound, her body oscillates between directly-present physicality and mediated reflection, echo, and trace. There are also points in the work where what the body does is completed by, and creates a complex whole with, what other media are doing. For example, at one point the performer is at the front of the stage, moving, at times emitting sounds and fragments of text, accompanied by sounds from *Uccellacci e uccellini*; establishing a connection with the film, she cries out one of the film's lines – '*Papà, corre!* [Dad, run!]', She runs across the stage, and continues to move while the film image on the mirror alternates; a female voice, repeating parts of *Solo a ciegas*' prologue speech over the speakers, blends with the *Uccellacci e uccellini* dialogues – this time, with a poverty-stricken mother lying to her children that daylight has not come to avoid them getting up and asking for food she does not have. The body's twisting, running, and stilling is juxtaposed to, and imbued with the urgency of the young boy warning his father to run, the desperation of

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5 Mesa: Interview.

6 Ibid.

Pasolini's mother figure, the slightly-disturbing effect of unidentifiable footage, the solo performer's own questions, repeated by a possible spectre of her previous self through the speakers. Through interaction, mediation, concealment, juxtaposition, or association, Mesa's body constantly forms, dissolves, and re-establishes diverse relations with the surrounding media.

In such ways, *Solo a ciegas* does not simply combine the human body with other media functioning separately from the action, or illuminating it as secondary scenographic elements; it is "carried" by them as much as it is embodied by a performer it expands beyond. It forms a framework in which the human body is present, indispensable, but, on its own, insufficient. Indeed, while Mesa has written that she has '*toujours compris le corps comme la base, c'est-à-dire d'abord il y a le corps, ensuite le mouvement, la parole, le geste. Le corps est le point de départ* [always understood the body as the basis, that is, first there is the body, then movement, speech, gesture. The body is the starting point]',<sup>7</sup> she has also mentioned that she considers the film projector to be the "heart" of *Solo a ciegas* and noted that the body is not the work's protagonist.<sup>8</sup> The artist talks of her body as being extended through the technical *dispositif* surrounding it, connected with the other media on stage in feedback loops; and proposes terms such as '*mécanique de la sensation* [mechanics of sensation]'<sup>9</sup> which can be taken to describe this process of interaction between a sensing, active body and the technical – among other – elements with which it shares the stage. In other words, while the body, its physicality, and its sensations are necessary here, so is the presence of other media and, particularly, the cinematographic element. Rudi Laermans perfectly grasps this type of performance:

Putting human and non-human capacities to move or to not-move on par implies that the second no longer serves the first [...] Sound waves or light rays no longer just emphasise bodily actions, adding or subtracting possible meanings, but interact with them as movements displaying their own characteristic physicality.<sup>10</sup>

But the piece is not limited to relations of the performer's body with different media; links are also established on stage that do not include the human

7 Mesa, Olga & Sanchez, José A.: La Danse commence avec le regard, in: Ruiz de Infante, Francisco (ed.): *Olga Mesa et la double vision: Expérimentations chorégraphiques avec une caméra collée au corps*, Strasbourg: Les Editions des Actes Manqués 2016, p. 14.

8 Mesa: Interview.

9 Mesa: Interview. Mesa considers the camera – often used in real time in her performances – as a further extension of the body. Mesa, Olga: Esquisse de Vocabulaire à la frontière de la vision, in: Ruiz de Infante: *Olga Mesa et la double vision*, p. 27.

10 Laermans, Rudi: *Moving Together: Making and Theorizing Contemporary Dance*, Amsterdam: Valiz 2015, pp. 230–231.

being directly – a reminder that non-human agents and their links exist “in themselves” without necessary reference to “us” as a centralising factor. One of the choreographer's comments on the *Solo* was indeed that she had

*construit un système émergent de codes secrets à travers une architecture de l'écoute, autonome de la vision et des déplacements et des décisions que mon corps réalise en temps réel* [constructed an emergent system of secret codes through an architecture of audition, autonomous from vision and from the movements and decisions that my body realises in real time].<sup>11</sup>

In the scene described above where the body's actions are part of a whole – in which lines from Pasolini's film blend with *Solo a ciegas'* recorded prologue – these sound elements enter into layered, overlapping dialogue. A recorded female voice poses the prologue's question – ‘Can I begin?’; repeating the words from the opening, the performer responds ‘Whenever you want’, but she seems like an intruder in the dialogue, since the invisible person asking the question waits until a male voice from the speakers also acquiesces; this dialogue is overtaken by voices of children from *Uccellacci e uccellini* calling their mother; the dialogue switches and the female voice re-starts her prologue text; the mother from the film responds, the two interactions woven together. At another moment, Mesa's body is completely invisible behind the curtain, while the sound dialogues continue to perform. At times, the technical tasks of the different media relate to each other, too; for example, the film projector may function as such only indirectly – through the mirror – but also operates as an additional source of light, complementing the spotlights [Figure 20]. Different media support each other's actions. At one moment, the lights black out, allowing the film image to become more intense; although its images are not sharp, Pasolini's use of footage from the funeral of Italian communist leader Palmiro Togliatti is discernible (although not ascertainable); a male chorus hums a solemn tune while the performer's body is only present through its sounds and the fragmentary snapshots permitted by a slight reflection. Here, the relations between film images – Pasolini's use of newsreel footage in his film and Mesa's use of Pasolini's film projects the event twice-removed – are doubled by the relationship between the film, the gravity of the sound, and the starkness of the lights' absence. Furthermore, the stage setup that partially blocks spectators' visibility also allows a dialogue to be established between each medium's physicality/technical function and its perceived result. For instance, the film image the spectator sees reflected in the mirror refers to its source in the screen, itself referring to its source in the projector, which refers to the

11 Cie Olga Mesa – Association Hors Champ/Fuera de Campo: Publicity Material, unpaginated, emphasis added.

original images that have been re-edited for the piece. The stage setup similarly refers to the film it contains; in *Uccellacci e uccellini*, the two protagonists hear a voice which initially comes from an invisible source – later discovered to be a speaking raven – just as invisible sounds emerge in *Solo a ciegas*. Finally, the intricately-constructed timeline of the *Solo* is marked by the film's editing; thus, media other than the body have the capacity to trigger events on stage.<sup>12</sup> The body therefore relates to different surrounding media but also exists in a multi-faceted space created by them and *their* inter-relations.

This type of performance situation – composed of relations between a human body and other media, coupled by relations between these media themselves – corresponds to a shift in the reception attitude of the spectators, who must widen their kinaesthetic response to choreography towards the heterogeneous, multiple objects of relational choreography. Indeed *Solo a ciegas* demands – and generates – cross-modal perception, something underlined by the choreographer when she notes '*je propose des questions audiovisuelles au corps et des questions physiques à la caméra* [I propose audiovisual questions to the body and physical questions to the camera]'.<sup>13</sup> (Even in actions contained within the performer's body, this cross-modal relationality remains present; kicking her leg high, Mesa emits a shout, giving the action a kinetic, auditory, and visual element that emerges from the simultaneous, multiple uses of the body as medium.) Moreover, Mesa's piece introduces a double aspect in spectatorship, in which experiencing the cross-modal effects of on-stage actions or relations is continuously counterbalanced by trying to decipher how they come about. The film screen is invisible, but the presence of the projector on stage explains how a deviated, indirect image reaches the viewers; most speakers are out of sight but the presence of the microphone indicates a process of recording the performer's voice to be re-broadcast – parts of the dispositif are visible, thus indicating how invisibility is created. Beyond decoding how each element on stage functions, the audience is given clues to decipher how different elements are related. The performer controls the light console herself, in full view; a spoken action – 'blackout' – may announce and/or prefigure the dimming of the lights; the *hors-champ* – a cinematographic concept referring to what lies outside the camera's scope – of the film prefigures an *hors-champ* of the moving body, which will also disappear from view; the lights interacting with the mirrors on stage both achieve and illustrate the process of creating limited visibility; the lights dim, to let the projector illuminate a part of the stage and thus draw attention to its function as a light-source that interacts with the spotlights. Other parts of the action are more difficult to decipher and the spectator is left with questions: do

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12 Mesa: Interview.

13 Mesa & Sanchez: *La Danse commence avec le regard*, p. 20.



they hear the soundtrack of the film or is sound coming from an independent source synchronised with the images? Is it the performer who just sighed, or did the sound come from the speakers? While there are no clues to help one find an answer, the very formulation of these questions incites the spectator to think of the piece in terms of intermedia relations.<sup>14</sup>

An equivalent claim of relationality within the work's reception can be made about its production. Indeed, Mesa's role as a choreographer was not limited to the creation of bodily (dance) actions delegating non-corporeal work, but expanded to this multiple constellation that includes the body. *Solo a ciegas* is a work in which interdisciplinary collaboration (including a film editor, sound technician, and collaborator in lighting design) was necessary; moreover, Mesa's authorship expanded to the co-conception and -creation of the lighting design, writing of text, and choosing of music and film.<sup>15</sup> The work's intermedia nature necessitates a type of choreographic authorship that is both collectively and individually interdisciplinary – not only in the types of skills and practices involved but also in the process of interweaving them, authoring what happens between them. Indeed, Mesa's process of work – as illustrated by the assignments given to her collaborators – reflects this; for example, *Solo a ciegas'* sound technician Jonathan Merlin was tasked not so much with composing the sound, but, rather, with the technical definition of when, and from where, sound emerged,<sup>16</sup> thus shifting his focus to the ways in which the sound relates to the rest of the stage action.

Mesa's choreography decentralises the human body as a dominant performer, and dance as a primary medium of expression, shifting the role of non-human media to active and meaning-carrying performers. Her relational treatment of diverse materials situates the choreographic not in a human-specific performance supported by non-human media, but in the arrangement of relations *between* both. This expands choreographic authorship to an interdisciplinary endeavour whose results are experienced cross-modally. By doing so, *Solo a ciegas* responds to a contemporary interest in non-human materialities and the forms of coexistence, interaction, and hybridisation between human subjects and non-human agents. At the same time, in these very ways it also mirrors Saint-Hubert's non-autonomous view of ballet as a composite spectacle, and the

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14 Rudi Laermans adds a highly interesting dimension to this kind of spectatorship; he considers that questions of dance criticism may not, in "expanded" cases, only focus on what a performance may mean (what he calls a 'hermeneutical or interpretative paradigm') but also on how it works. Laermans: *Moving Together*, p. 235.

15 For technical information and roles see Cie Olga Mesa – Association Hors Champ/Fuera de Campo: Publicity Material, unpaginated.

16 Mesa: Interview.

interdisciplinary role of his master of order. In return, this mirroring challenges the exclusions that result from a sole focus on dance as choreographic material in Saint-Hubert's ballet [Chapter 1].

## Doing choreography

The construction of *Solo a ciegas* as a complex web of non-hierarchical relations between an (un)moving body, text, sound, film, objects, and light points to a choreography that orchestrates and brings together the actions of different media, including the body. In effect, the choreographer uses multiple terms – often borrowed from non-dance disciplines – which focus on the importance of putting together; for example, the cinematographic term of montage and the visual-arts-based notion of collage recur in her discourse.<sup>17</sup> By proposing a view of choreography as an art of forming relations between different elements, *Solo a ciegas* is associated with a wider discourse about, and conception of, choreography as a process and praxis of “putting in relation”, developed in the decade following the piece's premiere. This was evident in artists' discourse – such as Michael Klien's proposal that ‘choreography can assume the creative practice of setting [...] relations, or set the conditions for [...] relations, to emerge’,<sup>18</sup> or Rasmus Ölme's idea that ‘choreographic work re-articulates the relations between the items’ of choreographic *dispositifs*<sup>19</sup> – and in theoretical approaches to choreography – as in Kirsten Maar's link between choreography and topology, ‘which, being the theory of structures and relationships, describes relational spaces’;<sup>20</sup> or Petra Sabisch' view of choreographic works as ‘an assemblage of specific relations: relations to objects, to music, to bodies, relations between bodies, relations of visibility, relations between forces, relations of movement and rest, etc.’<sup>21</sup>

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17 Cf. Anonymous: *Lexique incomplet*, in: Ruiz de Infante: *Olga Mesa et la double vision*, p. 23.

18 Klien, Michael: *Choreography as an Aesthetics of Change*, PhD thesis, Edinburgh: Edinburgh College of Art 2008, unpaginated abstract.

19 Ölme, Rasmus: *From Model to Module: A Move towards Generative Choreography*, PhD thesis, Stockholm: DOCH University of Dance and Circus/Stockholm University of the Arts/KTH Royal Institute of Technology 2014, p. 29.

20 Maar, Kirsten: *Uncanny Connections. William Forsythe's Choreographic Installations*, in: Fischer-Lichte, Erika & Wihstutz, Benjamin (eds.): *Performance and the Politics of Space: Theatre and Topology*, New York: Routledge 2013 [trans. Michael Breolin & Saskya Iris Jain], pp. 253–254.

21 Sabisch, Petra: *Choreographing Relations: Practical Philosophy and Contemporary Choreography*, Munich: epodium 2011, p. 7.

Talking about her work on *Solo a ciegas*, Mesa has also described choreography as an art of *assembling*.<sup>22</sup> The notion of the assemblage also became prominent in the years surrounding the premiere of her work. While the term is not reducible to this reading, in contemporary choreographic theory it is primarily Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's vision of the assemblage that is encountered. Manuel DeLanda quotes Deleuze: 'What is an assemblage? It is a multiplicity which is made up of many heterogeneous terms and which establishes liaisons, relations between them, across ages, sexes and reigns – different natures. Thus, the assemblage's only unity is that of a co-functioning: it is a symbiosis, a "sympathy"; and comments: 'in this definition, two aspects of the concept are emphasised: that the parts that are fitted together are not uniform either in nature or in origin, and that the assemblage actively links these parts together by establishing relations between them'.<sup>23</sup> This notion of assemblage – a *relational entity* composed of *heterogeneous materials* – has theoretically grounded two points that are relevant here and are illustrated by the writings of Laermans. Laermans introduces the assemblage as part of his quest for a less anthropocentric, "post-humanist" choreography:

the performative qualities of human as well as non-human actions [are treated] as being equal. Besides physical movements also lightning, sounds, props, text fragments or video images are all deliberately deployed as active agents, as components that do something and therefore co-define the overall performativity of a dance piece.<sup>24</sup>

But crucially, this decentralisation of the human in choreography – through the notion of the assemblage – is presented as a way of conceptualising contemporary choreographic work including heterogeneous media, *as opposed to* other multi- or intermedia approaches. Laermans and Carine Meulders write:

[t]o a great extent, the contemporaneity of dance has to do with the making of new middle zones, of *heterogeneous assemblages* – of always particular couplings between for instance music, image and movement that produce completely different operative and perceptual frameworks than what we know from interdisciplinary or multi medial work.<sup>25</sup>

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22 Mesa: Interview.

23 DeLanda, Manuel: *Assemblage Theory*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2016, p. 1f.

24 Laermans, Rudi: 'Dance in General' or Choreographing the Public, Making Assemblages, in: *Performance Research* 13/1 (2008), p. 11.

25 Laermans, Rudi & Meulders, Carine: The Body is the Re/De-Presentation: Or, What Makes Dance Contemporary?, in: Gareis, Sigrid & Kruschkova, Krassimira (eds.): *Ungerufen: Tanz*

This distinction between choreographic assemblages and other types of multi-media work can be paralleled by an important shift in the conception of choreography, from the ontological question of what choreography is – the material on which it operates, be it the body or multiple media – to the pragmatically-oriented question of what it *does* – here, putting heterogeneous elements into relation.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, possibly building on its lack of attachment to any one physical medium, (expanded) choreography is often seen as act rather than a material type of product; a multiplicity of verbs and action-words are utilised to describe choreography as primarily characterised by what it *does*. These terms include organising (Mårten Spångberg: ‘I’m a choreographer that is occupied with organising [among other things] dances’;<sup>27</sup> Jan Ritsema: ‘Choreography is thinking about the *organisation* of objects and subjects in time and space on stage’<sup>28</sup>), arranging (Ölme: ‘The first choreographic act is thus to choose which items to engage with. The second choreographic act is how to arrange them in relation to each other, forming a new assemblage than the one they were singled out from’<sup>29</sup>) and – echoing Saint-Hubert [Chapter 1] – ordering (Klien, Steve Valk, and Jeffrey Gormly: ‘Choreography (n.): order observed [...] a process that has an observable or observed embodied order. [...] Choreography (v.): act of interfering with or negotiating such an order’<sup>30</sup>). This composition-related vocabulary brings attention to the *act* described, while the object this applies to can be left open; from the compositional process of ordering bodies in spatial, temporal, and dynamic configurations, choreography becomes characterised by arranging itself, beyond *what* is being arranged. In this sense, the hierarchy between the dancer’s body and other media in *Solo a ciegas* may not be of primary importance; viewing choreography as an art of assembling or arranging suggests moving the focus away from the materials being arranged towards the act of arranging. The product not of a specific mediality (or multiple mediali-

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*und Performance der Zukunft / Uncalled: Dance and Performance of the Future*, Berlin: Theater der Zeit 2009, p. 285.

26 Cf. Sabisch: *Choreographing Relations*, p. 8.

27 Spångberg, Mårten: *Spangbergianism II* (first draft), Bologna: independent publication, 2013, unpaginated.

28 Quoted in CORPUS: Survey What does “choreography” mean today?, 2007, <http://www.corpusweb.net/introduction-to-the-survey.html> (Archive copy from October 2015). In the survey, Ritsema elaborates and questions this definition, for instance proposing choreography as ‘thinking about the organisation of the *moving relations* between objects and subjects in time and space on stage’.

29 Ölme: *From Model to Module*, p. 30.

30 Klien, Michael, Valk, Steve & Gormly, Jeffrey: *Book of Recommendations: Choreography as an Aesthetics of Change*, Limerick: Daghda Dance Company 2008, unpaginated.

ties), but of a specific praxis, Mesa's *Solo a ciegas* thus points to an expansion of choreography whose being may be its very doing.

Expanding choreography towards a praxis that applies to heterogeneous materials implicates reconsideration of choreographic authorship, including approximating choreographic making with other practices of *putting-together*. A focus on the art of arranging relations has indeed been underlined concerning dramaturgy, as proposed by Martina Ruhsam:

Nowadays dramaturgy [...] doesn't necessarily refer to any dramatic text or action [...] The fact that contemporary performances are often hybrid forms of dance, performance, film, exhibition, lecture, media-art, and installation calls out for new strategies of staging and more importantly, for a new aesthetic of connection and relation – or, in other words, for new practices of connecting and relating.<sup>31</sup>

The same point can be made regarding curating, as noted by the editors of the relevantly-titled book *Assign & Arrange* when they speak of 'recent discourse in which choreographing and curating are increasingly being perceived and discussed as related practices of creating dynamic constellations, relations, collaborations and affective encounters'.<sup>32</sup> Establishing proximity between the choreographic, the dramaturgical, and the curatorial is related to the concurrent expansion that widens curating beyond the visual arts, and dramaturgy beyond its theatre background; their proximity with choreography marks dissolving discipline boundaries. In effect, what is at issue here is not just the comparability of different practices, but their qualitative transformation that converges towards relational praxis. Thus, at times the practice of choreography blends with that of dramaturgy, conceiving of choreography *as* dramaturgy; Gabriele Klein notes that '[c]horeography increasingly became a matter of dramaturgy; whereas the once close link between dance and choreography gradually loosened'.<sup>33</sup> Mesa's words on *Solo a ciegas* reflect this blend:

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- 31 Ruhsam, Martina: *Dramaturgy of and as Collaboration*, 2010, <http://sarma.be/docs/2873> (August 2020). For an approximation between choreography and dramaturgy based on their relational approach, see also Cvejić, Bojana: *Dramaturgy: A Friendship of Problems*, in: *TkH (Journal for Performing Arts Theory)* 18 (2010), p. 50 and Laermans: *Moving Together*, p. 236.
- 32 Butte, Maren, Maar, Kirsten, McGovern, Fiona, Rafael, Marie-France & Schaffaff, Jörn: Introduction, in: Butte, Maren, Maar, Kirsten, McGovern, Fiona, Rafael, Marie-France & Schaffaff, Jörn (eds.): *Assign and Arrange: Methodologies of Presentation in Art and Dance*, Berlin: Sternberg Press 2014, p. 21.
- 33 Klein, Gabriele: *Dancing Politics: Worldmaking in Dance and Choreography*, in: Klein, Gabriele & Noeth, Sandra (eds.): *Emerging Bodies: The Performance of Worldmaking in Dance and Choreography*, Bielefeld: transcript 2011, p. 21.

*Mon travail est très lié à la construction de la narration, à la question même de la dramaturgie. Dans ce solo, il y a un texte fragmenté, il y a des éléments sonores extérieurs qui dialoguent avec ce que je dis moi-même et il y a du mouvement [my work is very much linked to the construction of narrative, to the very question of dramaturgy. In this solo, there is a fragmented text, there are external audio elements in dialogue with what I say myself, and there is movement].<sup>34</sup>*

Once again, the expansion of choreographic authorship aligns with shifts in spectatorship. Beyond tracking and deciphering the relations that compose the piece, the spectators of *Solo a ciegas* actively form them. While they are not called upon to participate in the performance, they are an inescapable pole in its construction; the performance is not just arranged in order to be presented to them, but *through* their very presence and gaze. Disrupting the frontal, ideally-complete viewpoint of the spectator, the black curtain hides the actual film screen, and its reflection depends on each spectator's position [Figure 20]; mirrors placed on stage create reflections not visible to all spectators. Thus, the piece's on-stage disposition and the performer's situation are construed in relation to each other, *as well as* to individuated spectators that are positioned at different angles with respect to the action. The choreographer notes:

*Ce hors-champ me permet de questionner le cadre de la représentation dans une double configuration, du point de vue du spectateur et du point de vue inverse du plateau. Aujourd'hui, je ne peux plus aborder la question du regard et de la perception uniquement de manière frontale. Il me faut déplacer, détourner les éléments de la scène comme si le regard était passé à travers un prisme afin de changer le rapport entre les choses et les individus [This hors champ allows me to question the frame of the representation in a double configuration, from the viewpoint of the spectator and from the inverse viewpoint of the stage. Today, I cannot approach the question of the gaze and of perception in a uniquely frontal manner anymore. I have to move, to divert the stage elements as if the gaze had passed through a prism, in order to change the relationship between things and people].<sup>35</sup>*

Several theorists – including Laermans, Sabisch, and Bojana Cvejić<sup>36</sup> – have indeed suggested that choreographic assemblages are not only made up of “internal” relations, but also implicate relations with audience members; the spectator is both external observer and active part of what they are watching.

34 Mesa, Olga & Lavigne, Aude: Interview, 2011, [http://mutualise.artishoc.com/bastille/medi-a/5/dp\\_solo\\_a\\_ciegas.pdf](http://mutualise.artishoc.com/bastille/medi-a/5/dp_solo_a_ciegas.pdf) (October 2018).

35 Mesa & Lavigne: Interview, p. 5, emphasis added.

36 Laermans: 'Dance in General', p. 13; Sabisch: *Choreographing Relations*, p. 7; Cvejić, Bojana: *Choreographing Problems: Expressive Concepts in European Contemporary Dance and Performance*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2015, p. 71.

If Mathilde Chénin's kinect videos allow a conceptualisation of a multiple choreographic ontology [Chapter 4], Mesa's *Solo a ciegas* and its choreographic assemblage of relations illustrates that the choreographic is identifiable, beyond ontological claims, in its praxis. This shift, amply reflected in the contemporary choreographic theory referred to above, has significant consequences both for choreographic authorship – approximable to other relational practices characterised by their type of *doing* – and spectatorship. This shift also has consequences for how choreographic history is conceived; a contemporary expansion of choreography to praxis reverses a long-standing attachment to (any, one, or many) materiality and reconsiders non-medium-specific practices of “putting-together” as *choreographic*. Saint-Hubert, a few centuries ago, argued for the importance of complementing an ontological understanding of ballet – what it is composed of – with the dramaturgical processes that arrange this composition – personified in the transmedially-relevant master of order [Chapter 1]. Contemporary choreographic expansions, like those discussed here, allow us to relocate choreography in Saint-Hubert's work beyond the materials that compose ballets to acts of ordering and the persons practicing them.

## Of what is related

If, as Laermans' position suggests, the relational choreography of *Solo a ciegas* is more than a form of intermediality, it is necessary to consider what else this relationality applies to. If Mesa links a movement with a sound, an object with a light change, a film image with an action, she is not just creating material or technical associations – of substances and modes of communication – but is also, and primarily, forming associations that contribute to the work's purposefully-intimate and almost-confidential treatment of its polymorphous subject. In effect, *Solo a ciegas* is not – only – a piece about the way in which light relates to movement, the human body relates to film, or sound relates to image; it is a piece about memory and loss – and, particularly, the memory of war, childhood, and their intersections – treated through a choreography of relational arrangements.

The topics of war, loss, or memory are not clearly articulated in the work; they reveal themselves progressively through associations of bits of information, fleeting images, and sounds. Shots from Hiroshima after the nuclear explosion, bomber planes, and houses destroyed during the Spanish civil war are blended into the film reflected on the mirror;<sup>37</sup> the prologue mentions the word “war” without any further information; siren- and explosion-like sounds contribute to

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37 Mesa: Interview.

the soundtrack; Verlaine's poem, transformed into a WWII secret code, is woven into the textual and auditory fabric of the piece. None of these references, on their own, establish full focus on the topic of war – in some cases, taken individually, they are not even fully recognisable. But put together in a single universe – brought in relation through image, text, and sound – they lead the spectator to consider war. This consideration does not uniquely pertain to one – or any – of the particular war-related situations; it emerges between them as a non-specified war, onto which the spectator can project their own experiences and knowledge. Similarly, childhood is not directly referred to, but in the voices from *Uccellacci e uccellini* – of children and parents; in images from the choreographer's childhood (a cherry tree planted by her grandfather, edited to appear alongside a tree in Hiroshima);<sup>38</sup> in the reference to a “miniature” war in the prologue; and in the performer's rolling across the floor or abandoning herself as if to sleep – there is a hint towards childhood, which appears through the relations of these fragmentary elements without explicit articulation. The further relation between war and childhood – both ushering in the notion of loss – points to the work's focus on memory, on a rapport with what is not there. *Solo a ciegas* thus allows fragmentary information from disconnected sources to be put in relation and evoke the topics that influenced the piece. Mesa's choreography is a relational arrangement of heterogeneous media in addition to ideas, references, and information.

*Solo a ciegas* furthermore arranges relations between temporalities and spaces. The stage space is linked to the *hors-champ* of the screen, and to the mediated space of the projection on the mirror. But, at the same time, the piece circulates in geographical spaces beyond the theatre. Similarly, the real-time actions performed by the body on stage are linked to the off-time of pre-recorded material – in some cases repeating what is performed live, juxtaposing temporalities – and the rhythms of the film images; but, simultaneously, the piece navigates a wider chronological range. The *Solo's* choreography arranges references to, and between, diverse locations and moments: 1940s France enters the stage through Verlaine's poem-turned-code; 1930s civil-war-ridden Spain and 1940s Hiroshima peek in through film images; 1960s Italy appears through Pasolini's film; early-20<sup>th</sup>-century South America emerges through excerpts of *La Comparsita* and tango steps (Argentina was already present through the reference/dedication of the piece to Mesa's grandfather, *El Argentino*); 1900s Japan, and 1900s European representations of it, are present through Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*. Mesa says that in *Solo a ciegas*, the performer's body must be present in the physical space shared with the audience, but the body also

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38 Ibid.



crosses different times and spaces<sup>39</sup> – theatrical, cinematographic, or sound spaces, in addition to times and spaces of memory. Like Pasolini's film that jumps between different time periods – in it, a present-day narrator recounts the story of two medieval Franciscan monks in a fantasy-ridden flashback – Mesa's piece navigates time and space, between specific locations and moments. Time-spaces multiply, fracturing each other's unity and continuity; but, rather than forming a new unity or continuity, they create a kaleidoscopic, multi-directional temporality and spatiality. The piece is neither set in, nor about, France in the 1940s or Spain in the 1930s; it is, rather, situated in the interval that relates the present with each and every referenced time-place, and in the interval that relates them to each other. It is, in Mesa's terms, in a '*temps suspendu* [suspended time]'.<sup>40</sup> Writing on the notion of the *hors-champ* – so crucial for the construction of the performance considered here – Deleuze has described a non-specificity of temporality and spatiality that also applies to *Solo a ciegas*:

In one case, the out-of-field designates that which exists elsewhere, to one side or around; in the other case, the out-of-field testifies to a more disturbing presence, one which cannot even be said to exist, but rather to "insist" or "subsist", a more radical Elsewhere, outside homogeneous space and time.<sup>41</sup>

Similarly, while the *Solo* has a biographical basis, it does not simply link episodes, instances, and locations of a single person's life in a linear, coherent way. The work is not an autobiography of Mesa herself – even though elements from her childhood and family history are present – nor a biography of her grandfather – even though references to his life and context are also present. If a subject, a person, is portrayed here, it is a multiple and relational one. The sole figure on stage performs neither a single, unitary body nor a single, unitary subject: she becomes animal through squatted positions and a goat-mask, she becomes child by shouting or rolling across the floor, she proliferates by being reflected. This figure may be, at times, animal, child, adult woman – but she is neither animal *or* child *or* woman, nor animal *and* child *and* woman. She is an animal-child-woman emerging from the relations of all three. On the one hand, this multiplicity can be defined by the diverse experiences residing within this figure – even though they have not directly been lived by her – and by the relations between them. Talking of the multiplication of the body in Mesa's work, Julie Perrin indicates that this is not done in order to '*s'imposer ou envahir le plateau*,

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39 Ibid.

40 Anonymous: *Lexique Incomplet*, p. 23.

41 Deleuze, Gilles: *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1986 [1983, trans. Hugh Tomlinson & Barbara Habberjam], p. 17.

*mais plutôt de défaire l'unité du sujet pour en faire surgir davantage de subtilité, de strates* [impose oneself or to invade the stage, but rather in order to undo the unity of the subject, so as to make more of its subtleties and its strata emerge].<sup>42</sup> On the other hand, the figure is multiple because the stage is populated by multiple beings, related to each other by the media construction of the piece. A child yelling 'Papa, corre!', a woman reaching back to her childhood and her grandfather, a mother protecting her starving children, a Spanish citizen living in Argentina before the civil war,<sup>43</sup> a radio-operator during WWII, a young Japanese woman waiting for her husband all night while a melancholy tune invades the air – all are there, without fully being there. None of the characters are fully represented, even though they are fleetingly present in subtle ways. By associating the vestiges of absent presences, a multifaceted figure of loss, longing, nostalgia, and pain emerges. And the work, once again, is not constructed as a simple collection of these characters but builds its representation of a multiple subject through the relations between them. Mesa comments on the way in which her work brings disconnected subjects into relation:

*Ici, le corps est hors du temps et hors de lui pour aller au contact d'une mémoire collective, voire universelle. Il s'identifie à des histoires qu'il traverse mais appartenant aussi aux autres, à tous* [here, the body is out of time and out of itself, in order to come into contact with a collective, universal even, memory. It identifies with the (hi)stories it goes through but also belonging to others, to everyone].<sup>44</sup>

In its publicity material, the piece is described as an '[i]nventaire des espaces et des mémoires qui pourraient appartenir à d'autres corps: corps abandonnés, exilés, violés, disparus, imaginés' [inventory of the spaces and memories that could belong to other bodies: abandoned, exiled, violated, disappeared, imagined bodies].<sup>45</sup> Doubled by mirrors and disconnected from its voice, the body is fragmented; layering itself with other images, it is invaded; hidden by partial lighting, it is evoked. Correspondingly, the performance's subject does not reside in the physical body but in the relations between the identities, persons, stories, and media that collectively form the piece.

Finally, if *Solo a ciegas* contains arrangements of relations between information, identities, subjects, times, and spaces, it also emerges through the

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42 Perrin, Julie: La Chorégraphe à la caméra, in: Ruiz de Infante: *Olga Mesa et la double vision*, p. 77.

43 Cf. Mesa & Lavigne: Interview.

44 Ibid.

45 Cie Olga Mesa – Association Hors Champ/Fuera de Campo: Publicity Material, unpaginated.

association of these elements with, and by, the audience. Just like the media arrangement of the work includes the spectator – their position in the theatre, their gaze and its direction – the arrangement of archives, memories, and traces of war and loss also include the onlooker. All materials in the *Solo* – the images of war or childhood, the goat-mask, or the colour blue (present in the performer's attire/wig and in the lights) – do not represent or strictly symbolise, but, rather, are simply present and evoke associations that may vary from one audience member to the next. Thus, the presence of war, childhood, or loss relies on the spectator, (un)consciously contributing to the relational whole proposed by the choreographer. For instance, according to Mesa, the goat-mask scene was '*une image qui s'est imposée comme une vision, alors que je pensais à ce qu'il reste après la destruction d'une ville ou d'un paysage* [an image that imposed itself as a vision, while I was thinking of what remains after the destruction of a city or of a landscape]'.<sup>46</sup> Once it has become part of the piece, however, this association recedes, replaced by the associations audience members form with the material or deduce from its relations with other parts. If the piece deals with memory, it is not only because it presents vestiges of a now-absent past; it is also because it implicates the memories of those watching. Mesa does not *represent* memory; she arranges relations and gaps in the material to which the spectator can contribute associations, shift arrangements, and *perform* the multiple work of memory.

With a reflection on war and childhood, and a voyage between territories, temporalities, and subjects, Mesa's piece can be inscribed within a framework of contemporary European choreographic work interested in multiple subjectivities and corporealities (Vera Mantero's 1996 goat-feet in *one mysterious Thing, said e.e. cummings\** speaks to Mesa's goat-head 12 years later), (auto)biography (e.g. the series including *Véronique Doisneau* (2004), *Lutz Förster* (2009), and *Cédric Andrieux* (2009) by Jérôme Bel and the aforementioned dancers; Eszter Salamon's *And Then* (2007) and Michikazu Matsune's *For Now* (2017)), and documentary and historical reference (e.g. Olga de Soto's explorations around Kurt Jooss' *The Green Table* in *Une introduction* (2010) or Salamon's 2014 *Monument 0 – Haunted by Wars (1913-2013)*, both focussing on the war history that interests Mesa). Against this background, *Solo a ciegas* performs a particular kind of body-subject, a particular kind of (auto)biography, a particular kind of documentary; like Salamon's *And Then* – in which multiple life stories are woven into an unstable narrative – it performs a life, story, and subject that are formed out of a web of sometimes-disparate relations. It is through this instability – in these network-like connections, in this multiplicity and dispersal of the subject – that the piece develops a choreographic politics of memory. This is a memory spilling out of a singular

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46 Mesa & Lavigne: Interview.

body, breaking the linearity of a causal narrative, in favour of a mesh of non-centralised links – putting the seemingly unconnected into relation.

In addition to its media assemblage, *Solo a ciegas* also assembles relations between themes, subjects, times, and places. As prefigured by Laermans, this doubling posits a relational praxis of choreography as more than a subtype of intermedia (choreographic) practice. This forms the basis for Mesa's work's politics of memory and for expanded choreography's capacity to articulate the complexity of – identitary, emotional, political, cultural – contemporary realities. At the same time, such a doubling is historiographically important, since it implies that the choreographic can be found – beyond practices encompassing multiple media – in the arrangement of elements such as themes, concepts, characters, or references. Returning to Saint-Hubert, his text considered compositions of motions, costumes, actions, and equipment as much as arrangements of *entrées* and themes around the notion of the subject [Chapter 1]. From the perspective developed here, these latter arrangements are not just frameworks in which the choreographic work of dance-making enters, but are choreographically relevant in themselves.

### In the between-ness

Recounting a period of Mesa's career when she worked with collage, her regular collaborator Francisco Ruiz de Infante notes that she collected the elements to be used in the collage but did not glue them into any fixed position.<sup>47</sup> *Solo a ciegas* is similarly fleeting – a fragile construction, that defies the expectation of dissolution by remaining present, not falling apart. The physicality of the body – its rawness – combined with other media, is made evident; at the same time, by emerging through the immaterial, and shifting relations between these elements, *Solo a ciegas* has a strikingly non-solid, evanescent quality. The arrangement of the work's relations – beyond an assemblage of physical elements, their effects, and the information they transmit – generates an ambience-like quality, an environment, a *milieu* in which they coevolve. In a comparable way, Laermans refers to the 'total performativity' of assemblage-based, multimedia choreographies as something 'that the spectator usually experiences and speaks of in atmospheric terms';<sup>48</sup> Jenn Joy similarly refers to 'the choreographic as an *atmospherics* of encounter'<sup>49</sup> – choreography as *ambience*.

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47 Ruiz de Infante, Francisco: Ces collages pas collés... (première tentative), in : Ruiz de Infante: *Olga Mesa et la double vision*, p. 125.

48 Laermans: *Moving together*, p. 233.

49 Joy, Jenn: *The Choreographic*, Cambridge/London: MIT Press 2014, p. 7, emphasis added.

The ingredients from which the fragile but persistent atmosphere develops are on stage from the beginning of the *Solo*: the performer is there while the audience enters, as well as the technical equipment – light console, projector – and other objects the performer will (not) use; the prologue text prefigures many of the topics touched upon throughout the performance. No connection exists between them; only progressively will an ambience be created between seemingly-disparate elements. This piece both gives rise to this universe and exists through its emergence. Irène Filiberti perfectly grasps this passage from disparate presences to a combined, ambience-like entity in Mesa's work:

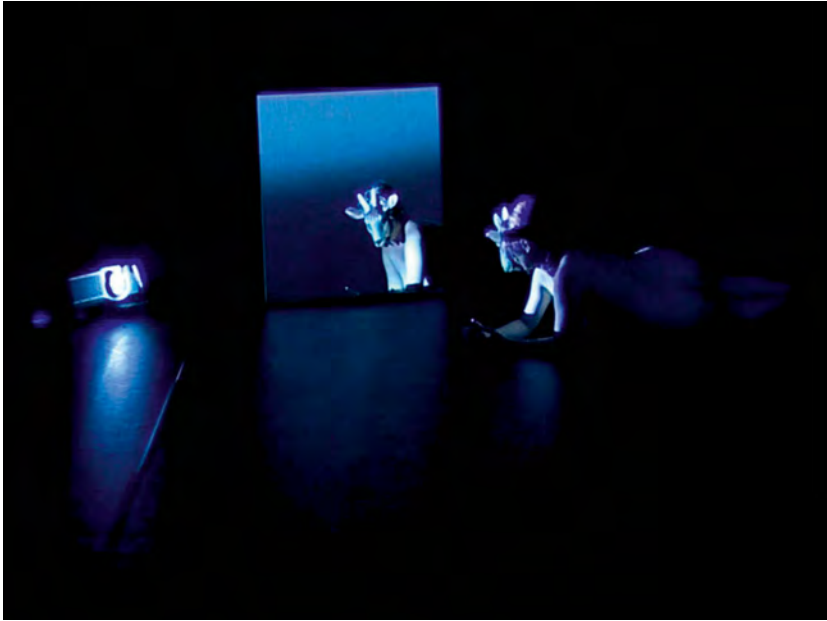
*[D]ans cet espace ouvert, infiniment, les choses, les mots, les corps, le mouvement ne peuvent apparaître qu'à partir de leur état premier : une page blanche, un espace vide. Ici, même le sol est un gisement de possibilités, de virtualités. Et puis, sans qu'on y prenne garde, avec le temps, cela prend forme, momentanément. Un frémissement, une hésitation, une émergence, une matière, une image, une phrase. Soudain on est devant la chose. Là, précisément où elle advient, où elle est juste en train de se faire [in this infinitely open space, things, words, bodies, movement, can only appear from their primary state: a blank page, an empty space. Here, even the floor is a deposit of possibilities, of virtualities. And then, without us noticing, through time, this takes form, momentarily. A simmer, a hesitation, an emergence, a matter, an image, a phrase. Suddenly, we are in front of the thing. There, exactly where it comes about, where it is just in the making].<sup>50</sup>*

The piece is progressively developed out of fragmentary entities, that do not fully blend into each other; even when the different elements seem to entwine into a whole – accentuating each other's effects – the poles of their relations remain visible, thus barring the formation of a "total" combination. To take an example from what Mesa considers to be the climax of the work,<sup>51</sup> she is naked, wearing a goat-mask and high heels [Figure 21]. In front of the film projection mirror, both her physical body and its reflection are visible. Unclear sounds form a soft background. The film image, superposed on her body's reflection, changes from a blue, abstract, still image to figurative-but-unidentifiable shots. The woman-goat figure moves slightly, unhurriedly, and the humming chorus from *Madama Butterfly* begins.

50 Filiberti, Irène: Le processus est poésie, in: Ruiz de Infante: *Olga Mesa et la double vision*, p. 11.

51 Mesa: Interview.

Figure 21: Film still from the video recording of *Solo a ciegas (con lágrimas azules)*. Source: Mesa, Olga: *Solo a ciegas (con lágrimas azules)* [DVD], Cie. Olga Mesa / Association Hors Champ – Fuera de Campo 2008, 41:19. No re-use without permission.



The scene does not erase the distinct elements of which it is composed; body, movements, mask, sounds, film images, light, mirror, humming and blueness, goat-ness and human-ness, nakedness and heel-extensions, the theatrical present and 1904 Japan, the theatrical space and the film space – the spectator is aware of each and every one of them. At the same time, they are related, the perception of one associated with the perception of another; the nostalgic calmness and melancholy of the humming responds to the body's slight movements, the almost-abstract film images make space for the goat-head, the low background sounds underlie the scene's overall fragility.

Rather than attending to individual elements *or* the whole they compose, the spectator can focus on the interval of the relation, the space between different elements, a space which belongs to each and to all. In her text 'The Choreography of Singularity and Difference' – to which the present analysis is greatly indebted – on Salamon's *And Then*, Ana Vujanović similarly sees the work as consisting of human/dance actions and multiple media (including film), as well as existing *between them*. In a passage that could apply to the choreographed between-ness of *Solo a ciegas*, she writes that Salamon's choreography

is also the speech as a soundtrack, the filmed interviews, the camera angles and movements, the lighting on stage, the *dispositif* of the screen-stage, the performing modes. However, choreography here relates to, but at the same time cannot be reduced to, the inscription of these various elements themselves. The choreography here is the inscription of differences, shifts, and the *movements* between them.<sup>52</sup>

Recounting evolutions in Mesa's choreographic career, Jaime Conde Salazar similarly notes that

*l'écran avait commencé à reprendre du terrain à la scène de telle manière que celle-ci finit par devenir un espace étrange entre différents médias ; une sorte de seuil où l'action vivante n'était complète qu'en relation avec l'image projetée* [the screen had started to take over with respect to the stage in such a way that the stage ended up becoming a strange space between different media; a sort of limit where the live action was only complete in relation with the projected image].<sup>53</sup>

*Solo a ciegas*, like Salamon's *And Then*, does not only exist in the space between its media, but also in the suspended time between its temporalities, the immaterial space between its spatialities, the relations between the subjects it brings onto the stage. The *Solo* almost floats among the elements out of which it is constructed, instead of remaining solely attached to their individual being and presence – and instead of creating a concrete, new, accumulated unit.

Arguably, this between-ness is the source of the piece's atmospheric quality and its very basic ingredient. 'Relations are themselves experienced' writes Brian Massumi,<sup>54</sup> referring to William James' idea, illustrated by Chénin's videos [Chapter 4]; a relation is not a mere projected association between distinct elements, but it is, itself, existing and perceptible. Comparably, the in-between intervals that form *Solo a ciegas* can be perceived as such; the work's very being is found in the composing elements *and* the interstitial space between them. This relational space also has qualities including, but not limited to, those determined by the participating media. In the goat-mask scene, when Mesa positions herself in front of the projection mirror [Figure 21] and moves, the interval between her body and the mirror can be understood as a relation in space, of images, of (bodily, bodily-mediated, and filmed) actions, and is perceived in a correspondingly cross-modal way. Relations are sensed in a field

52 Vujanović, Ana: The Choreography of Singularity and Difference. *And Then* by Eszter Salamon, in: *Performance Research* 13/1 (2008), p. 129.

53 Salazar, Jaime Conde: Hors Champs, in: Ruiz de Infante: *Olga Mesa et la double vision*, p. 35, emphasis added.

54 Massumi, Brian: *Semblance and Event. Activist Philosophy and the Occurrent Arts*, Cambridge/London: MIT Press 2011, p. 34.

between vision, audition, and kinaesthesia for the moving image. These relations have a texture, influenced by the sleekness of the mirror images, the roughness of its content, the rawness of the performer's skin; they have an intensity, modulated by the luminosity of the film and lights, the volume of the sound, the speed of the body; they have a sharpness, modified by contrasts in the film, the hesitations of the performer, the distinctness of the sounds. Most of these qualities emerge from media participating in the relations – the brightness of the film, the volume of the sound – but several also depend on their content and information. In the scene considered here, the humming chorus, nakedness and exposure of the body, goat-face, and film shots give the intervening space a nostalgic, melancholic, solitary, loss-ridden, strange, and strangely-familiar dimension. This texture, intensity, sharpness, nostalgia, solitariness, and strange familiarity are only partial attributes of the scene's individual elements; more so, they characterise the interstitial spaces – the relation – between them. In other words, the relations composing the piece are not abstract patterns but concrete, specific, qualitatively-describable entities. Mesa's art making is, thus, a process of arranging relations between heterogeneous elements, as well as an act of arranging heterogeneous relations.

The idea that the piece exists in both the compositional elements and in the immaterial territory circulating between them can be connected to the notion of assemblage, already employed to describe Mesa's work. In Jane Bennett's words,

no one materiality or type of material has sufficient competence to determine consistently the trajectory or impact of the group. The effects generated by an assemblage are, rather, *emergent properties*, emergent in that their ability to make something happen [...] is distinct from the sum of the vital force of each materiality considered alone. Each member and proto-member of the assemblage has a certain vital force, but there is also an effectivity proper to the grouping as such: an agency of the assemblage.<sup>55</sup>

Mesa's work can also be seen as the emergent effect of its material performers' actions and relations. Towards the end of the piece, the performer goes to

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55 Bennett, Jane: *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, Durham: Duke University Press 2010, p. 24, emphasis added. Manuel DeLanda links emergence with the assemblage's characteristic of retaining the singularity of its members, an idea also discernible in Mesa's work: '[u]nlike wholes in which "being part of this whole" is a defining characteristic of the parts, that is, wholes in which the parts cannot subsist independently of the relations they have with each other (relations of interiority), we need to conceive of emergent wholes in which the parts retain their autonomy, so that they can be detached from one whole and plugged into another one, entering into new inter-actions.' DeLanda: *Assemblage Theory*, p. 10



the back of the stage and opens the black backdrop curtains to reveal the backstage area, where she performs a series of movements, including tango-based steps [Figure 22]. The physical space suddenly becomes bigger; an increase in the sound volume – tango music – contributes to this sense of opening, of escaping; some of the invisible equipment appears. For a moment, the universe on stage oscillates between evaporating – collapsing through the dissolution of its spatial boundaries – and expanding – to include the newly-visible elements. In this ambivalence, it becomes possible to realise that the piece has created a universe – an *ambience-like* existence – out of minimally-few disparate objects, words, actions, and images; by opening up to the “beyond” of the stage, and increasing the fragility of the relational arrangement that it has formed, the emergent relational entity is made manifest.

Figure 22: Film still from the video recording of *Solo a ciegas (con lágrimas azules)*.<sup>56</sup> Source: Mesa, Olga: *Solo a ciegas (con lágrimas azules)* [DVD], Cie. Olga Mesa / Association Hors Champ – Fuera de Campo 2008, 41:19. No re-use without permission.



56 The piece was conceived as having the spectators on the stage. In this way, when the curtain opened, it would reveal an *hors-champ* constituted by the empty auditorium. This was, however, realised very few times due to technical difficulties. Mesa : Interview.

As an immaterial emergence, the work is not but rather *happens*;<sup>57</sup> it comes about through the conjunctive actions of the assemblage's members. Indeed, even if the piece is mostly set and does not contain real-time improvisation, the constraints of the choreography are – in the expression of Mesa herself – 'alive'.<sup>58</sup> The relations between her body and other media are not just mechanically *performed* but *lived* in specific moments; for example, the sound technician can react to the performance by making sound respond to it.<sup>59</sup> A choreography of *doing* concerns what the choreographer does, as well as choreography itself as happening.

Thus the question of choreographic ontology is not simply replaced by a focus on relational praxis, but also by a focus on the results of this praxis in their emerging. Mesa's work therefore allows choreography's being and its characteristics to be envisaged without solely referring to physically-present entities and performed actions, but also to their relationality as happening. Once again, this relocation of choreographic ontology has historiographic importance; it seeks the choreographic beyond physical presences and practices, in the very unfolding of (com)position. In 1641, Saint-Hubert's list of necessary elements in a court ballet contained physically-present acts (dance, music) and material entities (costumes, machines), as well as dramaturgical aspects (subject, order) [Chapter 1].<sup>60</sup> These are *ingredients* of ballets, illustrating that in Saint-Hubert's context, ballet consisted of physically-instantiated acts and presences as much as the order of their composition; and that, as different as Saint-Hubert's focus on order may be from Mesa's evanescent emergence, they are both modes of unfolding relational choreography.

## Conclusion

A word spoken, a fleeting image, a leg flying upward, a bright light turning blue, an object touched, a phrase written; Olga Mesa's *Solo a ciegas* allows a consideration of choreography that expands beyond the dancing/moving human body by re-aligning it with other media in a non-hierarchical relationship. Beyond a choreographic concern for the actions of the moving/dancing body and other media, however, the current analysis of Mesa's work identifies choreography as

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57 On the active, dynamic nature of assemblages see DeLanda: *Assemblage Theory*, as well as Laermans, who identifies a 'here-and-now or event-quality' in them: Laermans: *Moving Together*, p. 12.

58 Mesa: Interview.

59 Ibid.

60 Saint-Hubert: *La Manière de composer et faire réussir les ballets*, Genève: Minkoff 1993 [1641], p. 6.

a process of arranging relations between them. In this construal, choreography is characterised more by the act it operates – arranging, organising, ordering, relating – than by the types of objects – (non)corporeal, (non)physical, (non)kinetic – it applies to. Choreographic authorship is correspondingly modified and likened to other relational practices, placing it in an interdisciplinary position defined by common ways of *doing*.

A hungry kid, a woman-animal, a tango, a night of longing, a mission of resistance. In *Solo a ciegas*, the sounds, texts, film images, movements, and lights that are put in relation are intertwined with an arrangement of ideas, subjects, references, times, and places to form a portrait of war and childhood, loss and memory. The shift of choreography from material ontology to praxis of relational arrangement detaches it from a particular view of choreographic intermediality, and envisages it as a process of assembling narratives, subjects, and fleeting universes. As such, Mesa's choreography weaves a choreographic politics of memory, disruptive in its non-linearity, hybridised in its multiplicity, and critical in its open-endedness.

Intensity, texture, sharpness. Shifting choreographic attention to the creation of relations as potential objects of choreography, it is also possible to focus on how relations themselves are constituted beyond their poles as distinct entities or their additive effect. In this perspective, qualities that are attributes of the relations between the piece's materials are identifiable, beyond the qualities of those materials themselves. *Solo a ciegas* is composed of a body and sounds, of objects and texts, of film images and lights; it unfolds through an acting body, erupting sounds, changing lights, and moving images. But what it *is* can also be found in the interstitial, relational space, in the ambience-like, seemingly-fleeting-yet-persistent universe that develops in their between-ness. This development is an emergence, an event contingent upon the choreographic assemblage's distributed actions; it is an illustration of choreography's being beyond the materiality of its physically-present ingredients.

As a multimedia construction in which dance and the moving human body assume a non-hierarchical position – in horizontal coexistence with other media – Mesa's *Solo* reflects Saint-Hubert's non-solely-dance-centred vision of ballet [Chapter 1]. As a non-medium-specific assemblage resulting from a non-medium-specific relational praxis, the piece reflects *La Manière de composer's* composite ballet spectacle and the interdisciplinary role of some of its practitioners. As a choreographic act of arrangement reaching beyond intermediality, Mesa's work reflects Saint-Hubert's ballet's dramaturgical links between non-linearly-related parts. As an event emerging from heterogeneous relations, *Solo a ciegas* reflects Saint-Hubert's focus on order and the subject as non-physical constituents of the ballet. Identifying these reflections may seem preposterous; viewing 17<sup>th</sup>-century ordered assemblages through a contemporary, Deleuzeian/

Guattarian choreographic-assemblages lens *is* preposterous. But, it is preposterous in Mieke Bal's sense of the term;<sup>61</sup> it is a historiographic act of purposefully putting "before" what came "after" to consider the relevance each may hold for the other. This relevance is the marker of common issues despite differential responses, thus pointing to the need for a macro-history of choreography that includes pre-modernist composite spectacle along with contemporary work that counters modernist influences. Contemporary Deleuzeian-Guattarian assemblages and 17<sup>th</sup>-century ordered assemblages are radically dissimilar – from Mesa's dispersed dramaturgy to Saint-Hubert's centralising subject; from Mesa's compositional open-ness to Saint-Hubert's compositional rules – but they are dissimilar *as choreographic assemblages*. It is in this framework – of a parallel choreographic history – that a comparison between them needs to be pursued.

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61 Bal, Mieke: *Quoting Caravaggio: Contemporary Art, Preposterous History*, Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press 1999.

## Chapter 6: Being (in) a choreographic object: William Forsythe's artificial nature installation in Groningen<sup>1</sup>

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In the late 1980s, the Dutch city of Groningen was preparing to celebrate its 950<sup>th</sup> anniversary. For this occasion, several figures of the city's public life – most notably a former businessman named Frank Mohr – initiated a large-scale urban art installation project that would “mark” the city's boundaries at the same time it marked the city's anniversary. The chosen artist – architect Daniel Libeskind – prepared a “masterplan” wherein nine additional architects, thinkers, and artists proposed installations – called “markers” or “tokens” – to be erected around the city. The project was generally met positively in Groningen – a medium-sized city of around 200,000 residents – although some viewed it as a public-relations, image-building enterprise.<sup>2</sup> Funds were secured via organisations, including the municipality and Rijswijk's Ministry of Public Health and Culture.<sup>3</sup> An advisory committee was established, composed of actors from museum-related and academic contexts. A parallel steering group was also formed, to technically support the development of the project; it included a member of Groningen's municipal town-planning department, as well as Mohr.<sup>4</sup>

- 1 Parts of this chapter are based on Leon, Anna: Between and within choreographies. An early choreographic object by William Forsythe, in: *Dance Articulated* special Issue *Choreography Now*, 6:1 (2020), pp. 64-88.
- 2 Grassmuck, Volker: A Combinatorial Cosmology of the Contemporary City. The Books of Groningen: Marking the City, in: *Intercommunication 2* (1992), <http://waste.informatik.huberlin.de/~grassmuck/Texts/groningen.html> (August 2020). The number of residents in the city may have varied since the 1990s.
- 3 Letter to Daniel Libeskind from the municipality of Groningen, 23 June 1989, Groningen Municipality Archives: -1.855.1 – MAP 1, pp. 3–4; Hefting, Paul & Winkel, Camiel van (eds.): *Marking the City Boundaries: The Books of Groningen*, Groningen: City Planning Department 1990, unpaginated.
- 4 The advisory committee included W.H. Crouwel, director of the Boymans van Beuningen museum, Rotterdam; M.H. Cornips, conservator in the art department of Groninger

Libeskind's "masterplan" – or, as he called it, the 'critique' of a masterplan<sup>5</sup> – was titled *The Books of Groningen* and was organised around the city's name as it appears on the oldest-surviving handwritten document – CRUONINGA; each marker corresponds to one of its letters.<sup>6</sup> Libeskind also associated each city marker with a Greek muse, a colour, a time of the day, a place in the city (tavern, streets...), a material, and a (liberal) art, thus creating what Ruth Wallach termed an 'urban cosmology'<sup>7</sup>. The masterplan was embodied by a metallic book, each page corresponding to one marker. Based on this plan, and consistent with Libeskind's insistence on the interdisciplinary and international nature of the project,<sup>8</sup> a group of artists and theorists<sup>9</sup> were invited to propose designs for the markers. Each installation was placed at a route entering/exiting the city (one more, by philosopher Paul Virilio, is found in the town centre); they form a belt around present-day Groningen, spelling out its ancient name.

One of the artists invited to design a city marker was choreographer William Forsythe, who was director of Ballett Frankfurt at the time. His marker, completed in 1990, is what may be called an "artificial nature" installation in a field at the fringes of Groningen. It consists of a straight, approximately-400-meters-long canal excavated in the field, parallel to which willow trees were planted. Each willow's trunk is strapped to a concrete pillar in the canal via a metallic wire; the wire pulls the trunk towards the pillar, creating an arc-like form over time [Figure 23]. An S-shaped hedge made of hip-height bushes crosses the canal [Figure 24].

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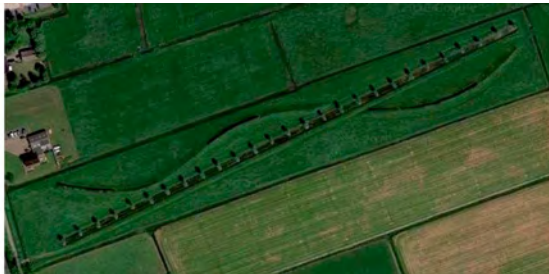
museum, Groningen; E. R. M. Taverne, Professor of History of Architecture at the State University of Groningen and P. H. Hefting, of the Dutch PTT. Cf. Hefting & Winkel: *The Books of Groningen*, unpaginated

- 5 Quoted in Grassmuck: *A Combinatorial Cosmology of the Contemporary City*.
- 6 Libeskind, Daniel: *Presentation of the Masterplan* (transcription), 1990, Groningen Municipality Archives: -1.855.1 – MAP 1, p. 5.
- 7 Wallach, Ruth: *Marking the City: Place-Making and the Aesthetics of Urban Spaces*, in: Klusáková, Lud'a & Teulières, Laure (eds.): *Frontiers and Identities: Cities in Regions and Nations*, Pisa: Plus-Pisa University Press 2008, p. 286.
- 8 Letter from Daniel Libeskind to the advisory committee, 5 November 1989, Groningen Municipality Archives: -1.855.1 – MAP 1.
- 9 The group included, apart from Libeskind himself, Kurt W. Forster, Akira Asada, Thom Puckey, Gunnar Daan, Heiner Müller, John Hejduk, Leonhard Lapin, William Forsythe, and Paul Virilio.

Figure 23: Willows along the artificial canal are bent by being pulled by a metallic wire attached to a concrete pillar. *The Books of Groningen*. Project by Daniel Libeskind with William Forsythe, BOOK N(7): *Dance/Mechanics/3pm/Streets/Red Flame/Erato*, William Forsythe. Photograph: Emma Villard. No re-use without permission.



Figure 24: Aerial view of William Forsythe's marker showing the hedge crossing the canal. *The Books of Groningen*. Project by Daniel Libeskind with William Forsythe, BOOK N(7): *Dance/Mechanics/3pm/Streets/Red Flame/Erato*, William Forsythe. Source: Google Maps, 2020, May 29. Ruischerbrug, Scale: 50m. Google Maps [online] (Retrieved 29.05.2020). No re-use without permission.



Corresponding to CRUONINGA's second "N", the marker is associated – according to Libeskind's masterplan – with mechanics, dance, the red flame, 3pm, the streets, and Erato, the muse of lyric poetry. (Terpsichore, the muse of dance, corresponds to architect Gunnar Daan's installation, consisting of two large frames in the form of open book pages, filled with small aluminium plates that subtly "dance" in the wind.)<sup>10</sup> Forsythe himself simply names the work *The Books of Groningen* with the subtitle *Book N(7)* and characterises it – prefiguring his work on choreographic installations in the 2000s and 2010s – a "choreographic object" for which he shares authorship with Libeskind.<sup>11</sup>

Related in Libeskind's mystical system to dance but not to its muse, described as "choreographic" but also as an "object", the marker raises the question of what conception of choreography is active in this non-human, largely-non-moving work of land art. This chapter draws from three types of sources to explore this question: firstly, a personal visit to the marker (and other markers around Groningen); secondly, a series of discussions with Groningen municipality employees who worked on the installation, and with Forsythe's collaborators who have experience of his more recent choreographic objects; and finally, Groningen Municipality's archives on the project. Based on these, this chapter presents the installation as a contemporary choreographic expansion that counters the anthropocentrism and kinetic necessity of choreography – historical constructions that succeeded Domenico da Piacenza and Guglielmo Ebreo da Pesaro's early-Italian Renaissance<sup>12</sup> [Chapter 3] but continue to colour present readings of them.

## A choreography of nature

Everything in Forsythe's marker is human-made; the field in which the installation now stands was previously just a grass-filled space surrounded by other fields and roads, transformed with a canal dug from scratch and the planting of willows and a hedge.<sup>13</sup> The choreographer intervened in the natural growth process of the bushes and trees, exploiting the unusual suppleness of willow wood, as well as the presence and flow of water – ultimately creating

10 Quoted in Papadakis, Andreas C. (ed.): *Marking the City Boundaries*, London: Art and Design/Academy Editions 1992, p. 53.

11 Forsythe, William: *The Books of Groningen*, undated, [http://www.williamforsythe.com/installations.html?&no\\_cache=1&detail=1&uid=36](http://www.williamforsythe.com/installations.html?&no_cache=1&detail=1&uid=36) (August 2020).

12 For an analysis of Libeskind's plan in relation to the Renaissance, see Stieber, Nancy: *The Triumph of Play. Charts, Carts and Cards*, in: Papadakis: *Marking the City Boundaries*, pp. 9–15.

13 Lourens, Diana, Pestoor, Jan & Tervoort, André: Interview with the author (August 2017).



a site of artificial nature. Over time, human intervention in the installation has continued; the Groningen city maintenance department trims and cuts the tree branches to visibly retain the arched shape.<sup>14</sup> The idea of human control over nature is prominent, both in Forsythe's marker's conception and in the discourse surrounding it. According to Dik Breunis – member of the *Books of Groningen* steering group who participated in the preparatory discussions about Forsythe's marker – the choreographer's conceptual focus was placed on two poles: firstly, the history of Groningen and, secondly, the interaction of humans with nature – and more specifically, human attempts to control and change nature to achieve their goals.<sup>15</sup> Bringing these two interests together, the installation's three components – willows, hedge, canal – all refer to how nature has been historically modified by Groningen inhabitants to facilitate their living and work conditions. The canal points to the multiple artificial canals present throughout the city; the bending of the trees reproduces a traditional, local technique used to obtain ship-making wood; the hedge can be seen as an artificial dike, an elevated ridge used in the Netherlands to protect from rising sea levels.<sup>16</sup> The discourse presenting the installation to visitors is also focussed on human control over nature; in the explanatory entrance sign the marker is said to 'represent the way in which mankind has made changes to the natural world for centuries in order to survive'. A similar reception is found by theorists; for Wallach the willows form 'a forced canopy over the canal',<sup>17</sup> while for Nancy Stieber 'Forsythe's trees in bondage bow gracefully to human control, in elegant but tortured tension'.<sup>18</sup> People control nature, and choreographers define the movement of bodies – in an expansion of choreography, the choreographer controls nature and defines the forms that it will embody.

The Groningen project is not Forsythe's only choreography of nature. His 2013 work *Aviation* also – and even-more visibly – choreographed trees in a square in central Basel, by fitting them with electronic devices that produced sound vibrations that moved their branches. There are further examples of

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14 Ibid; email to the author.

15 Breunis, Dik: interview with the author (August 2017). This is consistent with Libeskind's plan, which aimed for 'a rethinking of the symbolic and imaginative role that the city plays in the lives of its inhabitants.' Libeskind, Daniel: Oral Explanation during Presentation "Masterplan" for the Advisory- and Steering Committee, 26 August 1989 (transcript), Groningen Municipality Archives: -1.855.1 – RO/2126, p. 17.

16 William Forsythe's proposal also included using 'indigenous plants and vegetables, trees, bushes, etc, etc, grasses, flowers'. Note from Forsythe to Frank Mohr, 19 March 1990, Groningen Municipality Archives: -1.855.1 – RO/2118. This reading was also given in Lourens, Pestoor & Tervoort: Interview.

17 Wallach: *Marking the City*, p. 290.

18 Stieber: *The Triumph of Play*, p. 13.

Forsythe's work transposing choreographic movement prescription beyond the body. In the 2014 work *Black Flags*, for instance, it is the title's black flags that are put into motion, via robots given choreographic instructions. Expanding the types of objects to which choreography applies, Forsythe's work forms links with the visual arts.<sup>19</sup> It has also become part of a wider tendency – including Mette Ingvartsen's *Evaporated Landscapes* (2009) and *The Artificial Nature Project* (2012), or Jack Hauser/Lisa Hinterreithner's *The Call of Things* (2014) – of choreographically working with non-human elements and materials. This contemporary interest in the choreographic use of non-human materials cannot, however, be reduced to a simple exercise of choreographic control by humans on (natural) objects. Paralleling the development of philosophical perspectives that place increased value on things and materials,<sup>20</sup> such works stress the agency of their non-human performers.

Indeed, cracks appear in the discourse of control surrounding Forsythe's work; in an era of extreme human dominance and influence upon natural resources and phenomena, the Groningen installation has a nostalgic, almost “retro” aspect. Instead of high-tech equipment, it uses straightforward wires and pillars (the most technologically-complicated aspect of the installation – automatic LED lighting – was added by the municipality and was not part of Forsythe's artistic plan<sup>21</sup>); instead of complex control systems, it uses human surveillance and simple gardening; instead of up-to-date procedures and materials, it turns to traditional techniques. This low-tech, simple setup makes the installation's control over nature relative; keeping the vegetation well mowed and weeded, maintaining a completely-stable and precise form for the dike and tree arc, and keeping the canal completely clean and free of insects and plants would require an enormous amount of labour. If the installation stems from a human desire to control nature, it deliberately does not centralise the human within a clearly advantageous, fully-dominant position. The choreography in the installation is not completely human-controlled, and cannot be completely comprehended solely from an anthropocentric perspective.

One way the installation questions such a perspective is by disrupting the spatial scale habitually used by human observers. If the human subject – one partly inherited from the Enlightenment – experiences their being as a unit, the installation cannot be fully grasped at the mesoscopic scale of the plant-unit. The overall shape of the tree and dike change through cell growth (cells

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19 Cf. Leon: Between and within choreographies.

20 See, for instance: Bryant, Levi: R. *The Democracy of Objects*, Ann Arbor: Open Humanities Press 2011; Bennett, Jane: *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, Durham: Duke University Press 2010.

21 Lourens, Pestoor & Tervoort: Interview.

increasing in size) and cell division (the multiplication of cells),<sup>22</sup> which are only understandable at the microscopic level. (When asked about Forsythe's idea for his marker, Mohr commented that it would be a dance in close-up<sup>23</sup> – like under a microscope.) The trees' embodiment of an arc and the dike's embodiment of a curve happen incrementally, through a cumulative effect of a million microscopic events and cells. From this perspective, plant growth is a matter of innumerable sub-units and not directly of the tree- or bush-unit; the choreography is not performed by a unified single plant entity, but by the plant as a plural constellation. But, for choreography to be seen as a multiplicity of cellular sub-units' action, choreography must open beyond the mesoscopic scale habitually adopted by human subjects. In order to grasp such a choreography, relating to a tree – binding a loop around it, pulling it into an arc – or a bush – planted in specific formations – does not suffice; instead, it requires acceptance of the presence and role of microscopic sub-units whose being – combined with human intervention – makes the choreography possible.

From the cells and particles composing the plant-unit – and their micro-actions that make the plant take form – the installation also branches out to the macro-scale, in which the plant participates. A plant's limits are not clear-cut: its roots extend into the soil and absorb elements of it, its pores are open to the air and humidity, its hormones constantly respond to its environment, its shoots seek sunlight, its branches and leaves host insects. In Forsythe's willows, these “grey” boundaries are expanded by the wires – extensions that connect them with the canal pillars, introducing them into a network that is not reducible to its constituent elements, including other parts of the installation. The wires, as extensions of the trees – in addition to the sun, soil nutrients, rainwater, wind, animals feeding from and into the ground – make changes in the environment that influence the plants; the plants act towards, and because of, elements beyond them. Expanding beyond the plants, the installation also includes the canal, the field in which it was erected, and the complex ecosystem that has developed, largely because of the installation. Plants grow un-planned in the canal and are annually weeded before growing again, the wind adds sound and intensity, small animals cross the field, wild grasses surround the dike, and new small trees appear around the willows, which are allowed to remain so long as they do not drastically interfere with the installation's design.<sup>24</sup> As with its components, the limits of the installation as a whole are not clear. Its borders are marked by two short fences at either end of the field and by a

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22 Lloyd, Clive: *Plant Cell Biology*, in: Plopper, George, Sharp, David & Sikorski, Eric (eds.): *Lewin's Cells* (3<sup>rd</sup> edition), Massachusetts: Jones & Bartlett 2015, pp. 947–950.

23 Breunis: Interview.

24 Lourens, Pestoor & Tervoort: Interview.

difference in the height (and, at times, colour) of surrounding grass. But, the sounds and movements from nearby streets – cars passing, voices – blend into its environment, as do houses and (unbent) trees in the background. Similarly, while the project aimed to mark Groningen's *boundaries*, the contemporary city is difficult to contain; highways and train lines connect to suburbs and countryside, and the installation is on a boundary that is (possibly only) administratively defined. The municipality's letter to Libeskind regarding his contract suggested that '[t]he tokens are to be placed [...] in such a way that the in- and outgoing traffic (road, water, rail and air) will clearly notice that it is entering or leaving the city, as in former days the gates of the city of Groningen marked the entrance to and the exit out of the city'.<sup>25</sup> But, the city, like the plants and the installation itself, branches out beyond itself, in a macroscopic expansion beyond the scale and perspective of the individual human observer.

If the marker – microscopic or macroscopic constellation – questions the scale of a unitary, coherent human subject, it also casts doubt upon this subject's conception-of-being as autonomous. Indeed, in the macroscopic scale, Forsythe's choreography can be seen as an ecology, a complex macro-system made of heterogeneous, but interrelated, elements: trees, wires, water, soil, wind, insects, light... While Forsythe only partly made a site-specific work (the installation is conceptually associated with Groningen's history, but Forsythe did not choose the particular location<sup>26</sup>), he has, perhaps inadvertently, created an environment of which the installation is part – and which presumably exceeds the choreographer's design. The notion of ecology – introduced in scientific discourse as early as 1866<sup>27</sup> – is encountered in descriptions of contemporary choreography<sup>28</sup> and, particularly, in analyses of Forsythe's installations.<sup>29</sup> In Groningen, the choreographic ecology is, moreover, largely self-regulating: the installation has not suffered from pests, is only mowed at six-month intervals and trimmed once a year, while soil nutrients and abundant rain replace human-driven watering and fertilising. Maintenance largely focusses on damage due to human intervention and repairs of non-essential parts of the installation

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25 Letter to Daniel Libeskind from the municipality of Groningen, p. 2.

26 Breunis: Interview.

27 Stalpaert, Christel & Byttebier, Karolien: *Art and Ecology: Scenes from a Tumultuous Affair*, in: Cools, Guy & Gielen, Pascal (eds.): *The Ethics of Art: Ecological Turns in the Performing Arts*, Amsterdam: Valiz 2014, p. 60.

28 See, for instance, Klien, Michael: *Choreography as an Aesthetics of Change*, PhD thesis, Edinburgh: Edinburgh College of Art 2008, p. 2.

29 See, for instance, Manning, Erin: *Propositions for the Verge*. William Forsythe's Choreographic Objects, in: *Inflexions 2* (2009), [http://www.inflexions.org/n2\\_manninghtml.html](http://www.inflexions.org/n2_manninghtml.html) (August 2020).

– such as lighting and accompanying electricity circuits.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, it is not only human (choreographic) activity that makes the installation possible; it is also the ecology's capacity for self-regulation and maintenance.

Additionally, Forsythe's marker for Groningen affirms its own way of being against an anthropocentric perspective because of its inscription in time. The installation has a durational aspect that is intimately connected with the monumental, historically-rooted, and future-oriented nature of the municipality and Libeskind's "masterplan" project. In the architect's words, 'the overall Book of the City Marking Project is the letter which has been sent out through the present to those awaiting a reply of the future to what happened in the past'.<sup>31</sup> Libeskind wanted his project to be inscribed in the humanly-experienced time cycle of the 24-hour day, but also in the beyond-individual-lifetime timespan: 'millennial time, based on a 1000 year measure'.<sup>32</sup> The project's installations provide long-lasting traces that have become ingrained in the fabric of the city, as parts of its landscape.<sup>33</sup> (The municipality will maintain the installations for a minimum of fifty years, likely longer.<sup>34</sup>) Forsythe's installation fully enters this lengthened timescale. The work changes throughout the year, cyclically going through phases of bare winter branches and leafy green springs. Over a number of years, the size, form, and thickness of the plants also change; their being is thus introduced within the historical time-scale of the city, evolving with it. The contradictions of a purportedly-unchanging monument are thus avoided. In its extreme durational existence, the piece evolves in a high intensity of slowness, its actions imperceptible to human observers. Like changes to urban landscape that go unnoticed, "before" and "after" pictures are necessary to see change in the installation. The slowness of Forsythe's marker thus provides a response to an age of extreme speed, in the form of an aesthetics of patience. The choreographer was fully aware of the durational aspect of his proposition; according to Breunis, Forsythe was the only artist to really engage with the long-term existence and evolution of his installation – he gave instructions about the need for the wires to follow the trees' growth, changing the strap position to maintain the wire's resistance, and trimming branches to avoid the

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30 Lourens, Pestoor & Tervoort: Interview.

31 Libeskind: Presentation of the Masterplan, p. 5.

32 Libeskind: Oral Explanation, p. 15.

33 Engaging with the longevity of the project, a school group buried small boxes with drawings and stories about the future next to certain markers – Forsythe's included – to be opened by the students still present several decades later. Lourens, Pestoor & Tervoort: Interview. Cf. also Grassmuck: A Combinatorial Cosmology of the Contemporary City.

34 Lourens, Pestoor & Tervoort: Interview.

trees growing vertically upward.<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, contrary to other contributions – whose existence or decay depend on municipality intervention – Forsythe's marker can, presumably, continue its existence indefinitely. By the same token, when its vegetation is destroyed, replacement needs to respect the plants' temporality, by waiting for the new plants to grow to the desired size and shape. The timescale of the installation cannot be determined by the human figure, who must adapt to the plants' timescale.

Despite the intentions and discourse that make *Book N(7)* a project of artificial-nature creation, the installation develops beyond human projections because of design choices made by the choreographer and because of its components' plural and durational kind of being – plant but also multiplicity of cells and member of an ecology – affirmed in their growth process. Furthermore, a non-anthropocentric reading of the piece can also muddle possible dichotomies between the human and the non-human. Indeed microscopic, macroscopic, and durational choreography can also apply to the human body. Deborah Hay's conception of the body as a collection of 53 trillion cells<sup>36</sup> is an example of how human bodies can also be seen as agglomerations of microscopic units. From conceptions of humans as ecologies encompassing media-extensions to Forsythe's own transposition of the dancer's centre outside of the body,<sup>37</sup> the macroscopic scale can also be used to understand the actions of humans. In works like Eszter Salamon's *nvsbl* (2006) and Ivana Müller's *Playing Ensemble Again and Again* (2008), dancers evolve in states of intense slowness, at times increasing the duration of action to the point that movements become undetectable. In other words, if Forsythe's marker is a non-anthropocentric choreography, it also acts as a reminder that anthropocentrism may be linked to a specific – autonomous, unitary, mesoscopic – conception of *anthropos*, and

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35 Breunis: Interview.

36 Hay, Deborah: *My Body, the Buddhist*, Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2000, p. 1.

37 Theories of distributed cognition or "active externalism" consider that the environment surrounding a person, as well as the media they use, hold an active role in cognitive processes. Since cognition can be distributed to agents outside the person, the mind itself becomes extended and distributed. Cognition does not happen *in* the person but in the *ecology* of the person. Malafouris, Lambros: *How Things Shape the Mind: A Theory of Material Engagement*, Cambridge/London: MIT Press 2013; Clark, Andy & Chalmers, David: The Extended Mind, in: *Analysis* 58/1 (1998), pp. 7–19. Bojana Cvejić notes: 'Forsythe [...] multiplied the centres within the body, but also transposed them into the space surrounding the body, using not only points but also lines or entire planes on or in which to issue or lodge movement'. Cvejić, Bojana: *Choreographing Problems: Expressive Concepts in European Contemporary Dance and Performance*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2015, p. 138.

that the human being may be seen as a constellation branching out beyond its boundaries as well.

In addition to other figures of choreographic history who operated before the ideological shifts of the Enlightenment, Domenico and Guglielmo [Chapter 3] worked before this anthropocentric, autonomous conception of *anthropos* became entrenched and dominant. If Forsythe's choreographic object in Groningen decentralises such a view of the human and counters its dominance, this allows one to recognise the non-anthropocentric aspects of Domenico and Guglielmo's choreography as well – itself developing parallels between human practitioners and their surrounding world, inscribing dance into a realm not-fully designed by them, and calling into question the very dichotomy between human and non-human.

## A choreography of non-moving movement

Forsythe's marker was completed in 1990, one year after Peter Sloterdijk published *Eurotaoismus* and its critique of modernity as a project of ever-increasing, self-perpetuating hyper-mobility. The philosopher – in an argument that highly influenced Dance Studies through André Lepecki's reference to it in his book *Exhausting Dance*<sup>38</sup> – describes the constant striving towards movement as a staple of Western modernity:

*Fortschritt ist Bewegung zur Bewegung, Bewegung zur Mehrbewegung, Bewegung zur gesteigerten Bewegungsfähigkeit [...] Die Modernität ist ontologisch reines Sein-zur-Bewegung* [Progress is movement towards movement, movement towards more movement, movement towards heightened aptitude to move [...] ontologically, modernity is a pure being-towards movement].<sup>39</sup>

In the decades that followed – while Forsythe was elaborating his work on choreographic objects – movement increasingly came into the theoretical foreground, as illustrated by the social sciences' "turn" towards the notion of mobility.<sup>40</sup> Choreography has accompanied – or, at least, paralleled – this movement-focus, by expanding its application to multiple, non-dance- and non-art-related movement phenomena – from gendered gesture to the circulation of trolleys

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38 Lepecki, André: *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the Politics of Movement*, Oxon/New York: Routledge 2006, pp. 12–13.

39 Sloterdijk, Peter: *Eurotaoismus: Zur Kritik der politischen Kinetik*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1989, pp. 36–37.

40 Cf. Wilkie, Fiona: *Performance, Transport and Mobility: Making Passage*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2015; Urry, John: *Mobilities*, Cambridge: Polity Press 2007.

in supermarkets. If movement is everywhere, choreography gains relevance as a movement-related discipline that can expand beyond dance.

The work that Forsythe proposed for Libeskind's masterplan stands in an ambivalent relationship with this kinetic and choreographic omnipresence. On the one hand, the installation partially corresponds to the idea that Forsythe's choreographic objects are proposals for bodily, kinetic participation. In multiple examples, visitors must engage with Forsythe's installations through movement to achieve a task and to realise the work's *raison d'être*: they enter and move within the inflatable *White Bouncy Castle* (1997, with Dana Caspersen and Joel Ryan), they navigate among oscillating pendulums through *Nowhere and Everywhere at the Same Time* (2005-), they cross from one hanging gymnastic ring to the next without touching the floor in *The Fact of Matter* (2009).<sup>41</sup> Similarly, since the Groningen marker is in a 400-metre-long field, and since there is no high vantage point from which the installation's three components – canal, trees, dike – can be appreciated, the best way for the visitors to experience the work is to enter the field and walk within it; the installation provokes movement as a response to its design and placement in space. On the other hand, the marker itself performs no evident movement; apart from an occasional wind in the trees and the slight motion of the dike, viewers see a largely-immobile landscape of artificial nature. (According to Breunis, when he and Mohr asked Forsythe whether – as a choreographer – he wanted his installation to move, the answer was no.<sup>42</sup>) In this sense, the Groningen marker is comparable to choreographic objects – such as *A Volume within which it is not Possible for Certain Classes of Action to Arise* (2015), an empty cube whose small dimensions impose limits on users' movements – which allow an exploration of motion while remaining still.

If, however, one adopts a non-anthropocentric perspective on the work, *Book N(7)* cannot be solely grasped as an object whose immobility invites motion by the user. Drawing the focus away from the mesoscopic scale adopted by the average human visitor, the movement in the Groningen marker also happens at micro- and macro-levels which may not include the human observer/user; it

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41 In a 2012 interview, Forsythe explicitly associated the pendulum installation with scores. Forsythe, William, van Imschoot, Myriam & Engels, Tom: Interview, 2012, [http://olga.o.oral-site.be/oralsite/pages/William\\_Forsythe\\_on\\_Scores/index.html](http://olga.o.oral-site.be/oralsite/pages/William_Forsythe_on_Scores/index.html) (August 2020). In this interview, Forsythe used the term "choreographic object" to refer to means of communicating information about the body or other choreographic structures – something that is close to the function of his *Synchronous Objects*, discussed earlier. The usage of the term has since shifted to also refer to installations as well; see for example Gaensheimer, Susanne & Kramer, Mario: Foreword, in: Gaensheimer, Susanne & Kramer, Mario (eds.): *William Forsythe: The Fact of Matter*, Bielefeld: Kerber 2016, p. 6.

42 Breunis: Interview.



is detectible in cellular activity<sup>43</sup> that gradually gives form to the choreography, or in members of its moving ecology – the trees pulled towards the pillars, the branches reaching towards the sun, the animals moving among the bushes, the hydrophilic plants growing in the canal. The marker's apparent immobility is due to its motion being too small, too big, or too slow to be perceived by the human observer; but, within this immobility, a different conception of movement, and choreography, may be found as well. This is particularly illustrated by the willows – the installation's sub-part that has received the most attention and is the focus of the remainder of this chapter.

In their microscopic and macroscopic scales, the trees respond to a choreographic intervention in the form of wires that influence their growth patterns. As the discourse of control surrounding the installation argues, this intervention is a constraint for the trees. But the wires, beyond imposing a specific form to be embodied, may also be an opportunity; by inviting the trees into an ecology that includes wires and pillars, they allow the willows to embody a curve that is not attainable by their non-choreographed counterparts. Just as a tool allows actions that are impossible for human corporeality without this body extension, choreographic objects render different types of movements possible through the relation of their physical form and the – in this case, leafy and wooden – bodies of their users. The willows are thus invited to explore growth options that they would otherwise not have; what if one grew in arched form?<sup>44</sup>

Even if the choreographic intervention was the same for all of the willows, they have not uniformly responded to that question. Some willows are less curved than others [Figure 25] – in some cases, a second wire has been added to confront the tree's perceived resistance [Figure 26]. Other trees have fully curved towards the wires, but have shifted this curve sideways [Figure 27], introducing an unexpected direction to the work. Such discrepancies counter the discourse of control surrounding the installation; moreover, they highlight that choreographic objects do not fully determine the resulting motions, but open a range of options for users actively engaging with them.

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43 This "micro-movement" can only be construed collectively, as individual plant cells display very small changes of position. Lloyd: *Plant Cell Biology*, p. 947.

44 This analysis is also inspired by Forsythe's rhetorical universe – see Spier, Steven: *Dancing and Drawing, Choreography and Architecture*, in: *The Journal of Architecture* 10/4 (2005), p. 354.

*Figure 25: Trees with different curves. Compare the first willow's closed angle with the second willow's open one, as well as the first willow's strong curve with the fourth willow's much lighter bend. The Books of Groningen. Project by Daniel Libeskind with William Forsythe, BOOK N(7): Dance/Mechanics/3pm/Streets/Red Flame/Erato, William Forsythe. Photograph: Emma Villard. No re-use without permission.*



*Figure 26: Tree pulled by a double wire. The Books of Groningen. Project by Daniel Libeskind with William Forsythe, BOOK N(7): Dance/Mechanics/3pm/Streets/Red Flame/Erato, William Forsythe. Photograph: Emma Villard. No re-use without permission.*



Figure 27: *Tree curving sideways*. The Books of Groningen. Project by Daniel Libeskind with William Forsythe, BOOK N(7): *Dance/Mechanics/3pm/Streets/Red Flame/Erato*, William Forsythe. Photograph: Emma Villard. No re-use without permission.



According to Christopher Roman<sup>45</sup> – who collaborated with Forsythe as a dancer for multiple years and has experience of his installations – at times the choreographer refers to the objects as “propositions” towards participants, to be responded to in multiple ways. Thus, the object is not a physical translation of a prescriptive choreographic idea, but a framework for investigation. Steven Spier describes *White Bouncy Castle* in a similar way: ‘[a]t the time of the piece Forsythe was particularly interested in processes that would produce movement that was in accordance with the principles of a work, but not determined by him in detail’.<sup>46</sup> Forsythe has noted that in choreographic objects ‘physical engagement is the means to understanding *the class of actions* to which each choreographic

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45 Roman, Christopher: Interview with the author (September 2017).

46 Spier, Steven: *Choreographic Thinking and Amateur Bodies*, in: Spier, Steven (ed.): *William Forsythe and the Practice of Choreography: It Starts from any Point*, Oxon/New York: Routledge 2011, p. 142.

system refers<sup>47</sup> – the object may therefore be a territory in which its user can choose from the kinetic potentials offered by the environment.

Forsythe's choreographic action is, then, less a definition of movement than the creation of an environment in which different movements can arise; it is the generation of movement potentials. But this does not mean that all potentials afforded by the wires *will* be explored; certain tree forms and actions will never become visible, just like users of other choreographic objects may not actually perform all possible actions. Nevertheless, the objects still include the potential for unrealised actions; the potential movements a choreographic object affords – even if no one has performed them – and all the potential states and forms of the object itself – even if it has not exemplified, or will not exemplify, them – are parts of the object. Forsythe's choreography may therefore be more fully understood if not reduced to a dichotomy of movement realised or not realised. It is not limited to the selection of one option from among a number of defined possibilities – in this case, that the tree performs this specific curve instead of any other potential movement – thus favouring actually performed movements over non-realised ones; rather, it includes multiple, potential, virtual options. The choreography is not composed of the exclusion of unrealised forms, but of the co-presence of virtual forms alongside its actual one;<sup>48</sup> its apparent lack of activity coexists with the potential motion contained within the installation.

Thus, the tree ecologies – their form, flexibility, spatial disposition – are a choreography in a state of immobility too. Similarly, when asked about the choreographic interest that Forsythe's installations may display in their “inactive”, immobile state, Roman responded that several choreographic traits can be identified even when they are not used; for him, the height of each ring in *The Fact of Matter*, the distances between them, and the size of the room in which they are found are all visible aspects of choreographic design.<sup>49</sup> Caspersen, another of Forsythe's long-time collaborators, concurs:

These are situations where, unlike in traditional performance, the choreographic principles are visible and persist over time. The public enters into the choreo-

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47 Quoted in Millqvist, Elisabeth: *Sculpturemotion*, 2017, <http://www.wanaskonst.se/en-us/Art/Art-2017/SculptureMotion/SculptureMotion> (August 2020), emphasis added.

48 This draws from Gilles Deleuze's treatment of virtuality, developed in his work on Henri Bergson: “[f]rom a certain point of view, in fact, the possible is the opposite of the real, it is opposed to the real; but, in quite a different opposition, the virtual is opposed to the actual [...] The possible has no reality (although it may have an actuality); conversely, the virtual is not actual but *as such possesses a reality*. [...] the possible is that which is “realised” (or is not realised) [...] The virtual, on the other hand, does not have to be realised, but rather actualised [...]”. Deleuze, Gilles: *Bergsonism*, New York: Zone Books 1991 [1966, trans. Hugh Tomlinson & Barbara Habberjam], pp. 96–97.

49 Roman: Interview.

graphic environment, and their bodies, trained or untrained, and the decisions that each person makes, become a perfect expression of the environment. However, the choreographic principles exist and are visible independent of those bodies and decisions.<sup>50</sup>

In Groningen, the willows display, in their apparent immobility, choreographic properties – a play of force and resistance, gravity and flexibility, curving and asymmetry – that may never be used in performance, but which still illustrate choreographic decisions and options. *Book N(7)* is choreographic because it sets its users in motion and because it itself moves, micro- and macroscopically; but, it is also choreographic in its very immobility – like a fantasmatic interval [see Chapter 3 on *fantasmata*] – not *despite*, but precisely *in*, its lack of displacement.

If Forsythe's *Book* expands choreography, then, this may not be simply because it transposes a conception of choreography associated with movement in spacetime to the micro- or macroscopic level. It is also because it marks a shift in choreography's very relationship with movement; the marker's immobility, its lack of displacement, is more than an illusion due to the human observer's incapacity to see that it "really" is in motion. Rather, a different kind of choreographic motion emerges – one which is not performed, not actual, but nonetheless present. In a context of omnipresent motion, such a view of choreography does not avoid or exclude movement; it is neither passive immobility nor a refusal of movement, but a reconsideration of movement – and choreography's relationship with it.

While this view of choreography is developed on the apparent immobility of non-human entities – trees – it can apply to the human (dancer) as well. For example, in improvisational strategies investigating not the movement that *will* happen but the explosion of possibilities that *could* happen, potential, non-realised movement can also exist in, and be experienced by, human subjects.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, Forsythe's work in Groningen is part of a wider framework in which choreographic theory displays an interest in "non-moving" movement that is also applicable to human bodies. For instance, theorist Petra Sabisch has argued for a choreography that does not exclude movement, but that 'refutes a representational image of movement, according to which only the physical display of locomotion and displacement and the application of a dance code is validated as danced or choreographed movement'.<sup>52</sup> Rudi Laermans introduces the notion of non-movement – of virtual, but not actually performed, movement – in his very definition of dance's medium, when he notes that it

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50 Quoted in Spier: *Choreographic Thinking and Amateur Bodies*, p.140.

51 Cf. Erin Manning on "preacceleration", in Manning: *Propositions for the Verge*.

52 Sabisch, Petra: *Choreographing Relations: Practical Philosophy and Contemporary Choreography*, Munich: epodium 2011, p. 92.

'is a merely virtual potential consisting of all possible movements and non-movements'.<sup>53</sup> This shift in contemporary choreographic mentality is concurrent with multiple experiences of "non-moving movement" – contemporary subjects are exposed to immaterial digital transactions and exchanges within seconds without any actual displacement, to information "circulating" online, to motion felt through virtual reality equipment.<sup>54</sup>

A dichotomy between movement and stillness and between the human and the non-human reinforce each other all too often. In contrast, Groninger's willows enter – and thus widen – the class of performers situated on the "movement" side of the movement/stillness dichotomy. But more than that, what these non-human performers contribute to choreography is their capacity to expand it from an art prescribing (non-)human performers' displacement to an art occupied with an expanded conception of movement, actual or not. In this way, they make visible the shortcomings of a movement/stillness dichotomy – one that, as Lepecki and Sloterdijk, quoted above, remind us, is a result of the process of modernity. To refuse such a dichotomy's relevance is to recognise historical practices' – like that of Domenico [Chapter 3] – own fantasmatic imbrications of motion and stillness as non-oppositional aspects of choreography.

## To look at a tree happening

By augmenting trees' motion potential and – purposefully or not – inviting them to provide diverse answers to a choreographic problem, Forsythe's Groninger marker fosters their active participation in the choreographic process. This active participation reflects plants' general mode of function, which is much less passive than conventionally thought:

The intentionality of the plant is not unidirectional, given that the roots, too, seek nutrients, navigating a veritable environmental maze, sensing humidity

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53 Laermans, Rudi: *Moving Together: Making and Theorizing Contemporary Dance*, Amsterdam: Valiz 2015, p. 53 (italics in original).

54 In a comparable string of reasoning, Maaïke Bleeker introduces Gilles Deleuze's reflection on cinema and the moving image in her analysis of – intensely slow, or, at times, completely immobile – works by Ivana Müller, arguing that if film does not only represent movement happening in front of the camera but also uses movement as a way of showing its objects – the camera moves, perspectives shift and are multiplied, editing adds a layer of motion – this kinetic medium has so deeply ingrained its movement-thinking in contemporary audiences that it has become possible for them to also perceive non-cinematographic objects in this way. Bleeker, Maaïke: *Media Dramaturgies of the Mind: Ivana Müller's Cinematic Choreographies*, in: *Performance Research* 17/5 (2012), p. 69.

gradients of the soil, and avoiding movement in the direction of other nearby roots. A combination of passive growth and what appears to be an active “foraging” for resources positions this intentionality on the hither side of the distinction between passivity and activity.<sup>55</sup>

How to cross a room full of rings? How to avoid the pendulums? How to arch your trunk? The answers to these choreographic “questions” are not infinite; they are limited by the object’s form and, therefore, the choreographer’s choices – but they are more than a mere collection of possibilities pre-defined by the choreographer, as some of these emerge through the trees’/users’ engagement. In other words, a choreographic intervention that creates a set of potentials a tree can explore does not necessarily mean that the choreographer can grasp the whole range of resulting movements; it is in the willow-users’ active exploration that the potentials appear.

But the trees are not only active because the installation invites them to explore generative motion potentials; they are not *rendered* active by the installation. The choreographic act augments *and* taps into the trees’ already-existing capacity to be active; the installation is possible *because* the willows can embody diverse forms, *because* they are dynamic, malleable beings. In other words, although the wires guide the willow trunks to curve, the wires would not have an effect without the trunks’ pre-existing flexibility and mobility. The marker choreographically embodies a specific form (an arc), potential for variation of this form (the sideways- and differently-curved bends resulting from Forsythe’s intervention), and the trees’ unrealised potentials for further form shifts – the willows could, with adequate support, perform a large number of movements, in different directions, bending to the left or right, forward or back. Looking at the willows, then, what one sees is not just the simple addition of all potential movements performed and not performed, but also the very capacity of the object to generate new forms.<sup>56</sup> From this perspective, a tree is active not only in its diverse choices of arching, but also in its state of being.

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55 Marder, Michael: What is Plant-Thinking?, in: *Klesis – Revue philosophique* 25 (2013), p. 129.

56 It is useful to refer to the way in which Deleuze explains his vision of virtuality: ‘for the real is supposed to be in the image of the possible that it realizes. [...] The virtual, on the other hand, does not have to be realised, but rather actualised; and *the rules of actualisation are not those of resemblance and limitation, but those of difference or divergence and of creation.* [...] For, in order to be actualised, the virtual cannot proceed by elimination or limitation, but must *create* its own lines of actualisation in positive acts. [...] *It is difference that is primary in the process of actualisation [...]*’. Deleuze: *Bergsonism*, p. 97, emphases added.



In this respect, Erin Manning introduces a useful theoretical tool by referring to the notion of objectile to analyse Forsythe's choreographic installations.<sup>57</sup> In his reference to this notion in *The Fold*, Gilles Deleuze writes:

*L'objet ne se définit plus par une forme essentielle, mais atteint à une fonctionnalité pure [...] Le nouveau statut de l'objet ne rapporte plus celui-ci à un moule spatial, c'est-à-dire à un rapport forme-matière, mais à une modulation temporelle qui implique une mise en variation continue de la matière autant qu'un développement continu de la forme. [...] C'est un objet maniériste, et non plus essentialiste: il devient événement* [the object is not defined by an essential form anymore, but achieves a pure functionality [...]. The new status of the object *does not anymore link it to a spatial mould, that is to a relationship between form and matter, but to a temporal modulation which implies a continuous variation of matter as much as a continuous development of form [...]. It is a mannerist, and not an essentialist object: it becomes event].<sup>58</sup>*

This suggests that the object is not matter with unvarying form; in its inactivated state, a choreographic object is not a sculpture. Rather, the object is dynamic; it is defined by what it can do, how it can unfold, how its form happens.<sup>59</sup> In this perspective, beyond providing movement potentials for its users, a choreographic object is dynamic because it contains margins of variation. In the case of Groningen, it is possible to see the trees as natural objectiles, with the capacity to re-arrange themselves. Thus, looking at choreography here means not looking at/for displacement, but at/for the dynamic capacity for change, rearrangement, and unexpected unfoldings.<sup>60</sup>

Therefore, Forsythe's choreography in Groningen is possible through the combination of choreographic intervention and the trees' own, active being.

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57 Manning: Propositions for the Verge. Manning introduces the notion of the objectile while describing choreographic objects as dynamic entities that invite participation within their 'relational environment'.

58 Deleuze, Gilles: *Le Pli. Leibniz et le baroque*, Paris: Les Editions de Minuit 1988, pp. 26–27, emphasis added.

59 For a consideration of 'any object as an unfolding event' see also Lepecki, André: thing.dance.daring:(proximal aesthetics), in: Copeland, Mathieu (ed.): *Chorégrapheur l'exposition*, Dijon: Les Presses du réel 2013, p. 97.

60 In a similar vein, dance theorist Bojana Cvejić considers movement as qualitative change over time, rather than relative repositioning or displacement: 'a movement which cannot be seen from the empirical point of view of extension (shape, size, trajectory) – as the displacement of a mobile – but can only be sensed as a transformation of the body in time, as change in duration. [...] To move is not to go through a trajectory which can be decomposed and reconstructed in quantitative terms; to move is to undergo the transformation of the body in the Bergsonian sense that makes movement a qualitative change'. Cvejić: *Choreographing Problems*, pp. 38, 86.

This reading implicates identifying choreographically-relevant action in both the artist's choices, and in the trees themselves. In this way, the installation expands choreographic authorship from a singular human creator towards a non-anthropocentric collection of agencies that, combined, give rise to the work's form. This form is not the stable result of a centralised choreographic prescription, but the constantly- and perpetually-reinstated result of its performers' dynamic existence.

To practice choreography is therefore not-fully coextensive with a productive-creative act; it includes identifying choreographic potential in an expanded realm of non-human, possibly non-intentional agents' being. If Mathilde Chénin's works envisage a multiplication of choreographic ontology [Chapter 4] and Olga Mesa's *Solo* proposed a passage from ontology to praxis [Chapter 5], Forsythe's installation in Groningen invites a passage from choreography-as-praxis to choreography-as-a-tool for identifying, understanding, and relating with material ontology as an active, unfolding process. Indeed, Forsythe's work has the striking ability to make one think of *any* tree, *any* organism, in their stillness, through – and as – choreography. A view of (expanded) choreography as a tool for the perception and conception of one's surroundings is encountered in the words of various choreographic artists. As an echo of Renaissance's cosmic dance of the heavenly spheres, Michael Klien, Steve Valk, and Jeffrey Gormly argue that '[c]horeography is everywhere, always, in everything. I no longer see in pictures. I see movement and interrelation, exchange and communication between bodies and ideas'; choreography is 'a way of seeing the world'.<sup>61</sup> For Chase Granoff, choreography almost becomes an ideology; '[i]t is a weird thing, choreography. I can start to view everything from that perspective [...] What if choreography was a political party or a religion?'<sup>62</sup> For Mårten Spångberg, choreography is 'a complex means of approaching the world. No, the universe'.<sup>63</sup> Choreography is argued to be a mental act, an intellectual activity; skills associated with choreography are likened to a tool both of action and of thought.

The idea of an expanded choreography as a perspective or mode-of-thought is, once again, not only applicable to the apparent stillness of non-human agents, such as a series of willow trees. The very choice of plant life within *Book*

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61 Klien, Michael, Valk, Steve & Gormly, Jeffrey: *Book of Recommendations: Choreography as an Aesthetics of Change*, Limerick: Daghdha Dance Company 2008, p. 24 and unpaginated introduction.

62 Granoff, Chase & Joy, Jenn: Transparency and Process: A Conversation with Chase Granoff and Jenn Joy, in: Granoff, Chase & Joy, Jenn (eds.): *The Art of Making Dances* [No edition information] 2011, pp. 22–23.

63 Spångberg, Mårten: Seventeen Points for The Future of Dance, 2012, <https://spangbergianism.wordpress.com/tag/choreography/> (August 2020).

N(7) situates it in a particular, liminal position that undoes the illusory clarity of dichotomies. Plants are not human and share fewer sentient characteristics with humans than animals; at the same time, they are living, organic creatures. From this boundary-occupying position, choreography shifts towards becoming a thinking tool and mode-of-relation with a world envisaged as process. On the one hand, this view of choreography can be applied to multiple inorganic objects and materials; a bowl of liquid, a pile of sand, an elastic band, a piece of metal, a sheet of paper, a drop of paint can all be seen as dynamic choreographic entities that incorporate potential movement and change. On the other hand, it can also be applied to human subjects and how their (potential) movement can be grasped. For example, the expanded choreography of urbanism – the directives and opportunities proposed by street crossings, stairs, obstacles, traffic lights – involves dynamic situations, with unpredictable options bubbling under the surface of actual performance.

In a world where everything and everyone seems to be in motion, ethical and political questions – Who moves? Who decides who moves? What physical, financial, psychological expense is required for motional capacity?<sup>64</sup> – can be translated in choreographic terms. A critical engagement through, and with, movement is indeed present in writings related to (expanded) choreography. For Kai van Eikels, '[c]horeography as a craft of organising dance will [...] be an *application* [...] of the *choreographic*, which is an intelligence that enables you to redirect the cultural, social, political, economic, psychological, pedagogical, etc. forces of existing patterns and habits of moving';<sup>65</sup> choreography is said to be 'gaining momentum on a political level as it is placed in the middle of a society to a large degree organized around movement, subjectivity and immaterial exchange'.<sup>66</sup> But, if the omnipresence of motion is due to both actual, incessant displacement and the existence of potential movement, its ethics and politics need to also expand towards a non-moving, virtual, still choreography. Shifting choreography from the act of arranging (non-)motions to a tool for understanding staticity in terms of motion, stability in terms of potential, being in terms of becoming, and form in terms of aptitude to change, a choreographic ethics appears that concerns what movement potentials are available, to whom, why, and how. To practice expanded choreography by

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64 Cf. Allsopp, Ric & Lepecki, André: Editorial. On Choreography, in: *Performance Research* 13/1 (2008), p. 1.

65 Eikels, Kai van: An Institution Is only as Good as the People who Work there Can be. No?, in: Brandstetter, Gabriele & Klein, Gabriele (eds.): *Dance [and] Theory*, Bielefeld: transcript 2013, p. 306.

66 Expanded Choreography. Situations, Movements, Objects..., Conference presentation, MACBA 2012, <http://www.macba.cat/en/expanded-choreography-situations> (August 2020).

looking at both mobile and immobile phenomena – and understanding them in terms of active potential – may untangle the ethics and politics – power distributions and spaces of liberty – hidden within a moving stillness: to look for a tree's freedom to become, to explore posture potentials, to tend towards non-movements.

Deleuze writes: 'I have, it's true, spent a lot of time writing about this notion of event: you see, I don't believe in things'.<sup>67</sup> Drawing from Erin Manning and Deleuze, the current reading of *Book N(7)* similarly acknowledges its tree-components' being as happening. This acknowledgement implicates a distributed choreographic agency, beyond the conscious and/or intentional acts of a human author, that inscribes these acts in a world that is always, and already, (choreographically) active. In this perspective, choreography is not a creative intervention in the world – a *poiesis* – but a tool for recognising the world as being (in) a constant, generative process. While this view of choreography is anchored in a contemporary sensitivity, it recognises *as choreographic* historical practices – like those of Domenico and Guglielmo [Chapter 3] – that similarly did not create choreography autonomously, but entered frameworks defined by the non-human – be it nature, music, or a cosmic harmony – and attributed political and ethical importance to them.

## Conclusion

In William Forsythe's installation for *The Books of Groningen*, choreography expands by widening its possible objects; instead of human dancing bodies, the work choreographs a water canal and a collection of plants. However, the marker is not the result of fully-human choreographic planning of an artificial nature; its constituents' input is equally crucial. Operating at the microscopic level – the cell or particle – and at the macroscopic level – the complex ecology, with heterogeneous elements – the work leads to a non-anthropocentric choreographic logic. By doing so, Forsythe's artificial nature and its expansion to a non-anthropocentric choreography question assumptions about the human, the human scale, and their autonomy.

Forsythe's early choreographic object in Groningen does not merely change choreography's objects but also its conception of, and relationship with, movement. From a practice arranging how human bodies move across time and space, choreography becomes more than a practice arranging non-human movements (possibly at different scales). It also becomes a field where movement is present

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67 Massumi, Brian: *Semblance and Event: Activist Philosophy and the Occurrent Arts*, Cambridge/London: MIT Press 2011, p. 6.

despite a lack of actual displacement, turning *potential* movement into valid choreographic material. This view of choreography is neither dichotomously juxtaposed, nor secondary, to an arrangement of perceptible motion in space; by casting doubt on the dichotomy between movement and stillness, it provides an alternative to how choreography can be conceived and practiced.

The willows in Groningen perform a non-anthropocentric choreography of microscopic, macroscopic, and intensely-slow motion; they perform, in their apparent stillness, a virtual choreography of potential motion. But, they can also be seen as active, choreographically-relevant, dynamic entities, before being rendered as such by the choreographer; the installation invites us to see the trees as choreographic agents. From the autonomous act of a human creator, authoring choreography thus becomes the collective outcome of multiple entities' being; from human poietic intervention, choreography itself becomes a tool for observing and recognising the world as always, and already, active. The aesthetics, ethics, and politics of this expanded choreography lie in identifying action potentials *inherent* in the world, rather than the putting-into-motion of this world.

Guglielmo's vision of the person – a microcosmos reflecting the macrocosmos – is mirrored in the Groningen installation's plant performers, non-dichotomously opposed to human ones, yet transforming how the latter are construed; Domenico's stillness-including, fantasmatic dance is mirrored in Forsythe's willows' non-moving choreographic relevance [Chapter 3]. The Renaissance masters' understanding of a choreography exceeding the individual human creator is mirrored in the Groningen trees' active participation in their choreography. Once again, these reflections are not deterministically causal or direct relations, but juxtapositions. As such, what they make manifest is not a transhistorical similarity; Domenico and Guglielmo's harmonious "natural" dance ideologically differs from Forsythe's allowance of unorderedly and unpredictable performance. What these examples do make manifest, in their differential singularities and macro-historical links, is the dynamic through which current expansions – that distance themselves from the anthropocentric and the kinetic – widen the contemporary gaze on historical practices that developed outside of the full grasp of anthropocentrism or the kinetic.



## Conclusion to Part 2

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Just a link, a click, and a small-sized window; red, black, and yellow lines appear and disappear, form and split planes, cross each other, zoom in and out. To get the lines moving, an algorithm has been at work, patiently processing and translating positional data into visual forms – a series of programming instructions give rise to a graphic dance. The lines, planes, and underlying code are performing expanded choreography. A woman is naked; she wears a mask and high heels; she cries and rolls; she tangos and speaks. A screen shows blurry images; a blue light invades the space; reflections multiply both images and space; sounds circulate, words are repeated, music booms and murmurs. The woman, mask, heels, steps, images, screen, light, sounds, words, and music are, together, performing expanded choreography. A group of willows are planted in a field in a small Dutch city. Pulled by wires, the willows bend and bow to the water; they form an arc, a natural half-tunnel, part of an artificially-constructed but not-entirely-human-dependent landscape. This group of trees, in their slow growth and progressive movement towards an arched shape – along with the wires and everything that surrounds them – are performing expanded choreography.

Arguably, Mathilde Chénin's lines are performing expanded choreography because they are remediations of actual, embodied motions, images of a dance that took place [Chapter 4]. Arguably, Olga Mesa's *Solo* is an expanded multimedia choreographic piece, where an embodied practice of dance is complemented by a wide array of other media [Chapter 5]. Arguably, William Forsythe's Dutch willows are an expanded choreography because they are gracefully – or painfully – *dancing*: their leaves dance in the wind, their bodies incorporate choreographic form; their being-plants rendering their dance an expanded choreography [Chapter 6]. These are all justifiable claims. But, a multiple choreographic history points to expansions of choreography that are not only widenings, but also shifts and changes in what choreography is and how it is conceived. From such a perspective, Chénin's lines and planes are not only choreographic because they are rooted in bodily motions; they are also choreographic because they propose a multiple choreographic ontology based on choreography's in-

formational content, adapting to and transformed by different media. From such a perspective, Mesa's *Solo* is not only choreographic because it includes a moving and dancing human body, accompanied by sound, light, text, and other physical presences; it is also choreographic because it is an assemblage of relations, unfolding in the dynamic – albeit immaterial – space between its components; it is fruit of a praxis, rather than type of product. From such a perspective, Forsythe's Dutch willows are not only choreographic because they are micro- or macroscopically moving-dancing; they are also choreographic in their stillness, in the virtuality of their non-movements, and their capacity to turn choreography into a tool for understanding their being. In other words, these works are expanded choreographies because they contain notions of what *else* (expanded) choreography may be.

These three manifestations of choreographic expansion are not an exhaustive overview of the contemporary choreographic field's experimentations, nor do they point towards a unified, singular, essential quality that characterises the expanded choreographic field as a whole. Rather, they portray expanded choreography as a collection of different ways of envisaging choreographic "eliteness"; they are parts of a multiple choreographic history because they, too, contribute to its multiplication, its non-linearity, its diversity. They also contribute to this history because – in their sporadic intersections, scattered convergences and agreements – they contrast a hybrid, alternative paradigm to entrenched conceptions of choreography.

This plural paradigm refuses set notions of the human body, motion, and dance. In contrast to corporeally-essentialist choreographic approaches, it does not treat corporeality as fixed, but, rather, posits it as complex and multiple. And in contrast to a refusal of the body, it spills beyond the human by finding commonalities with other species and develops relations of mutual influence by entering non-anthropocentric wholes. Similarly, rather than engaging with stillness as a negation of motion, it questions the equivalence of motion with displacement and explores novel conceptualisations of the kinetic – as change, dynamic existence, virtual potential. Rather than excluding dance, it engages with it in transformational ways, as material to be dephysicalised, a source of information, a member of a composite assemblage. In other words, it proposes a less-essentialised view of what body, motion, and dance can be. Relatedly, this differentiated, expanded-choreographic paradigm refuses a stable choreographic ontology. Treating non-human materialities as choreographic agents, it dissolves hierarchies that bind the choreographic to a specific *type of thing* – the privileged medium of human corporeality. Pointing to the relational between-space or informational content as choreographic, it posits that choreography can be immaterial, intangible, invisible. Shifting focus from its produced "objects" towards praxis-of-creation or even a quasi-ideological tool, it dislodges chore-



ography from the (im)materials it is made of and that it makes. This variable paradigm also plays a role in expanding choreographic authorship – ranging from interdisciplinary creative teams (e.g. in Mesa's work) or interdisciplinary aspects in a single artist's practice that multiply their skills and methodologies (e.g. Mesa and Chénin) to a decentralisation of the human creator when non-human agency contributes to the emergence of choreography.

The plural, expanded-choreographic paradigm finally posits a choreographic politics that both reflects and feeds into the condition of the early-21<sup>st</sup> century. Against a background of ecological crisis, it proposes a choreography that allows non-anthropocentric communities of beings to enter into horizontal relations and participate in the emergence of often-unforeseeable results. Through the notion of relation as an existing entity – as it appears in Chénin and Mesa's works *via* Massumi [Chapters 4 and 5] – it posits relationality as a constitutive aspect of being, pointing to the limitations of (human) subjects conceived as autonomous. Based on a focus on virtual potential for motion and action – as it appears in Forsythe's work *via* Erin Manning and Gilles Deleuze [Chapter 6] – it concentrates on potential worlds already inherent in daily experience, rather than possible worlds that are detached from a reality perceived as inescapable. The expansion of choreography is concurrent with major ideological shifts towards a view of the world as a complex, interconnected entity that unfolds unpredictably; it is this world that it reflects and it is to this world that it contributes, through its own reconfigurations.

This inscription of expanded choreography in the present does not, however, presuppose its isolation *within* contemporaneity. Expanded choreography's links with choreographic history are multiple and bidirectional; adopting an expanded-choreographic perspective towards the past, in a parallaxic<sup>1</sup> movement, allows this past to feed into visions of an expanded present. From a methodological and historiographic standpoint, choreographic history is active in these analyses of present expandedness by hypothesising a multiplicity of choreographic shifts, rather than a widening and linear directionality. But, choreographic history is also active in the echoes between Saint-Hubert's non-medium-specific dramaturgical order [Chapter 1] and Mesa's multimedia practice of arrangement [Chapter 5]; between Raoul Auger Feuillet's corporeal, graphic, and sign-based choreography [Chapter 2] and Chénin's tripartite kinest works [Chapter 4]; between Domenico da Piacenza and Guglielmo Ebreo da Pesaro's choreography following natural principles [Chapter 3] and Forsythe co-choreographing his installation with a group of trees [Chapter 6]. These echoes

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1 Foster, Hal: *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*. Cambridge/London: MIT Press, 1996, p. xii.

are not markers of resemblance – a court ballet was a radically different spectacle than Mesa's low key, ethereal *Solo*. Nor are they revivals – Chénin's approach is precisely *not* an attempt to recreate a notational practice. Nor are they pointers of linear continuity – there is no causal relation between Domenico's *balli* and curved trees in a Dutch field. Rather, bouncing in the juxtapositional space between past and present, they are indicators of mutual relevance that manifests common problematics despite diverse responses: diverse ways in which choreography has been non-anthropocentric; diverse ways in which it has detached itself from the necessity of displacement; diverse ways in which its ontology has been conceived, from multiple materiality to immateriality; diverse ways in which its authorship is practiced; diverse ways in which it has been inscribed in political and ethical contexts that go beyond human corporeality. There is neither smooth continuity nor rupture between contemporary expanded choreography and choreographic history. There is, however, a necessity to place both in common, macro-historical frames of reference – and thus to envisage histories of expanded choreography.

## **Part 3: Expanded modernities**



## Introduction to Part 3

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Twentieth-century dance history manifests a fundamental diversity in dance culture. The European territory between the two World Wars, for instance, displays an almost-kaleidoscopic variety. Classical ballet productions at highly-regarded and institutionally-established theatres were produced alongside more daring, experimental, modern ballet productions by companies such as the Ballets Russes and the Ballets Suédois [Chapter 7]. Next to diverse ballets, modern dance and associated practices also manifested themselves in variable forms. Isadora-Duncan-inspired schools pursued quests of free dance and Jaques-Dalcroze-inspired schools tuned moving bodies into rhythm; while Mary Wigman exemplified an expressive but stark style of *Ausdruckstanz*, Kurt Jooss and Valeska Gert developed their own strands of dance theatre. In parallel, “girl” troupes performed in cabarets; Rudolf Laban guided non-professionals dancing in movement choirs; dancers from, or alluding to, Africa and Asia populated European stages and confronted audiences with their exoticising projections; Oskar Schlemmer echoed objectlike baroque costumes; and Fernand Léger made a film called a ballet. This striking diversity is not exclusive to the midwar years in Europe. A similar variety appears in, for example, the 1960s in the United States. This decade of “post-modern” dance saw the creation of Alvin Ailey’s *Revelations* (1960), Hanya Holms’ excursions towards musical theatre with *Camelot* (1960), Martha Graham’s *Phaedra* (1962), Katherine Dunham’s *Bamboche* (1962), José Limon’s *A Choreographic Offering* (1964), George Balanchine’s *Jewels* (1967), Alwin Nikolais’ *Tent* (1968), and Jerome Robbins’ *Dances at a Gathering* (1969) in parallel with Robert Dunn’s John Cage-inspired composition workshops, and the first Judson Dance Theater concerts. Such concurrent diversity is becoming more and more visible in dance historical research, even though the dominance of certain dance styles still skews portraits of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Part 3 examines the extent to which such diversity also exists in the *choreographic* history of the period.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, choreography’s association with the function of dance-making and the medium of moving corporealities became entrenched and even essentialised. “Choreography” had been used to refer to dance-making since

the 19<sup>th</sup> century; in 1828, Carlo Blasis used it to describe artistic work on the dance-step content – and not the notation or plot – of a ballet;<sup>1</sup> in 1860, while acknowledging the sense of notation, August Bournonville wrote:

The term *choreography* has in a peculiar way changed meaning since Noverres's times; today it is used equally with regard to composition and to performance, and the appellation of choreographer is lightly given to the least supernumerary, who transmits what he has seen either his chief or the youngest dancers doing, and for the most part in a rather imperfect form [...] Let us begin by dealing with choreography in the literal sense of this word and afterwards with what is now conventionally called choreography, that is the composition of ballets and dances.<sup>2</sup>

It was, however, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that the amalgamation of choreography with dance-making was most forceful in Europe and the United States. Wigman, for example, linked dance and choreography: 'We need [counting] especially in our choreographic work, during the process of creation and the rehearsing of group works in the modern dance or ballet'.<sup>3</sup> Graham too spoke of choreography as equivalent to dance-making: 'I choreographed for myself. I never choreographed what I could not do [...] When I stopped dancing, but kept making dances, it was very difficult at first to create not on my own body'.<sup>4</sup> Graham further underlined the connection by commenting that "choreography" can be absorbed by "dance-making":

[Anthony Tudor] was what was known as a choreographer. Such an impressive word. I had never heard the word "choreographer" used to describe a maker of dances until I left Denishawn. There you didn't choreograph, you made up dances. Today I never say, "I'm choreographing". I simply say, "I am working". I never cared much for choreographing. It is a wonderfully big word and can cover up a lot of things. I think I really only started to choreograph so that I could have something to show off in. It came as a great shock to me when I stopped dancing that I was honored for my choreography as well.<sup>5</sup>

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1 Blasis, Carlo: *The Code of Terpsichore*, Hampshire: Dance Books 2008 [1828, trans. R. Barton], p. 95. Cf. Foster, Susan Leigh: *Choreographing Empathy: Kinesthesia in Performance*, Oxon/New York: Routledge 2011, p. 40.

2 Bournonville, August: *Letters on Dance and Choreography*, London: Dance Books 1999 [1860, trans. Knud Arne Jürgensen], pp. 49–50.

3 Wigman, Mary: *The Language of Dance*, Middletown: Wesleyan University Press 1966 [1963, trans. Walter Sorell], p. 10.

4 Graham, Martha: *Blood Memory: An Autobiography*, New York: Doubleday 1991, p. 238.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 236.

Beyond modern dance, this view of choreography was present in modern ballet – Susan Foster reports that it was in this framework that “choreography” was first used in this sense<sup>6</sup> – as well as post-modern dance – as Dunn’s essay ‘Evaluating Choreography’<sup>7</sup> illustrates.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century paralleled the association between dance-making and choreography with an increased focus on the body and movement as essential elements of dance. From the idea of dance as an autonomous – “absolute” (Wigman) – art that casts aside musical or textual support in favour of self-sufficient expression through corporeal motion, to an organic engagement with corporeality for technique development, and subjective expression through motion that finds a source in the body, the 20<sup>th</sup> century points to an entanglement of movement, body, and dance. In the words of leading modern dance critic John Martin, dance’s very ‘material is the whole human body, tangible and real, in movement’.<sup>8</sup> While the above views are mostly associated with modern dance artists, 20<sup>th</sup>-century ballet also had a central focus on motion and body. For example, critic and ballet proponent André Levinson defined dance as

*le mouvement continu d'un corps se déplaçant selon un rythme précis et une mécanique consciente dans un espace calculé d'avance. Du fait de situer un corps dans un espace, la danse apparaît comme un art plastique. Du fait d'imprimer à ce corps un mouvement réparti dans le temps, la danse se manifeste comme un art cinématique. [...] Une troisième donnée la différencie pourtant de tous les arts plastiques. C'est sa matière: le corps humain [the continuous movement of a body displacing itself according to a precise rhythm and a conscious mechanics in a pre-calculated space. Because it situates a body in space, dance appears as a plastic art. Because it inscribes into this body a movement distributed over time, dance manifests itself as a cinematic art. [...] A third element differentiates it, however, from all plastic arts. It is its matter: the human body].<sup>9</sup>*

Against this background, choreography was associated with the specificity of human corporeality and the necessity of motion; Foster sees 20<sup>th</sup>-century choreography as heading towards the ‘process of individual expression through movement’.<sup>10</sup> To take a specific example, Doris Humphrey explicitly linked choreography to corporeality:

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6 Foster: *Choreographing Empathy*, p. 43.

7 Dunn, Robert Ellis: Robert Ellis Dunn Remembered. Four Pieces by the Artist/Teacher, in: *Performing Arts Journal* 19/3 (1997), pp. 14–16.

8 Martin, John: *America Dancing*, New York: Dodge 1936, p. 89.

9 Levinson, André: *La Danse d'aujourd'hui*, Paris: Duchartre et Van Buggenhoudt 1929, pp. 172–173.

10 Foster: *Choreographing Empathy*, p. 16.

[T]he first mark of the potential choreographer is a knowledge of, or at least a great curiosity about, the body – not just his own, but the heterogeneous mixture of bodies which people his environment [...] I have never heard of a choreographer who achieved even moderate success, who did not have a physical skill in moving bodies, and who was without an over-all theatrical sense of shape.<sup>11</sup>

Mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, Nikolais qualified motional aspects of his multimedia practice as choreographic: ‘I cannot be content as only a choreographer. As such, my dominant concern should be motion; yet I cannot forego my attraction to the shapes and forms of things’.<sup>12</sup> Humphrey-student Limon intersected choreography, body, and movement by talking about how one ‘puts together the movements of his body to create the concatenation called choreography’.<sup>13</sup> Once again – and despite the persistence of narrative-oriented choreographic models in classical dance [Chapter 7] – these tendencies are also found in modern ballet; for example, Bronislava Nijinska writes that ‘[m]ovement is the principal element in dance, its plot. A modern school of choreography must introduce movement into dance technique, it must provide a basis for the theory and the mechanics of dance’.<sup>14</sup> In a framework closer to post-modern dance, Don McDonagh’s *The Rise and Fall and Rise of Modern Dance* (1970) illustrates choreographic entanglement with a moving corporeality:

If dance could do without music and technique, could it also do without rehearsal? If it could do without elaborate lighting designs, could it do without visible light of any kind? If it could do without decor, could it do without costume? If it could do without any of these, could it do without dancers? The answer to the latter was the only “No!” Some attempts were made to create dances verbally or by printed suggestions so that audiences would conjure up their own movement sequences. But although these “concept” choreographies were interesting, they were exceedingly frail in the physical world of dance.<sup>15</sup>

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- 11 Humphrey, Doris: *The Art of Making Dances*, London: Dance Books 1997 [1959], pp. 20, 25.
  - 12 Nikolais, Alwin: No Man from Mars, in: Cohen, Selma Jeanne (ed.): *The Modern Dance: Seven Statements of Belief*, Middletown: Wesleyan University Press 1965, p. 63.
  - 13 Limon, José: *An Unfinished Memoir*, Hanover: Wesleyan University Press/University Press of New England 1999, p. 75
  - 14 Nijinska, Bronislava: On Movement and the School of Movement, in: Preston-Dunlop, Valerie & Lahusen, Susanne (eds.): *Schrifttanz: A View of German Dance in the Weimar Republic*, London: Dance Books 1990 [1930], p. 55.
  - 15 McDonagh, Don: *The Rise and Fall and Rise of Modern Dance*, London: Dance Books 1990 [1970], p. 209.



An associated conception of choreography posits it as an arrangement of moving bodies in time and space.<sup>16</sup> As the above quotations illustrate, choreography as an arrangement of moving bodies in time and space at times overlaps with the notion of dance-making, which is itself conceived of *as* an arrangement of moving corporealities.

Within the 20<sup>th</sup>-century field – in which choreography was most forcefully entangled with dance-making and human corporeality – there are, nevertheless, important variations of choreographic history. Frictions between dance and choreography appeared in the words of practitioners who associated choreography with parts of dance-making with which they did not agree. For example, for Paul Taylor this was the limitation of dancers' individual presence: '[s]ome dances look like "choreography" because the dancers are not allowed to become their most interesting stage selves [...] Up with dancers; down with choreography.'<sup>17</sup> Frictions also appeared through references to dance-making not termed "choreography". In the 1960s, Serge Lifar suggested replacing the term "choreographer" by "*choréauteur*" [chore-author] when referring to a dance-maker.<sup>18</sup> Both modern dance (Humphrey, Louis Horst, Wigman) and post-modern dance (the seminal 1960s workshops held by Dunn that contributed to the appearance of the Judson Dance Theatre) employed the term "composition" to refer to aspects of dance-making. Finally, frictions appeared in practices challenging the insistence of a necessarily-physicalised choreography – from futurist dance to Nikolais' multimedia spectacles, and from Loïe Fuller to Merce Cunningham's work with LifeForms.

Therefore, the 20<sup>th</sup> century both performed and questioned choreography's association with dance and/or the moving human body – an association so strong it feeds into current understandings of choreography. Against this background, Part 3 introduces an expanded choreographic perspective to the analysis of works from different moments of early- and mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century dance history; this perspective points to an undeniable diversity that challenges the idea of choreography being solely based on dance, the human body, and/or motion. This diversity also has implications for how historiography portrays 20<sup>th</sup>-century choreographic culture(s) – their complex relations with motion and corporeality, as well as their negotiations between different construals of these concepts; their concurrent embrace of choreographic medium specificity

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16 For example, Gabriele Klein theorises 20<sup>th</sup>-century choreography as relating to the topographic ordering of bodies in time and space. Klein, Gabriele: Essay, in: Klein, Gabriele (ed.) *Choreografischer Baukasten. Das Buch*, Bielefeld: transcript 2015, p. 19.

17 Taylor, Paul: Down with Choreography, in: Cohen: *The Modern Dance*, p. 97.

18 Lifar, Serge: *La Danse: La Danse académique et l'Art chorégraphique*, Paris: Gonthier 1965, p. 16.

and artistic interdisciplinarity; their interrogation of the notion of choreographic authorship.

Chapter 7 looks at *Relâche* – a modern ballet conceived in 1924 by painter Francis Picabia for the Ballets Suédois. Identifying it as a nexus of multiple choreographic models,<sup>19</sup> it shows that while Picabia's dada ballet was preoccupied with choreographic modernity's attachment to embodied motion, it also decentralised corporeal dance performance in a composite spectacle – thus sketching out yet another type of intermedia choreographic assemblage that can dialogue both with Saint-Hubert's 17<sup>th</sup>-century ballet [Chapter 1] and Olga Mesa's contemporary *Solo* [Chapter 5]. Chapter 8 investigates the work of modern dance's central figure, Laban, in industry during and after WWII. Amid Laban's attachment to the centrality of the human body and the necessity of motion, it identifies his view of supra-individual choreographies that emerge from the actions of both human and non-human agents – thus de-anthropocentring choreography – and his belief in the presence of movement in apparent stillness – branching out to William Forsythe's present-day willows [Chapter 6] and Domenico da Piacenza's fantasmatic pauses [Chapter 3]. Finally, Chapter 9 analyses the choreographic productions of lettrism, a post-WWII artistic movement with roots in poetry, whose eclectic works are comparable to post-modern dance. Placing lettrism among dominant dance discourses of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – based on its confirmation of the link between dance and choreography – it posits lettrism as (also) a field in which choreography expanded to a range of materials and media, as well as immateriality, echoing Mathilde Chénin's informational-algorithmic [Chapter 4] and Raoul Auger Feuillet's abstract-graphic [Chapter 2] transfers. Identifying an ambivalence in relation to a dominant choreographic model at several points of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – both in historically-marginalised (lettrism) and -over-represented (Laban) examples – Part 3 presents figures of choreographic multiplicity, rather than a series of counter-examples that challenge a canon with an alternative, but singular, view.

Part 1 analysed written documents not only as discursive sources *about* embodied acts but also as objects displaying their own conceptions of choreography. Consistent with this methodological idea, Part 3 considers that choreographic practices – be they “condensed” in a single work (e.g. *Relâche*), spread out in a continuous process of work without a single designated product (e.g. Laban), or distributed over multiple works (e.g. lettrist choreography) – do not only consist of performative and/or embodied, but also visual, textual, auditory, and other manifestations. Correspondingly, to contribute diverse understandings of these

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19 Cf. Leon, Anna: Vielfältige Konzepte des Choreografischen in Tanz und Film. Die Ballets Suédois und ihr Stück *Relâche*, in: *Montage AV* 24/2 (2015), p. 32.

practices, the following draws from multiple types of sources – from contemporary reconstructions to scripts, from scores to notations, from photographs to film, from written reports and notes to music.

While they are dispersed over several decades, Part 3's chapters relate to what may be referred to as the 20<sup>th</sup> century's "dance modernity". *Relâche* dates from the interwar context where several figures, notions, and practices associated with a heterogeneous 20<sup>th</sup>-century dance modernity – including modern dance – were active [Chapter 7]. Laban's projects in industry concern the activity of an artist central to modern dance history [Chapter 8]. Lettrism, while appearing slightly later, refers and responds to the pre-war historical avant-gardes as well as modern ballet and modern dance; it is included as an example of how arguments about choreography can be transferred from pre- to post-war modernity and exemplifies the former's possible influence upon the latter [Chapter 9]. Finally, as parts of, or references to, 20<sup>th</sup>-century dance modernity, these examples relate to a network of associated notions: the modernity of the avant-gardes (*Relâche*, lettrism), modernism (*Relâche*, Laban, lettrism), modern dance (Laban, lettrism), modern ballet (*Relâche*, lettrism), and the experience of body, life, and society as "modern" (*Relâche*, Laban). But, as Stefan Hulfeld illuminatingly reminds, "modernity" and the "modern" is neither fixed nor limited to the 20<sup>th</sup>-century timespan and position; despite modernist historiography's insistence on presenting modernity as a series of chapters – subsequent innovation annulling previous ones – modernity is a notion that calls for a macro-historical approach that acknowledges linkages, rather than affirming ruptures.<sup>20</sup> The following chapters tend towards this approach, looking into how 20<sup>th</sup>-century choreography branches out both to an expanded, pre-choreographic past, and an expanded present.

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20 Hulfeld, Stefan: *Modernist Theatre*, in: Wiles, David & Dymkowski, Christine (eds.): *The Cambridge Companion to Theatre History*, New York: Cambridge University Press 2013, esp. p. 15f



## Chapter 7: The multiple choreographies of the Ballets Suédois' *Relâche*<sup>1</sup>

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In 1920, Rolf de Maré, a well-off arts patron from Sweden, founded a dance troupe. Like Sergei Diaghilev before him, he named the troupe after his national origins – the “Ballets Suédois”, or “Swedish Ballets” – but selected Paris as its home base. In the next few years, the troupe produced and performed more than 20 works in Paris and abroad, implicating an international selection of artists. Choreography was the domain of Jean Börlin, also lead dancer of the Ballets Suédois; de Maré's librettists included Paul Claudel, Luigi Pirandello, Blaise Cendrars, and Jean Cocteau; his ballets' sets were signed by, among others, Fernand Léger and Giorgio de Chirico; music was composed by artists including Darius Milhaud, Georges Auric, and Cole Porter. In 1925, the Ballets Suédois were dissolved – although de Maré's dance activities did not cease, as indicated by his foundation of the *Archives Internationales de la Danse* [International Archives of Dance]. A few months before its dissolution, the company performed its last choreographic production: *Relâche*.

Like other Ballets Suédois works, *Relâche* had enviable credits: Börlin choreographed, Erik Satie composed its music, and René Clair directed a film – *Entr'acte* – that became part of the ballet's performance. This collaboration was meant to be based on a libretto by Cendrars; however, the project was transferred to ex-Dada artist Francis Picabia,<sup>2</sup> who wrote both the ballet's script – possibly in reference to Marcel Duchamp's *Le Grand verre* (1915-1923)<sup>3</sup> – and

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- 1 This chapter is an elaboration of Leon, Anna: Vielfältige Konzepte des Choreografischen in Tanz und Film. Die Ballets Suédois und ihr Stück *Relâche*, in: *Montage AV* 24/2 (2015), pp. 17–35; see also Leon, Anna: Now and Then. Contemporary and Historical Instances of Intermediality on the Choreographic Stage, in: Haitzinger, Nicole & Kollinger, Franziska (eds.): *Überschreitungen: Beiträge zur Theoretisierung von Inszenierungs- und Aufführungspraxis*, Munich: epodium 2016, pp. 14–21 (e-book).
  - 2 Boulbès, Carole: *Relâche. Dernier coup d'éclat des Ballets Suédois*, Dijon: Les Presses du réel 2017, p. 91.
  - 3 Baker, George: *The Artwork Caught by the Tail: Francis Picabia and Dada in Paris*, Cambridge: MIT Press 2007, p. 302.

a loose scenario for the film. Picabia's ballet benefited from a wide publicity campaign; the piece, though, was performed merely thirteen times, the last of which was followed by a further short stage work by Picabia, *Cinésketch*.<sup>4</sup> In the approximately 40-minute-long work, the Parisian audiences of *Relâche* were treated to an introduction and intermission filled by Clair's film, on-stage action that ranged from a firefighter pouring water into buckets to a partial striptease, and Picabia and Satie in a Citroën car in the finale.

*Relâche* is part of the historical cannon of early-20<sup>th</sup>-century dance modernity and representative of multiple tendencies of the period. It exemplifies the innovations and experimentations of modern ballet – including incorporating non-classical technique, interdisciplinarity, and scenographic elements that accentuated the plastic/visual dimensions of the stage. It displays early-20<sup>th</sup>-century choreography's challenges towards institutionalised dance practices; its inclusions of, and penetrations by, mass media and popular culture; and its relations with the historical avant-gardes in the visual arts – branching out, beyond dance history, to performance art. In parallel, the piece deepens and heightens several of the period's tendencies; for example, a dephysicalisation of the body is found in several works of the time, and in Picabia's ballet the body is confronted with its quasi-replacement by the inorganic medium of film. Here, the performative implication of scenography takes centre stage and, at times, undermines the presentation of dance. In these ways, *Relâche* – just like other radically-experimental modern ballet works, such as the Ballets Russes' *Feu d'artifice* (1917) – both exemplifies and intensifies aspects of early-20<sup>th</sup>-century dance modernity relevant to expanded choreography.

Although no original film recording of the ballet exists, available primary sources on the Ballets Suédois' last ballet include: photographs of the stage and the performers (however, these were not shot during the performances and do not certainly represent “final” versions of material);<sup>5</sup> notes and correspondence between de Maré, Picabia, Satie, Clair, and other collaborators, available at the archives of the Stockholm *Dansmuseet*; the entirety of Clair's scenario and film,<sup>6</sup> Satie's music, and Picabia's basic scripts for *Entr'acte* and for the ballet as a whole. An invaluable secondary source is art historian Carole Boulbès' book-length study, based on her research as a contributor to the ballet's reconstruction by the Ballet de Lorraine (2014). The reconstruction itself is a further valuable source, even though it includes (founded, but creative) conjectures by choreographers

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4 Boulbès: *Relâche*, pp. 12, 126.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 115.

6 For a version of the film in circulation today, see: Clair, René: *Entr'acte*, in: Clair, René: *A nous la liberté* [DVD], The Criterion Collection 2002 [1924], 20:17.

Petter Jacobsson and Thomas Caley.<sup>7</sup> *Relâche* is mentioned in several dance-history studies of the early-20<sup>th</sup> century, and is analysed from the perspective of art, film, and performance history.<sup>8</sup> Here, the Ballets Suédois' last ballet is explored from the perspective of expanded choreography.

From such a perspective, *Relâche* responds to multiple conceptions of choreography at once – some associated with dance-making and embodied motion, and others expanding beyond them. Adopting an “expanded” viewpoint allows *Relâche* to exemplify early-20<sup>th</sup>-century dance modernity's questionings and multiplications of its own choreographic models. At the same time, *Relâche* feeds back into reflections about the historical inscription of expanded choreography itself. Thus, ideas around the proximity of dramaturgy and choreography, or the development of intermedia choreographic assemblages – as seen in Olga Mesa [Chapter 5] and Saint-Hubert's [Chapter 1] works – crop up again, in different configurations, as fragments of an expanded choreographic history.

## Of dancing in a ballet

Its unconventionality notwithstanding, *Relâche* was presented as a ballet, produced by a ballet company, and danced by classically-trained dancers of the Ballets Suédois. An initial conception of choreography is indeed found in Picabia's piece's relationship with the world of ballet – particularly in Paris, where de Maré's company was based. In the French capital, ballet was primarily construed as a dramatic genre – as the danced representation of a (more-or-less elaborated) narrative. In the words of Héléne Laplace-Claverie, who has thoroughly studied the history of French ballet libretto:

*[o]n admet sans trop de peine aujourd'hui qu'une oeuvre chorégraphique est une création hybride, située au confluent de plusieurs disciplines artistiques. Mais à l'époque, les*

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7 Jacobsson, Petter & Caley, Thomas : *Relâche*. Ballet instantanéiste en deux actes, un Entr'acte cinématographique et *la Queue du chien* (Reenactment of the 1924 ballet by Francis Picabia), Nancy : Ballet de Lorraine 2014, 32:35, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sNmxvRt4Rg8> (October 2018).

8 For example, see Brandstetter, Gabriele: *Poetics of Dance : Body, Image and Space in the Historical Avant-Gardes*, New York: Oxford University Press 2015 [1995, trans. Elena Polzer & Mark Franko], pp. 375–384; Suquet, Annie: *L'Eveil des modernités : Une histoire culturelle de la danse (1870-1945)*, Pantin : Centre national de la danse 2012, pp. 120–124; Baker: *The Artwork Caught by the Tail*, chapter 5; Bouchard, Karine: *Les Relations entre la scène et le cinéma dans le spectacle d'avant-garde: Une étude intermédiaire et in situ de Relâche de Picabia, Satie et Clair*, MA thesis, Montreal: Université de Montréal, 2009; Goldberg, RoseLee : *Performance : Live Art 1909 to the Present*, New York : Harry N. Abrams 1979, pp. 59–62.

*conceptions sont plus rigides et pour la plupart des spectateurs, un ballet doit se contenter d'être une pièce de théâtre dansée. Les goûts et les attentes en la matière évoluent lentement. La scène chorégraphique française reste tributaire de la tradition noverrienne du "ballet d'action" [we admit without issue today that a choreographic work is a hybrid creation, situated at the intersection of multiple artistic disciplines. But at the time, conceptions were more rigid and for most spectators, a ballet must settle for being a danced theatrical piece. Tastes and expectations on this matter evolved slowly. The French choreographic scene remains tributary of the noverrian tradition of the "ballet d'action"].*<sup>9</sup>

Choreography, therefore, was associated with dance-making, and it bore traces of a narrative/dramatic focus – although it was not strictly equated with narrative, unlike Edward Nye's reading<sup>10</sup> of the *ballet d'action*. In this framework, choreographers in ballet companies often based their dance-making on the work of a librettist. But, the early-20<sup>th</sup> century was a transitory period. The ballet world included highly-institutionalised performance venues – such as the central(ising) Paris Opera – and practitioners who adhered to a movement aesthetics of virtuosity and grace, using a highly-codified and relatively-stable vocabulary; but it also coexisted with a diversity of alternative dance models – some emerging within the ballet realm itself – and popular dance forms. Similarly, the libretto and its narrativity gradually fell out of use, largely through the work of companies such as the Ballets Russes and the Ballets Suédois.

Against this transitory background, when Picabia was asked to direct a ballet for de Maré's company, he initially expressed hesitation:

*J'avais pris la résolution de ne jamais faire de ballets mais la collaboration de Satie dont j'admire le talent et auquel je porte beaucoup d'amitié m'a fait revenir sur cette décision et j'ai accepté avec grand plaisir [I had made the resolution to never make ballets, but the collaboration with Satie, whose talent I admire and for whom I feel strong friendship, made me change my mind and I have accepted with great pleasure].*<sup>11</sup>

Reflecting this hesitation, *Relâche* undermined the codes and contexts of classical dance – although it was presented as a ballet. It attacked established ballet institutions and subversively targeted a ballet-habituated audience. For example,

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9 Laplace-Claverie, Hélène: Les Ballets Suédois sont-ils des ballets? Petit dictionnaire des idées reçues en matière d'art chorégraphique, in: Mas, Josiane (ed.): *Arts en mouvement: Les Ballets Suédois de Rolf de Maré. Paris 1920-1925*, Montpellier: Presses Universitaires de la Méditerranée 2008, p. 21.

10 Cf. Nye, Edward: 'Choreography' is Narrative: The Programmes of the Eighteenth-Century *Ballet d'Action*, in: *Dance Research* 26/1 (2008).

11 Boulbès: *Relâche*, p. 85.



the second act was danced before a backdrop painted with the names of its creators alongside phrases such as '*Aimez-vous mieux les ballets de l'Opéra? Pauvres malheureux* [Do you prefer the ballets of the Opera? You poor wretches]'.<sup>12</sup> De Maré sold whistles and encouraged noise, shifting reception attitudes away from ballet-theatre codes.<sup>13</sup> This attack of ballet institutions was exacerbated by *Relâche's* insistence upon bridging the gap between ballet and popular dance forms, such as the music hall. Its title expressed, according to Picabia, '*une trêve à toutes les absurdités prétentieuses du théâtre actuel, je ne parle pas du music-hall qui seul a gardé un côté vivant* [a truce with all the pretentious absurdities of contemporary theatre, I am not referring to the music hall, which is the only one to have kept a lively aspect]'.<sup>14</sup> In his composition for the ballet, Satie – who had worked as an orchestra conductor in a cabaret – made use of popular themes and, even, army songs; according to a reviewer of the time, this risked disrupting the performance by provoking sing-along-moments by the audience.<sup>15</sup> Finally, although danced by professionally-trained classical dancers, *Relâche* defied classical dance aesthetics and technique. The ballet included acrobatic movements, refused *pointe* work, and the lead female dancer appeared in high-heeled shoes. The Ballets Suédois' previous choreographies had also experimented with the non-virtuosic, the non-technically spectacular, the folk influence – so much so that certain critics were persuaded the company lacked skill.<sup>16</sup>

*Relâche*, then, was presented by its creators as a ballet; nevertheless, it attacked the ballet genre in various ways. A similar ambivalence is identifiable in its treatment of a libretto-based choreographic model of dance-making. On the one hand, *Relâche* reflected – reproduced, even – this model. For example, Picabia drafted a scenario for *Relâche* in which he roughly described its action sequences and indicated the points where dances were to be composed by Börlin;<sup>17</sup> the ballet's actions can be understood as flirtations between a woman

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12 Ibid., p. 345.

13 Ibid., p. 351.

14 Picabia, Francis: Interview by Rolf de Maré, undated, Archives of Les Ballets Suédois, Dansmuseet, Stockholm, Sweden: *Relâche/Ballet librettos and descriptions*.

15 Boulbès: *Relâche*, pp. 197, 224; Baker: *The Artwork Caught by the Tail*, p. 298. While de Maré's troupe's audience remained largely limited to the Parisian bourgeoisie, its insistence upon popular culture did not go unrecognised; critic Emile Vuillermoz has written about the Ballets Suédois' "Bolshevik" programme while other writers – less reticent to respect the music hall than one may imagine – recognised the Ballets Suédois' possible contributions to the genre through *Relâche*. Boulbès: *Relâche*, pp. 316, 180, 558.

16 Laplace-Clavierie: *Les Ballets Suédois sont-ils des ballets?*, p. 23; Boulbès: *Relâche*, p. 63; Baker: *The Artwork Caught by the Tail*, p. 298.

17 Libretto reproduced in Boulbès: *Relâche*, pp. 112–113 and Bouchard: *Les Relations entre la scène et le cinéma dans le spectacle d'avant-garde*, pp. 131–132. See also Boulbès: *Relâche*, pp.

and a group of men, in a (possible) wink to love stories often encountered in ballet libretti. Mirroring the importance of certain librettists of the time, Picabia is recognised as the main author of the project; de Maré referred to his last dance production as ‘*un ballet de Francis Picabia* [a ballet by Francis Picabia]’.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, Picabia’s scenario has no coherent narrative or plot development beyond a series of actions, no named characters, and no apparent desire to make sense. Börlin noted that the ballet he produced dances for had ‘*pas de sujet: le scénario tient dans cette feuille* [no subject: the scenario fits in this sheet]’.<sup>19</sup> Thus, the scenario troubles a libretto-based choreographic model by shifting towards non-narrative (or even a-narrative) dance-making; it does not tell a story to be staged in dance, but provides the basis for a staging without story – and thus illustrates the format’s non-narrative turn at a time when it was still in use, but also rapidly overcome. In effect, Picabia’s script was not given to the public as a support for understanding – it was not a textual aid for making sense of the ballet – but, rather, was a tool in the production process.

Through Clair’s contribution, the intersection between ballet and film was centrally important to subverting a ballet-based and dramatic/narrative-oriented choreographic model. To an extent, this concerns film’s contribution to the ballet’s turn towards popular art forms; Picabia held that

[l]e Cinéma est devenu le théâtre essentiel de la vie moderne, et cela parce qu’il s’adapte aux individus de toutes les classes de la société et aux caractères les plus divers [Cinema has become the essential theatre of modern life, and that is because it adapts itself to individuals of all classes of society and to the most diverse of characters].<sup>20</sup>

But most importantly, *Entr’acte* accentuates the work’s attack upon coherent plot development and narrativity – and therefore the choreographic model associated with them. Indeed, while the film contains some light narrative aspects – notably in its second part, which includes Börlin’s character’s funeral procession – it is not based on a coherent plot and its cinematography is not organised around dramatic development; both Picabia and Clair have referred

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118–119 for a fuller description of the ballet’s action sequence, from which the following draws.

18 Boulbès: *Relâche*, p. 128.

19 Ibid., p. 132.

20 Quoted in Bouchard: *Les Relations entre la scène et le cinéma dans le spectacle d’avant-garde*, p. 94. Moreover, instead of elevating film to the artistic status of ballet, Picabia looked back to a “proletarian” era of cinema; the inclusion of Clair’s film was an explicit reference to the earlier 20<sup>th</sup>-century *café-concert* custom of film interludes between acts, while parts of *Entr’acte* have been read as references to early cinema’s comical gags. Cf. Baker: *The Artwork Caught by the Tail*, p. 306; Boulbès: *Relâche*, p. 426.

to it as pertaining to the realm of dreams.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, Clair ignored Picabia's recommendation to include written projections between scenes,<sup>22</sup> preferring unexplained and uncommented action flow. Fernand Léger's laudatory review of *Relâche* notes that:

*Le cinema va naître [...] du ralenti au rapide, du gros plan à l'infini petit, toute la fantaisie humaine bridée dans les livres et le théâtre va se déchaîner – le scénario s'envole loin et inutile [cinema will be born [...] from slow motion to fast, from the close-up to the infinitely small, the whole of human fantasy restrained in books and theatre will unleash itself – the script flies away, useless]<sup>23</sup>*

– just like the libretto. In this way, Clair's work contributed to the marginalisation of narrative as an organisational principle – underlining Picabia's treatment of the libretto model – and thus linked choreography-related considerations with developments in other arts.

*Relâche* subverted the choreographic model of a libretto-based dance-making process even beyond questioning its potential narrativity; in a choreographic expansion, it questioned the primacy of dance-making itself as a goal. Apart from staging non-classical dance within a ballet – thus challenging the limits of the ballet genre – the work also moved towards choreographed versions of everyday actions. For example, the female protagonist gathered up discarded clothing after a collective partial striptease in the 'Dance of the wheelbarrow'; there were also actions such as smoking a cigarette, lying on a stretcher, or pouring water in a bucket. And, despite its inclusion of several dances, *Relâche* also included moments of immobility, explicitly differentiated from dance in the script. Reflecting the ballet's flirtation with the limits of dance, de Maré recounted that '*les danseurs se voyaient, dans ce ballet, réduits au rôle de figurants, ils ne pouvaient comprendre ce que l'on attendait d'eux* [dancers in this ballet saw themselves being reduced to the role of extras, they could not understand what was expected of them]'.<sup>24</sup> In these ways, *Relâche* embodies a conflict with dance while becoming relevant to a contemporaneity stretching its limits; it embodies expanded choreography's widenings of, and distances from, dance-making.

Certain "danced portions" of the ballet – to refer back to Marina Nordera's expression [Chapter 1] – had attention drawn to them by being presented with-

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21 Picabia, Francis: Untitled, in: *La Danse* (November-December 1924), unpaginated; Boulbès: *Relâche*, p. 395.

22 Boulbès: *Relâche*, p. 391.

23 Léger, Fernand: Review of *Relâche*, in: Damase, Jacques (ed.): *Ballets Suédois*, Paris: Jacques Damase/Denoël 1989 [1924], p. 253.

24 Quoted in Boulbès: *Relâche*, p. 521. Although unsigned, the text this quotation is drawn from is attributed to Rolf de Maré.

out music; but, while this underlines a possible choreographic and dancerly autonomy, it was counterbalanced by an equal musical autonomy, in sections where music played without dance. And, in effect, *Relâche* displayed a Saint-Hubesque treatment of ballet, in which different art forms were equally valourisable. In this framework, different media could disrupt the ballet's stage actions – both dancing and actions that challenged the centrality of dance. The background scenography consisted of a multitude of reflectors that resembled automobile headlights and lit up intermittently, thus blinding the audience and fragmenting their visual experience of dance.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, Clair's *Entr'acte* interrupted the stage action – notably, presenting content that contained ironic gestures towards dancing. Ornella Volta reads Börlin's character's death in Clair's film as a symbolic death of dance in the company's works; Boulbès reads *Entr'acte*'s famous scene featuring a bearded ballerina – danced by an actual Ballets Suédois ballerina with a fake beard – as an ironic cinematographic gesture towards the realm of dance.<sup>26</sup> In *Relâche*, therefore, Börlin's dance coexisted with Satie's music, Clair's film, and a complex lighting and scenographic design. These media affirmed their own presence, instead of framing dance as a primary element – often to the detriment of offering the audience a smooth dance experience. The Ballets Suédois' last work thus expands ballet towards a spectacular framework not solely focussed on presenting dance.

This decentralisation of dance in the ballet was partly determined by the very element meant to ground dance-making in a libretto-based choreographic model: the scenario. Not a mere basis for dance invention, Picabia's scenario provides information about other media activities. For example, it indicates the duration of musical and cinematographic passages and gives descriptions of certain costumes; it prescribes how to stage the lighting and suggests elements of scenography – thus placing its treatment of dance on par with that of other media. In this way, *Relâche* retains a scenario written by a “librettist”, but expands this script's function beyond the specific teleology of (non-)narrative dance-making. If Picabia's scenario betrays the libretto's role as a basis for dance-making, then, this is because it leads to a multimedia (expanded) choreography instead of the sole choreography of dance. Inversely, if the ballet's choreographic model can be disengaged from the primordial imperative of (non-)narrative/dramatically-inclined dance-making, *Relâche* is an example of the libretto's expansion, rather than its failure or betrayal. This use of the libretto –

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25 Ibid., p. 301. For journalists' accounts of this “blinding” by the lights, see pp. 300, 307, 620.

26 Volta, Ornella: La Dernière séance des Ballets Suédois, in: Mas: *Arts en mouvement*, p. 191; Boulbès: *Relâche*, p. 402.

shifting away from its textually-based dramaturgical role – prefigures contemporary approximations of choreography as an expanded, multimedia practice and dramaturgy as a non-essentially-textual one.

Through institutional, dramaturgical, intermedia, technical, and stylistic shifts, the Ballets Suédois' last work attacked ballet codes while remaining a ballet – indeed one of its publicity slogans invited spectators to a '*Ballet, qui n'est pas un ballet, ni un anti-ballet* [ballet that is neither a ballet, nor an anti-ballet]'.<sup>27</sup> In the same way, *Relâche* also performed a choreographic model inherited from ballet while simultaneously subverting it; if its choreography is related to a libretto-based process of dance-making, the work troubles narrativity, betrays classical dance, challenges an even-wider conception of dance, casts doubt on dance as the privileged ingredient of ballet, and shifts the role of the libretto as the foundation of dance-making. In other words, *Relâche* was both a script-based ballet and a non-narrative work which expanded beyond dance in a multimedia framework. In this way, it indicates the ways early-20<sup>th</sup>-century dance modernity may have critiqued its own choreographic models – and reminds that historiographic tools are needed to acknowledge the period's expansions of choreographic practices. These expansions, manifested through decentralising dance in intermedia spectacle – a tendency that was also, albeit differently, pursued by court ballet [Chapter 1] and contemporary expanded choreography [Chapter 5] – place Picabia's work and the avant-garde world of modern ballet-making in transhistorical choreographic relationships that are not founded upon their being-ballet or even being-dance.

## Of motion in the body

While *Relâche* was defined as a ballet and responded to a choreographic model inherited from ballet history, it also responded to modern, 20<sup>th</sup>-century appreciations of dance and choreography attached to the centrality of motion. Such appreciations reflected the notion of perpetual movement as a central, and sometimes idealised, characteristic of early-20<sup>th</sup>-century society.<sup>28</sup> This is easily identifiable within modern dance, which was associated with continuous flow of movement, as opposed to the codified unit of the ballet step; movement for movement's sake, replacing the illustrative role of dance; and a body presented as liberated from classical discipline, to be unleashed in a flux of motion. But it was also, as *Relâche* exemplifies, identifiable in modern ballet. In parallel, choreographic motion was physicalised, "corporealised"; nine years

27 Boulbès: *Relâche*, p. 153.

28 On the status of dance within this era of motion, see Brandstetter: *Poetics of Dance*, p. 21.

after *Relâche*, John Martin wrote of modern dance choreographers' 'discovery of the actual substance of the dance' – movement – which he presented as 'the most elementary *physical* experience of human life'.<sup>29</sup> In a context closer to *Relâche*, French writer Jacques Rivière responded to the Ballets Russes' *Sacre du printemps* (1913) by opposing motion as a 'sauce' in which the dancer's body is lost; in the *Sacre*, inversely, movement is '*sans cesse ramené au corps, rattaché à lui* [continuously brought back to the body, attached to it]':<sup>30</sup> movement was incorporated. *Relâche*, then, appeared at a time when motion was not only centralised and essentialised, but also anchored in the dancer's moving body – thus underlining dance's specificity through its attachment to human corporeality.

*Relâche* fully responded to the 20<sup>th</sup>-century (dance) modernity's preoccupation with motion. Picabia presented his work as an "*instantanéiste* [instantaneist]" ballet; instantaneism '*ne croit qu'au mouvement perpétuel* [believes only in perpetual movement]'.<sup>31</sup> He also wrote of the ballet as '*le mouvement sans but, ni en avant ni en arrière, ni à gauche ni à droite* [movement without a goal, neither forward nor back, neither left nor right]'.<sup>32</sup> Through such expressions, the piece expands choreography from the delimited domain of artistic dance to a wider world of movement. For Cécile Schenck, its choreography is found

*dans l'impression d'un "mouvement perpétuel", sans finalité autre que celle d'exalter la vie dans ce qu'elle a et de chaotique et de spontané. [...] La danse n'est dès lors plus sur scène mais dans la salle, sur l'écran, dans la rue, les gestes du travail et le roulement infini des machines: désormais "tout est danse" [in the impression of a "perpetual movement", without other end than to exalt life in its chaotic and spontaneous aspects [...] Dance is, from that point, not on the stage anymore but in the performance space, on the screen, in the street, the gestures of work and the infinite rolling of machines: from now on, "everything is dance"].<sup>33</sup>*

In other words, everything is movement and movement becomes essentialised as the choreographic medium, in a process literally staged by *Relâche*.

Consistent with a choreographic model of human bodies in motion, a great deal of movement in *Relâche* was embodied by the Ballets Suédois' dancers, with Börlin creating gymnastic, acrobatic steps that filled the stage with activity. A

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29 Martin, John: *The Modern Dance*, Princeton: Dance Horizons 1989 [1933], pp. 6–8, emphasis added. (This text was published in 1933 but was actually written for a series of lectures in 1931–1932 – therefore it emerged seven years after *Relâche*.)

30 Rivière, Jacques: *Le Sacre du Printemps*, 1913, <http://sarma.be/docs/621> (August 2020).

31 Boulbès: *Relâche*, p. 443.

32 Picabia, Francis: *Relâche*, in: *La Danse* (November–December 1924), unpaginated.

33 Schenck, Cécile: *La Danse inhumaine, fonctions de la chorégraphie dans l'oeuvre d'art totale des Ballets Suédois*, in: *Mas: Arts en mouvement*, p. 61.

striking performance of embodied movement – fully responding to the incessant motion of urbanised, speedy 20<sup>th</sup>-century modernity – is found in a short dance choreographed for the female lead dancer (Edith de Bondsdorff) and one of the leading male characters (Börllin), titled 'Dance of the revolving door'. According to contemporary historians' reconstructions of the ballet, this was a waltz-inspired choreography in which the two dancers circled through a revolving door.<sup>34</sup> In the context of increasingly-mobilised modes of life, including experiences of automated motion in *automobiles*, the 'Dance of the revolving door' literally staged the kinetic experiences reflected in choreography's pre-occupation with the motion of bodies. Crucially – although it is not certain whether this was planned – the revolving door itself was not present on stage as a scenographic element,<sup>35</sup> and was therefore referred to through the dancers' motions – the kinetic experience of early-20<sup>th</sup>-century European modernity was literally absorbed into the body.

While *Relâche* reflected a choreographic model of embodied motion, the emerging notion of a movement-based choreography is also extremely pronounced in Clair's *Entr'acte* – the very element that disrupted a dance- and body-based choreographic format. The approximately-20-minute film includes some dance movement – for example, there is a beautiful scene of a dancer jumping, filmed from below, through a glass floor. Overall, however, *Entr'acte* is not a film representing dancing bodies so much as a celebration of motion in diverse manifestations; the camera follows everyday "choreographed" scenes such as car traffic in an urban environment, and in Börllin's character's funeral procession there is a finely-choreographed kinetic sequence including a frenetic roller-coaster ride.

Beyond its representation of motion, *Entr'acte* is an internally-choreographed piece itself – movement effects, such as slow motion and fast-forwarding, are extensively used; the camera's own being-in-motion is made apparent; images are inverted and superposed, multiplying viewpoints and spatial relations; the film's editing makes rhythm one of its main organising principles as it moves through images. George Baker identifies in the film

an endless motivating of the arbitrariness of the montage between images through the shared revelation of cinematic motion, the gift that film imparts to all things. Objects are connected in *Entr'acte* because they are "like" one another, in motion, or in speed, or in direction; the film also utilises motion to align the disparateness of shape and texture.<sup>36</sup>

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34 Boulbès: *Relâche*, p. 118; Baker: *The Artwork Caught by the Tail*, p. 299.

35 Boulbès: *Relâche*, p. 289.

36 Baker: *The Artwork Caught by the Tail*, p. 319.

In his annotated script, Clair indicated the motional effects – slow motion, increased speed – he introduced,<sup>37</sup> while his more-theoretically-construed vision of cinema also reflected his kinetic focus:

*S'il est une esthétique du cinéma [...] Elle se résume en un mot: "mouvement". Mouvement extérieur des objets perçus par l'oeil, auquel nous ajouterons aujourd'hui le mouvement intérieur de l'action. De l'union de ces deux mouvements peut naître ce dont on parle tant et ce que l'on perçoit si peu souvent: le rythme [If there is an aesthetics of cinema [...] it is summed up in one word: "movement". External movement of objects that the eye perceives, to which we will add, today, the internal movement of action. From the union of these two movements can be born that which we talk so much about and that which we perceive so rarely: rhythm].<sup>38</sup>*

If choreography is about motion, *Entr'acte* is not only part of a choreographic work, but an (expanded) choreographic work in itself; motion expands beyond the human body and towards other c/kinematic media.

Through a common logic of movement, the baller's choreographed film forms a basis for understanding the porosity between choreography/dance and film. Clair – who had experienced earlier dance-film experiments by acting in Loïe Fuller's *Le Lys de la vie* (1921, with Garbielle Sorère) – illustrated a motion-based understanding of choreography by incorporating and exemplifying movement as a cinematographic mode of thinking. Movement on stage and on screen, in bodies and in film: *Relâche* creates a kinetic parallel between different media. Underlining their continuities, at the end of *Entr'acte*, Börlin's character breaks through a – filmed – curtain, as if jumping out of the film screen, only to be actually found on stage in the ballet's second act.

The choreographic expansion performed by *Entr'acte* can, however, also be read as an antagonism between media that embodied 20<sup>th</sup>-century modernity's kinetic focus. Indeed, the choreographic aspects of *Entr'acte* can also be read as staging the *replacement* of embodied motion by cinema's mediating technology; critic Paul Dambly wrote that *Relâche* was '*avant tout le triomphe du cinéma, dont la pantomime, médiocrement chorégraphique n'a d'autre but que d'encadrer les films* [above everything else the triumph of cinema, [its] poorly choreographic pantomime has no other goal than to frame the films]'.<sup>39</sup> Reflecting a possible antagonism with an organic/corporeal view of dance, the de-physicalisation of the body on the film screen was paralleled by Picabia's research on the mechanisation of the body. This is coherent with his portraits of *Relâche*-related actors Clair and de

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37 Boulbès: *Relâche*, pp. 416–417.

38 Quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 429–430.

39 Quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 574.



Maré – depicted as machines made up of curly wires – and Börlin – as an amalgam of lines and circles.<sup>40</sup>

Picabia's project, then, included aspects of a nascent antagonism *and* continuity between different media responding to the kinetic focus of the time. Indeed – and as the aforementioned motional activity illustrates – Picabia did not fully efface physicality in favour of cinema. In his own words, '*il est certain que le cinéma [...] ne pourra jamais avoir les possibilités tactiles d'un ballet*' [it is certain that cinema [...] will never be able to have the tactile possibilities of a ballet];<sup>41</sup> his animated stage was not completely replaced by a mediated version of dancing bodies. Neither fully "organic" – including cinematically-mediated and -performed motion – nor fully technologised – insisting upon the liveness of tangible dancers moving in front of an equally-tangible audience – *Relâche* performs neither a modernist autonomisation of choreographic movement through its corporeality, nor the complete effacement or replacement of human physicality through the embodiment of motion by non-corporeal, technological media. Just as it responded to a choreographic model of dramatic/narrative dance-making while also upsetting it, *Relâche* performs a choreographic model of embodied motion while also expanding beyond it. In this way, it makes visible 20<sup>th</sup>-century modernity's conflicts about the place of the body in a choreographic format centred on motion, along with its expansions beyond such conflicts. Once again, it becomes an invitation to historiographically acknowledge practices performing *and* troubling modernism's tendencies. In doing so, it relativises choreographic modernism's grip upon the very period that saw its emergence – and calls for a more-plural understanding of the choreographic history inherited from the historical avant gardes, framing it as a period relatable to both anterior and posterior quests to dephysicalise motion and establish parallels between different media on stage.

## Arranging (expanded) choreography

Picabia's ballet cannot be reduced to any single medium; in Baker's expression, it expressed an 'utter [...] rejection of the modernist imperative of medium specificity'.<sup>42</sup> In the piece, different artistic media collaborate with, support, and penetrate each other – a point most prominently illustrated by the association of music and film. Satie wrote the music for *Entr'acte* after the film and its

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40 Reproduced in *ibid.*, pp. 136, 141, 144.

41 Picabia: Interview, Archives of Les Ballets Suédois, Dansmuseet, Stockholm, Sweden: *Relâche/Ballet librettos and descriptions*

42 Baker: *The Artwork Caught by the Tail*, p. 330.

editing had been completed, basing his composition on a meticulous, shot-by-shot timing of the film images.<sup>43</sup> The result was what Baker reads as a musical “revelation” of cinematographic editing, where the music points to the effects of the *montage* cut:

Satie’s music often cadences and thus underlines the cuts and montage in Picabia and Clair’s film, bringing things to a rhythmic stop when the film images seem rather to push connectedness between scenes [...] If montage is the invisible force within cinema that creates a film’s rhythm – one of the qualities that the temporal art of film could conceivably “share” with music – then it is precisely the invisible “rhythm” of montage and cutting to which the music is attracted, and that it must reveal.<sup>44</sup>

Given that *Entr’acte* was presented with live accompaniment by an orchestra, this relation between film and music was literally performed in the *Théâtre des Champs Elysées*, with conductor Roger Desormière adjusting segments of Satie’s music – including elements of repetition that were included for this very reason – in order to synchronise it with the film.<sup>45</sup> A further relation of mutual support – of blending, even – is identifiable between the set and certain costumes of the ballet; according to Boulbès, the brightness of the background flashing lights was meant to merge with the sparkling dress of the female protagonist.<sup>46</sup> The continuity between film and stage action through Börlin’s screen-tearing cinematic jumps, described above, also adds to this construction.

While avoiding modernist medium specificity, *Relâche* cannot be fully characterised by the additive accumulation, or fusion, of different media in a *Gesamtkunstwerk*-manner. In effect, as much as diverse media in the ballet related through mutual support, blending, or continuity to one another, they were equally interrelated by carefully-orchestrated disruption and opposition. This is the case between dance and music which, at times, alternated; in particular, in a beginning passage of the ballet, music played but the lead dancer remained still, smoking a cigarette, only to start dancing when the music stopped. Dance and music thus avoided and gave space to each other. (The dissociation of dance and music had been a long-time interest of Satie.<sup>47</sup>) Comparable oppositions also emerged between dance and scenography, as the background lights interrupted dance’s kinetic action; according to Baker, the lights were correlated

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43 Boulbès: *Relâche*, p. 411.

44 Baker: *The Artwork Caught by the Tail*, pp. 325–326.

45 *Ibid.*, p. 325.

46 Boulbès: *Relâche*, p. 322.

47 *Ibid.*, p. 214.

with the music,<sup>48</sup> and this was where the set-dance clash originated. Rather than a unified, autonomous piece, *Entr'acte* similarly both interrupted the ballet – by being inserted mid-way through – and was itself interrupted – by the stage action, between the prologue and the rest of the film. Through this series of disruptions, *Relâche* points to an aesthetic of abruptness, or even aggression.

Support, revelation, blending, continuity, interruption, disruption: *Relâche* makes different media meet, interact, and, at times, conflict with each other. Neither modernist nor *Gesamtkunstwerk*, Picabia's ballet was an intricate construction that relied as much on its multimodality as on the specific ways in which its different media crossed one other. This reading of *Relâche* is associated with practices that are highly relevant to Dada art, such as collage, montage, and assemblage. Such practices are, like *Relâche* – and like Mesa [Chapter 5] and Saint-Hubert's [Chapter 1] work – not necessarily medium-specific; Georges Didi-Huberman explicitly notes how montage in the 1920s was a notion 'transversale à tous les arts de la représentation [transversal to all arts of representation]'.<sup>49</sup> Such practices are also – like *Relâche* and *Solo a ciegas* – primarily focussed on juxtaposing elements and developing (oppositional or continuous) relations between them; they do not focus on singularised contents, but on the effect of their co-appearance. *Relâche's* film, music, set, and dances acquire their full significance in their interaction. If the ballet is seen as an expanded choreography, then, this is because – beyond just questioning the place of dance and the fundamental physicality of motion – it is the result of assemblage-like media associations that include the dancing/moving body. In this way, *Relâche* relates to other assemblage-based choreographic endeavours – be they later, like Mesa's, or earlier, like Saint-Hubert's – while contributing a Dadaist variation to the diversity of historically-distinct types of choreographic assemblages.

In addition to juxtaposing the ballet's media, an assemblage-like approach operated within the ballet's contents; while the actions *Relâche* presented may have seemed absurd, in many ways they constituted responses to, or reflections of, other actions. This relationality of content primarily took the form of symmetry between the ballet's two acts.<sup>50</sup> Thus, in the first act Börlin – lead male dancer – enters the stage in a wheelchair, in the second, de Bondsdorff – lead female dancer – enters on a stretcher. In the first act, de Bondsdorff strips off her dress, in the second it is a group of male dancers who take off their

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48 Baker: *The Artwork Caught by the Tail*, pp. 295, 305.

49 Didi-Huberman, Georges: *Quand les images prennent position: L'Oeil de l'histoire, 1*, Paris: Les Editions de Minuit 2009, p. 85. Here, Didi-Huberman is referring to the practice of montage in Russia and Germany, but allows this point to be expanded to Dada in general (cf. p. 124).

50 Cf. Baker: *The Artwork Caught by the Tail*, pp. 299–300.

evening clothes to reveal tight-fitting unitards. While the first act starts with a solo part for the woman before she is joined by a group of men, the second act starts with a male group that is joined by a woman, who, by the end, will be left alone – thus coming full circle. Picabia's script demands that the female character is pulled off of the stage through a fly system [*cintrés*] at the end of the first act, only to be lowered to the stage through the same system in the second. This was accompanied by a 'mirror composition' ('*composition en miroir*') of the music,<sup>51</sup> as well as a site-specific title for the cinematographic part of the ballet;<sup>52</sup> *Entr'acte* means "intermission" in French, relating the film's title to its dramaturgical position within the ballet. Just as Mesa created, beyond media associations, relations between ideas, times, spaces, and characters [Chapter 5] – and like Saint-Hubert's notion of the subject that concerned not only media of representation, but also themes and narrative lines [Chapter 1] – the contents of Picabia's ballet can be understood relationally, supplanting the narrativity of the libretto by an assemblage-based dramaturgy.

*Relâche's* spectators were exposed to these disruptions and fusions, these symmetries and interruptions, between media and contents of Picabia's construction. But, the role of the audience in the *Théâtre des Champs Elysées* was not confined to the external observation of actions on stage. Instead of treating them as mere observers, *Relâche* literally reached out to its spectators by directly addressing itself to them and, at times, even attacking them – in truly Dada-style: in the beginning of *Entr'acte*, a canon fires towards the camera (and, thus, the audience); the film's script prescribes that a spectator be staged to intervene in the film's action;<sup>53</sup> in the beginning of the piece, the Ballets Suédois dancers sat among the spectators and, towards the end, they distributed props to an audience member, before (in a further symmetry) returning to their seats; the light reflectors on the stage blinded and lit up the audience,<sup>54</sup> reminding spectators of their own presence in the theatre. Picabia and his colleagues also connected the theatre space with the work that was performed in it: certain scenes of *Entr'acte* were shot on location at the theatre building; the complex electric installation required for the light-reflecting scenography rendered the piece difficult to export for touring, thus keeping it grounded within its initial spatial context; the scenography of the second act – including anti-Opéra slogans and the names of the ballet's creators – functioned as publicity for the work it would frame.<sup>55</sup> Just as *Solo a ciegas* was constructed from media,

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51 Boulbès: *Relâche*, p. 219. (Boulbès is here referring to an argument by Robert Orledge.)

52 Baker: *The Artwork Caught by the Tail*, p. 290.

53 In Boulbès: *Relâche*, p. 417.

54 Baker: *The Artwork Caught by the Tail*, p. 295.

55 Boulbès: *Relâche*, pp. 298, 343.

content relations, and an assemblage that incorporated the position and gaze of its spectators [Chapter 5], *Relâche* also established site-specific relations between the work itself, the specific space in which it was presented, and the audience there to watch it. In this way, *Relâche* was a performance inscribed in the specific moment and space of co-presence with its audience, developing an event-like quality – characteristic of many avant-garde works of its time – while also (preposterously<sup>56</sup>) appearing as a relational, expanded choreography that orchestrates links with its audience.

Thus, as an avant-garde ballet – and as an expanded choreography – *Relâche* displayed an assemblage-like intermediality, dramaturgy, and relation with its audience. Picabia was the author of this complex construction. But, despite being an author-figure, it is possible he did not physically create anything for the ballet; for example, he did not even participate in the construction of the second act's set, delegating it to a professional painter-decorator from the Parisian suburbs.<sup>57</sup> The praxis of Picabia can therefore not be seen as the *poiesis* of an object, but, rather, as an orchestration of different media, persons, and content elements. Such a process seems to have been recognised by spectators; Léger wrote:

*[T]out est réglé, voulu: minuterie du geste, du mouvement, des projecteurs. Plusieurs mois, Picabia a réglé les temps, les demi-temps, les dixièmes de temps – un monde entier en petit où tout fonctionne avec discipline, exactitude, raideur, mécaniquement – et toujours ça n'en a pas l'air... [Everything is regulated, deliberate: timing of gesture, of movement, of the projectors. During many months, Picabia regulated the times, the half-times, the tenths of time – a whole world in small size in which everything functions with discipline, exactitude, rigidity, mechanically – and always does not seem to do so...]*<sup>58</sup>

Indeed, while Börlin was the choreographer of the ballet's dances, and Clair can be considered choreographer of its film, Picabia was the choreographer of a relational work; authorship being associable with the choreography of dance (or film) as well as the expanded choreography of a complex entity. In this way, Picabia's role joins Saint-Hubert's master of order [Chapter 1] and Mesa's *praxis* [Chapter 5] by acknowledging choreographic creation that is not-necessarily attached to a specific, tangible product, but that focusses on intermedia arrangements.

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56 Cf. Bal, Mieke: *Quoting Caravaggio: Contemporary Art, Preposterous History*, Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press 1999.

57 Boulbès: *Relâche*, p. 353.

58 Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 594.

*Relâche* displays, apart from the libretto-based or movement-focussed choreographic models of its time, an early-20<sup>th</sup>-century response to these very models. It does this by being a non-medium-specific, assemblage-based work in which the juxtaposition of media – including the (non-)dancing and (non-)moving body – acquires equal, if not more, importance than their actions; by developing a dramaturgy based on relations between actions and actors, rather than narrative; by inscribing the performance in the event of its co-presence with an audience; by having a creator who was more attached to a minutely-timed orchestration of different elements than to grounding dance-making. The links between Picabia's ballet with contemporary expanded choreography (in general) and Mesa's [Chapter 5] work (in particular) show that early-21<sup>st</sup>-century, non-medium-specific, relational choreographic strategies do not constitute a rupture with the choreographic past, but a contemporary reconfiguration of elements inherent in that past. The links with an expanded view of Saint-Hubert's ballet [Chapter 1] further show that if contemporaneity can engage in undoing dancery essentialisms in order to re-read the "pre-choreographic" past, this undoing is an operation whose tools are contained within choreographic history itself.

## Conclusion

With its classically-trained dancers and its anti-dramatic development, *Relâche* responds to a libretto-based, ballet-sourced choreographic model while also subverting its narrativity and focus on dance. With its on-stage action that transfers the motion of modern lifestyles into the dancing body, its kinetically-constructed cinematographic prologue and interlude, and its discursive insistence upon movement, *Relâche* reflects choreography's passage towards an era of motion – and the conflicts arising in this passage; it thus acts as an incubator of modernist dissociations between a body-centred dance and other movement-mediating art forms. With its continuities and juxtapositions, fusions and oppositions between dancing bodies, music, scenography, costumes, lights, film, and its constant links between the work and its audience, *Relâche* is an assemblage-like, non-medium-specific expanded choreographic entity that unfolded as an event. *Relâche* thus forms a *nexus*<sup>59</sup> – a territory of multiple, coexisting understandings of choreography between narrative, motion, and expandedness.

By remaining in such an interstitial choreographic territory, the piece reflects early-20<sup>th</sup>-century (dance) modernity's oscillations: oscillations between narrative and motion as a creative model in film or choreography; oscillations between classical and modern ballet/dance; oscillations between how motion is

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59 Cf. Leon: Vielfältige Konzepte des Choreografischen in Tanz und Film, p. 32.

incorporated by dancers while overflowing into other arts (e.g. film) and the urbanised experience of early-20<sup>th</sup>-century life; oscillations between medium specificity and interdisciplinary collaborations. These oscillations are partly mediated by shifts and frictions between, and expansions of, diverse choreographic models – of danced narrative, of body, of motion – thus making choreography a realm in which the period's ambivalences are translated. In this way, the choreographic multiplicity of the Ballets Suédois' last ballet suggests that historiography should focus on the complexity of simultaneous choreographic models, but also on these models as agents in a process of negotiation between different dance genres, different arts, and their porosities.

Apart from the horizontal axis of simultaneity, this reading of *Relâche* also proposes that historiography consider the vertical axis of transhistoricity.<sup>60</sup> Along this axis, Francis Picabia's ballet – a multimedia assemblage developed through the work of a creator approximating choreographic authorship and a non-linear dramaturgy – relates both to Mesa's *Solo* [Chapter 5] and Saint-Hubert's *La Manière de composer* [Chapter 1] and thus points to the necessity of interrogating potential links between choreographic models of the baroque, historical avant-garde, and contemporary periods. In its performance of an assemblage-like choreography, *Relâche* displays aesthetic, stylistic, institutional, and artistic features that are not assimilable to the 17<sup>th</sup> century's 'disposition of things put in their place'<sup>61</sup> nor to early-21<sup>st</sup>-century Deleuzeian-Guattarian views. In other words, if the vertical axis of transhistoricity demands that a history of choreography-as-assemblage be told, it also points to the variety of choreographic models contained within this history. In this sense, an expanded choreographic perspective of early-20<sup>th</sup>-century modern ballet allows for more plurality in a historical specimen, and at the same time it refines expanded choreography's own historical inscription.

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60 A methodological discussion of these axes' interaction is to be found in Foster, Hal: *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*. Cambridge/London: MIT Press 1996, p. xii.

61 *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, 1694, <http://artfl-project.uchicago.edu/node/45> (August 2020).





## Chapter 8: Looking at a world in movement: Rudolf Laban's work in industry<sup>1</sup>

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Rudolf Laban's attachment to dance was primordial. At the same time, his dance practice overflowed into the non-performative domain – most notably in the form of amateur movement choirs that were not always staged – and was associated with non-dance fields.<sup>2</sup> Among these, Laban considered labour motions to be particularly relevant to the dance-maker: 'all through history movement on the stage drew its inspiration from the occupational motions of the now most numerous part of the population, the workers'.<sup>3</sup> The most notable example of a connection between dance and work in Laban's early career was his orchestration of Vienna's 1929 *Festzug des Handwerkes und der Gewerbe* [Pageant of the Crafts and Trades], a large-scale event in which professional dancers and workers from different guilds performed dances and choreographically-arranged work movements on mobile platforms along the streets of the Austrian capital.<sup>4</sup> Roughly a decade later, in 1938, Laban left Germany for the United Kingdom, where he remained until the end of his life; there, he reduced his dance-making activity<sup>5</sup> and worked in the field of industry, primarily collaborating with consultant Frederick Lawrence.

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- 1 Parts of this chapter are based on Leon, Anna: Object, Material and Machine in Rudolf Laban's Industrial Dance: Undoing Dichotomies in European Dance Modernity, in: Birringer, Johannes & Fenger, Josephine (eds.): *Tanz der Dinge/Things that Dance*, Bielefeld: transcript 2019, pp. 89-96.
  - 2 E.g. Laban, Rudolf: *Choreographie: Erstes Heft*, Jena: E. Diederichs 1926, p. 24. See also Maletic, Vera: *Body – Space – Expression: The Development of Rudolf Laban's Movement and Dance Concepts*, Berlin/New York/Amsterdam: Mouton de Gruyter 1987, p. 4.
  - 3 Laban, Rudolf: *The Mastery of Movement* (4<sup>th</sup> edition), Alton: Dance Books 2011 [1950], p. 93.
  - 4 Cf. Laban, Rudolf: *A Life for Dance: Reminiscences*, London: McDonald and Evans 1975 [1935, trans. Lisa Ullmann], pp. 141–149. See also McCaw, Dick (ed.): *The Laban Sourcebook*, Oxon/New York: Routledge 2011, pp. 139–144.
  - 5 Isabelle Launay situates his last important spectacle in 1936; see Launay, Isabelle: *La recherche d'une danse moderne: Rudolf Laban, Mary Wigman*, PhD thesis, Saint-Denis: Université Paris 8 1997, p. 10.

While inextricably bound to the socio-political circumstances of their beginnings – during and after WWII, when women were trained in manual factory jobs previously held by men<sup>6</sup> – Laban's activities in industry are also part of the wider framework of 20<sup>th</sup>-century dance modernity's interest in labour, be it in Western Europe (François Malkovsky), Russia (Ippolit Sokolov), or the United States (Ted Shawn, the New Dance Group).<sup>7</sup> Laban's work is also situated within factory management discourse about how to increase the efficiency of human movement – ranging from Frederick Taylor's "scientific" management<sup>8</sup> to Fordist control of labourers' actions – and the management of non-manual labour, to which Laban also contributed. Laban's work in industry can also be inscribed within a framework of increasing labour mechanisation, compartmentalisation of tasks in assembly lines, and a high concentration of labourers in factory environments. Despite these contextual inscriptions, however, Laban's work in industry – and its effectiveness – is less studied than his other activities.<sup>9</sup>

One of the reasons for this may be that – apart from theoretical works such as *Effort*<sup>10</sup> – the vast majority of relevant materials are found in unpublished notes, letters, reports, notations, etc. that are uniquely available in archives. This chapter draws from Laban's published books; texts from Laban and collaborators, found in Laban Art of Movement Guild journals; as well as unpublished material in the Rudolf Laban collections (Special Collections, Leeds University Library), the Laban Archive (Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance), and the Rudolf Laban Archive (University of Surrey). The latter sources – often informal documents pertaining to everyday planning and operation of industrial activities – are written by Laban, Lawrence, and/or their collaborators, and they form a collective authorial figure around Laban's person and ideas. As authorship is sometimes uncertain, this chapter's footnotes indicate how likely it was that

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6 Cf. McCaw: *The Laban Sourcebook*, p. 8.

7 On Malkovsky see Bodak, Suzanne: *Philosophie du geste. La Danse libre de François Malkovsky*, France (no city indicated): Ressouvenances 2007, pp. 32, 40; on Sokolov see Bowlit, John E.: Ippolit Sokolov and the Gymnastics of Labor, in: *Experiment 2* (1996), pp. 411–421 and Suquet, Annie: *L'Éveil des modernités: Une histoire culturelle de la danse (1870-1945)*, Pantin: Centre national de la danse 2012, pp. 624–627.

8 Laban writes that Taylor 'was one of the first people who tried to penetrate the riddle of human movement from an entirely new point of view'. Laban, Rudolf: *Modern Educational Dance*, Plymouth: McDonald and Evans 1975 [1948], pp. 4–5.

9 An important book-length work on this topic is Davies, Eden: *Beyond Dance: Laban's Legacy of Movement Analysis*, New York/Oxon: Routledge 2001.

10 Laban, Rudolf & Lawrence, Frederick Charles: *Effort: Economy of Human Movement* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition), Plymouth: McDonald and Evans 1979 [1947].

sources were written by Laban himself,<sup>11</sup> nevertheless, documents not (definitely) written by him are still part of his discursive and conceptual universe.

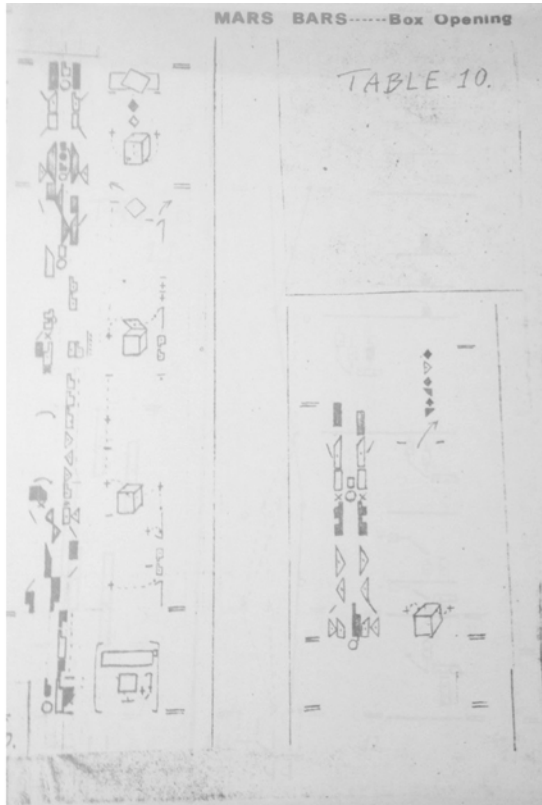
Laban is a canonical figure of German and, more widely, European modern dance; more than exemplifying modernity's choreographic traits, he is, arguably, a historiographically-central figure who played an almost-disproportionate role in determining those very traits. However, Laban's work in industry displays a paradoxical complexity that both confirms and subverts choreographic tendencies of modernity, revealing its potential expandedness. His work is also relevant to a historical perspective on expanded choreography because of its inscription beyond theatrical dance and its role in the history of choreography – both in a revived interest in choreography as notation, and in adapting that interest to 20<sup>th</sup>-century needs and practices.

Laban and Lawrence's work applied Laban's dance-based knowledge, concepts, and notation system to factory work [Figure 28] and developed kinetic ideas related to industrial activities. This was implemented in consulting projects for food and drink manufacturing (Mars Bars Ltd., J. Lyons & Co.), transport logistics (Manchester Ship Canal Co. Ltd.), equipment production (Tyresoles Ltd.), and farming (Dartington Hall Ltd.). For these and other clients, Laban, Lawrence, and their associates provided training to employees in their job movements, selection advice for recruitment, and proposals for the re-arrangement of work, including performance-based payment schemes. Thus, Laban's work with Lawrence marked a shift from the appropriation and re-contextualisation of labour movement in dance (as had happened in Vienna in 1929) towards an application of dance-derived concepts to labour, without any performative end beyond the accomplishment of the work itself.

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11 The first time a source is referenced and if authorship is uncertain.

Figure 28: Detail of Labanotation of the action of opening a box, for Mars Bars. Anonymous, MARS BARS – Box opening, 1942. Image source: Special Collections, Leeds University Library, BC MS 20c Theatre/Hodgson/1/1/151. <https://explore.library.leeds.ac.uk/special-collections-explore/419984>. Reproduced with the permission © Laban Estate. No re-use without permission.



Laban's work in the industrial field – and, to a certain extent, his work in general – implies a broad conception of what choreography is, in which multiple definitions of choreography coexist. The first is literally and historically inscribed, referring to Raoul Auger Feuillet and choreography as notation [Chapter 2]. Indeed, Kinetography (Labanotation) was adapted to the needs of industrial analysis, and factory work used, and may have contributed towards, the development of a supplementary notation system based on effort. A second conception of choreography active in Laban's mentality is the 20<sup>th</sup>-century understanding of both dance and choreography as bound to corporeality, as the bodily expression

of an interior psychological state – doubled by an attachment to movement; Laban spoke of dance as ‘a total immersion in the *flow* of movement’<sup>12</sup>. This became a cornerstone of the Labanian approach to employee selection, which matched workers to jobs specifically adapted to their movement patterns. A third conception of choreography should also be considered, which places Laban's industrial work in an expanded choreography framework. In this context, Laban questions his own anthropocentrism and attachment to motion, pointing to the early-20<sup>th</sup>-century's ambivalences around its choreographic models – just as *Relâche* did [Chapter 7]. In doing so, Laban's work on work links with other beyond-human and beyond-motional choreographic approaches, responding to interrogations raised by Domenico da Piacenza and Guglielmo Ebreo da Pesaro's treatises [Chapter 3] as well as William Forsythe's contemporary installations [Chapter 6]. Thus, Laban manifests 20<sup>th</sup>-century modernity's reconfigurations of problematics also present in early modernity and the present.

### Anthropocentrism in question

Laban's activity – in industry and beyond – reflected the 20<sup>th</sup> century's choreographic focus on a moving corporeality in multiple ways. Even when his work related more to the term's etymology –the literal writing of motion through notation and the inscription of motion in space – than its significance in Laban's modern context, it remained anchored in the body. Laban's notational system – his main tool of observing, analysing, and graphically-encoding movement – grounds its principles of function and its conception of space upon the dancer's corporeality and embodied experience,<sup>13</sup> while the notation allows for subdivisions of the body, its representation of the body as a whole is a shift away from its Feuilletian inspiration. This whole-body representation in the notation was reflected in Laban's factory work; for example, Eden Davies reports that for Mars Bars Ltd. Laban ‘devised a system of compensatory exercises and improved the actual wrapping action so that it merged into a whole body movement’.<sup>14</sup> Laban insisted on the specificity of the human body when he suggested his notational

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12 Laban: *Modern Educational Dance*, p. 97, emphasis added. In *Choreutics*, Laban writes that ‘[t]he lasting, uninterrupted flow of organised movement phrases is true dance’: Laban, Rudolf: *Choreutics*, London: MacDonald and Evans 1966, p. 93.

13 For example, paths in space are drawn from the embodied perspective of the dancer; the size of steps is judged with a performer's “natural” stride as a reference point. Hutchinson-Guest, Ann: *Choreo-Graphics: A Comparison of Dance Notation Systems from the Fifteenth Century to the Present*, New York: Gordon and Breach 1989, pp. 370, 139.

14 Davies: *Beyond Dance*, p. 27.

work ‘could be used only to describe and analyse human movement’.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, the kinesphere – one of the main constructs developed by Laban in order to conceptualise and visualise the inscription of motion in space – is also defined on the basis of the human body – specifically, the spherical space that one can reach with extended limbs.<sup>16</sup>

Laban’s practice also aligned itself with 20<sup>th</sup>-century views of choreography pertaining to human bodies in motion. Alluding to a Delsartean mind-body link, Laban theorised that the moving body was a *locus* of expression of the subject: ‘bodily movements consist of elements which create actions reflecting the particular qualities of the inner effort from which they spring’.<sup>17</sup> This relationship also functions inversely: Laban stressed ‘the important effect action has on the mental state of the mover’.<sup>18</sup> His notion of effort, to a great extent elaborated in the field of industry – the most important publication on the topic was co-written with Lawrence – contributes to these ideas. Part of Labanian movement analysis, effort theory is less interested in the spatial form of motion than its qualities and dynamics (mostly associated with Eukinetics, analysed through the figure of the dynamosphere).<sup>19</sup> It analyses movement in terms of Space, Time, Weight, and Flow;<sup>20</sup> this is not simply the movement’s

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- 15 Laban, Rudolf: *Principles of Dance and Movement Notation*, New York: Dance Horizons 1973 [1956], p. 20. However, in an evolution presumably not planned by Laban and prefiguring the arguments in this chapter, his notation may today be applied to the movement of non-human organisms (notably mammals and birds). Hutchinson-Guest, Ann: *Labanotation: The System of Analyzing and Recording Movement*, New York: Routledge 2005, p. 5.
- 16 In *Choreutics*, Laban writes: ‘[i]nnumerable directions radiate from the centre of our body and its kinesphere into infinite space’: Laban: *Choreutics*, p. 17.
- 17 Laban: *Modern Educational Dance*, pp. 25–26. On the associations and parallels between Laban and Delsarte see Maletic: *Body – Space – Expression*, pp. 5, 73, 154.
- 18 Laban: *Modern Educational Dance*, p. 102.
- 19 Laban’s early definition of eukinetics presents it as a sub-field of choreutics associated with dynamics: ‘[i]n that part of the study of choreutics which we call eukinetics the dynamic structure of these movements can be exactly determined. The result is a scheme which is comparable to that of orientation in space. The space in which our dynamic actions take place may be called the “dynamosphere”’. Laban: *Choreutics*, p. 30. On the nuances between Effort and Eukinetics, Maletic explains: ‘[w]hile eukinetics focussed on the expressive qualities in dance [...] Effort is concerned with all human movement and its term indicates that unlike energy which exists in all nature in many different forms, Effort can only be found in living organisms and is clearly linked with motivation/intentionality’ Maletic: *Body – Space – Expression*, p. 178.
- 20 Laban lists eight basic combinations of effort parameters which correspond to basic actions: wringing, pressing, gliding, floating, slashing, flicking, punching, and dabbing. To take two examples, pressing is firm in relation to weight, direct in relation to space, and sustained in relation to time, while flicking is light in relation to weight, flexible in relation to space, and sudden in relation to time. Laban: *Modern Educational Dance*, p. 35.

path, speed, etc., but the “how” of the movement understood in terms of these factors. This analysis assumes that effort is the expression, in movement, of an inner impulse for action, in a sense combining (un)conscious motivation and engaged energy in order to realise an action.<sup>21</sup> As such, effort manifests internal aspects of the person through their corporeal movement; ‘pressing, thrusting, wringing, slashing, gliding, dabbing, flicking and floating [actions recurring in Laban’s analysis of effort ...] are the basic actions of a working person, and, at the same time, the fundamental movements of emotional and mental expression.’<sup>22</sup> In their chapter ‘Psychological aspects of effort control’, Laban and Lawrence further analysed personality in terms of indulging or resisting the four effort factors: ‘[n]othing can be expressed in psychological terms until the attitude towards the motion factors Weight, Space, Time and Flow has been determined’.<sup>23</sup>

Despite his association with human-body-centred and human-subject-oriented understandings of choreo(-)graphy, however, Laban also conceived of a non-human choreography; this was strikingly present in his industrial work. This is initially indicated by how the industrial Laban treated the body itself as an object. He was interested in the body as a physiological and mechanical device, comparable to the machines that were also working in factories; ‘[e]ssentially, the movements of the robot and of man are the same [...] There is no bodily action which is not essentially mechanical and even the reactions of the senses are built up on the same principles as cameras, gramophones radio apparatus, and such like’.<sup>24</sup> Laban further considered the body – or specific parts of it – as tools; ‘[t]he hand is a universal tool. Its movement are [sic] the movement of a pair of pincers, of a shovel, a fork, a hammer, a batter, etc.’<sup>25</sup> Equating the body to the machine has pragmatic

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21 Cf. Laban: *The Mastery of Movement*, pp. 9, 21, 169.

22 Laban, Rudolf: *The Mastery of Movement on the Stage*, London: MacDonald and Evans 1950, p. 105.

23 Laban & Lawrence: *Effort*, p. 72, see also p. 67. In *Choreutics*, Laban proposed that ‘the inner meaning of movement can perhaps be described by special dynamospheric symbols still more explicitly than by spatial ones’: Laban, *Choreutics*, p. 35.

24 Laban Rudolf: Laban Lecture 1962 (Paper II), in: *The Laban Art of Movement Guild Magazine* 29 (1962), p. 16. On the chemical aspect of the body, Laban writes: ‘[t]he human body is a very complicated mechanic-chemical device [...] I can use my fist as a hammer, an action which sets a greater part of the mechanico-chemical device “man” in action’. Laban, Rudolf: *The Difference between a Machine and a Human Body*, 1942, Rudolf Laban Archive, © University of Surrey, L/E/71/11, pp 1b–2 [handwritten notes, attributed to Laban by handwriting comparison and the archive catalogue]

25 Laban, Rudolf: *Movements Involved in Industrial Operations*, 1942, Rudolf Laban Archive, © University of Surrey, L/E/75/16, p. 3 [attributed to Laban by the archive catalogue through an attached handwritten manuscript]. Laban also writes: ‘[t]he working person

implications; Laban warned that 'the value of a labouring man decreases more rapidly through neglect in maintenance as [sic] a machine',<sup>26</sup> thus highlighting that corporeal training of workers was considered upkeep of their corporeal device – or of them as corporeal devices, too.

Laban also stressed the extent to which this human-body-as-device made constant use of objects – from simple tools to complex machinery – while working. An interest in the objects' physical make-up resulted in suggestions for their re-design, in order to make the interaction between workers and equipment easier. To optimally adapt the machine or tool to the human, Laban and his colleagues proposed ways of perfecting the worker's affordances provided by the equipment; these included everything from adding bars to trolleys for better grip to correcting the structure of tables.<sup>27</sup> He also proposed that machines should

give the operator the most suitable series of stresses and relaxations and of all the other contrasts of effort elements. It is evident that the designer should know enough about effort study and the function of the human body engine, both with regard to structure and effort capacities, so that the controls of his machines are constructed in the most suitable way for easy and rhythmical operation.<sup>28</sup>

But objects are not just peripheral accessories that facilitate working movement by being adapted to human functioning; they also have an active role in influencing the very movements in which they are used. Thus, bidirectionally, 'the

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might use his bare hands, or a set of tools. Hands are in fact nothing but tools attached to our bodies as living implements'. Laban: *The Mastery of Movement*, p. 88.

- 26 Laban, Rudolf: Untitled notes, undated, Rudolf Laban Archive, © University of Surrey, L/E/64/70, p. 8 [handwritten notes, attributed to Laban by handwriting comparison and the archive catalogue].
- 27 Laban-Lawrence Industrial Rhythm: Notes on the Tools and Equipment Designed for Use in the Tea Factory, 1944, Special Collections, Leeds University Library, BC MS 20c Theatre/Hodgson/1/1/146. <https://explore.library.leeds.ac.uk/special-collections-explore/419979>, p. 1; Laban-Lawrence Industrial Rhythm: Rhythm of J Lyons & Company, Greenford, Tea Factory, 1944, Rudolf Laban Archive, © University of Surrey, L/E/72/5, p. 6. Cf. also Paton Lawrence & Company: Movement and Effort Observations, 1948, Rudolf Laban Archive, © University of Surrey, L/E/74/2.
- 28 Laban, Rudolf [& Lawrence, Frederick Charles?]: The Effort Situation of our Age, undated (Part of typescript report entitled 'Synopsis of a lecture by Rudolf Laban and F.C. Lawrence, at the Manchester Association of Engineers': 'Motion and Movement in Modern Engineering Practice', 3 June 1946), Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, Faculty of Dance, Laban Archive, LC/B/16/320.58, p. 10 [document not signed but attached to a 1946 lecture by Laban and Lawrence; handwriting comparison of corrections to the typed text also support that Laban is its author. Page numbers are not regular].



efficient machine which can be easily operated is driven and assisted by men who should be taught to use their own bodily power in the right way'.<sup>29</sup> Despite the credo that 'machines should be adapted to the men and not the men to the machines'<sup>30</sup> or that machines 'are accidental accessories only, destined to facilitate the function of the real instrumental body which is the cooperating staff consisting of individual workmen',<sup>31</sup> Laban and his colleagues proposed exercises that habituated workers to the objects and machines they operated. These included, for example, suggestions for the efficient use of pedals and levers, and the use of token tools for training with objects.<sup>32</sup> Notwithstanding Laban's discursively-advocated anthropocentrism, the individual *anthropos* had to conform to mechanical rhythm; '[m]ind and body', wrote Laban and Lawrence, 'must sometimes be trained to match the machines as their structure and rhythm become more and more exacting'.<sup>33</sup>

Non-human entities, such as tools and machines, also played a central part in the choreography of work – so much so that Laban suggested that '[i]n the case of highly mechanised processes the importance of body movement fades away almost entirely. It is then the movement of the object, effected by machinery, which must be assessed'.<sup>34</sup> Materials and machines were choreographically analysed through the "dance into industry" metaphor:

This dance of material is unique to modern industry. Metal melts and flows into moulds, bars or pipes bend, fall to pieces, hover in the air, get into exact positions, branch out or are assembled together through the impact of machines almost *without human interference* [...] Logs dance and balance together supported by cranes, turn to the right or the left, stand on their ends and glide down slopes.<sup>35</sup>

A manager or consultant had to understand the choreographic aspects of the non-human since '[h]elplessness towards the rhythm of material is a cause of

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29 Laban & Lawrence: *Effort*, p. 8.

30 Paton Lawrence & Company: *Movement and Effort Observations*, 1948, Rudolf Laban Archive, © University of Surrey, L/E/74/2, p. 8.

31 Laban, Rudolf: *The Industrial Concert*, undated, Rudolf Laban Archive, © University of Surrey, L/E/77/44, p. 1b [handwritten notes, attributed to Laban by handwriting comparison and the archive catalogue].

32 Rink, Gerda: *Hoover – Motion Economy and Industrial Rhythm*, 1943, Rudolf Laban Archive, © University of Surrey, L/E/66/17, p. 7.

33 Laban & Lawrence: *Effort*, p. 82.

34 Laban, Rudolf: *The Laban Lawrence Method of Effort Assessment, Selection and Effort Training*, 1946, Rudolf Laban Archive, © University of Surrey, L/E/33/49, p. 4.

35 Laban, Rudolf: *The Revival of Rhythm*, undated, Rudolf Laban Archive, © University of Surrey, L/E/57/4, pp. 38–39, emphasis added [attributed to Laban by the archive catalogue].

worries and difficulties very comparable with the helplessness of the operator who does not become aware and is not able to master his own bodily and mental rhythm'.<sup>36</sup>

Against this background that recognises the presence and role of the non-human in industrial activity, Laban's view of choreography – as notation and movement-writing – expanded beyond its human-corporeal forms. The importance of tools and machines in the choreography of work was reflected in "Industrial Kinetography". This adaptation of Laban's notation system to industry was presented as a consequence of the common use of objects by dancers (stage props) and workers (tools).<sup>37</sup> The modified notation covers the movement of both human workers and 'materials, parts, tools and implements which are set in motion or on which work is done';<sup>38</sup> specific symbols for tools and machine parts allowed objects to de-centralise Kinetography – and choreo(-)graphy – away from the human body.

Similarly, a choreography of expressing human interiority through movement also expanded to non-human factory workers. Indeed, the most striking way Laban acknowledges the non-human in his choreography of work is through the attribution of effort to machines. Some of Laban's writings deny this possibility, marginalising the inorganic:

No matter whether the exertion appears to be more bodily or mental, there is always at its origin a process which can be compared to the switching on of an electric current. This primary function is the exclusive privilege of living beings. No inanimate object can make an effort.<sup>39</sup>

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36 Laban, Rudolf: Untitled notes, undated, Rudolf Laban Archive, © University of Surrey, L/E/77/34, pp. b2–c [handwritten notes, attributed to Laban by handwriting comparison and the archive catalogue].

37 'The special application which movement notation has found in industry has developed from the fact that dancers frequently handle objects and tools, i.e. stage properties, when on the stage. The close connection between the movements made when handling stage properties and those used in industrial operations is obvious'. Laban: *Principles of Dance and Movement Notation*, p. 19.

38 Laban, Rudolf: Laban Lawrence Industrial Notation, 1943, Rudolf Laban Archive, © University of Surrey, L/E/22/3, pp. 3 and 4 for a mention of specific tools. [attributed to Laban by the archive catalogue]. See also Laban, Rudolf: Industrial Kinetography (Laban), undated, Rudolf Laban Archive, © University of Surrey, L/E/66/2 [handwritten notes, attributed to Laban by handwriting comparison and the archive catalogue].

39 Laban: *The Mastery of Movement*, p. 169. This quotation focusses on the "inorganic", implying that organic non-human beings could display effort patterns. This is, in effect, the case; however, human actors are still considered superior in their relevance to effort analysis: 'the effort-characteristics of men are much more varied and variable than those of animals'. Laban: *The Mastery of Movement on the Stage*, p. 11, see also p. 13. *Effort* expresses a similar idea: '[i]t is true that the tremendous motion which is shown in the

However, in the practice of industrial consulting, machine and human movement were analysed in the same terms of effort: '[m]achinery and implements, which can be considered as an extension of human body powers, can be assessed in their effects in W[eight] S[pace] T[ime] and F[low] in a similar way as the movement functions of the body itself'.<sup>40</sup> Laban also considered using effort graphs – which display effort qualities through a combination of strokes – to represent mechanical movements.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, machines may not have initiated effort-laden movements or possess human-like inner impulses, but they can embody and manifest effort. They perform a specific kind of effort, in which the dynamic qualities of movement are found, even if these movements are not associated with the machine's inner state.

Thus, in his choreography of work, the differences between the human and the non-human body – in terms of physical make-up and movement qualities – were more vague than Laban himself suggested. The embodied subject was also seen as a device-like, mechanically-functioning, working body, while Laban's conception of the machine was, in Isabelle Launay's words, '*un modèle non mécanique de la machine* [a non-mechanical model of the machine]'<sup>42</sup> – one that can *embody* intentional states even if it cannot *generate* them. Despite the human being considered superior to the machine, Laban's work indicates that the machine has more agency than may be immediately apparent, reconfiguring the hierarchy of work towards a more horizontal, non-anthropocentric organisation. Laban's thinking and practice thus displayed a fundamental interest in the centrality of the human body while simultaneously challenging this centrality, recognising the role of inorganic materiality. In this framework, conceptions of choreography-as-writing were re-activated and linked with human corporeality, but could also be adapted to the non-human. Modern conceptions of choreography associated with the moving-body were reflected through a focus

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flow of material in modern industry is a part of this investigation, but its main value lies in the recognition that behind this terrific flow there is always the bodily-mental effort of an individual. No mechanisation can eliminate human effort; the handling of the powers of nature must be done by humans'. Laban & Lawrence: *Effort*, p. 73.

- 40 Laban, Rudolf [ & Lawrence, Frederick Charles?]: New Efforts Appearing in Massagglomerations, undated (Part of typescript report entitled 'Synopsis of a lecture by Rudolf Laban and F.C. Lawrence, at the Manchester Association of Engineers': 'Motion and Movement in Modern Engineering Practice', 3 June 1946), Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, Faculty of Dance, Laban Archive, LC/B/16/320.58, p. 31 [document not signed but attached to a 1946 lecture by Laban and Lawrence. Overlaps with handwritten notes by Laban, suggesting he is its author. Page numbers are not regular].
- 41 Laban or a Laban-based analyst writes of '[t]he employment of effort graphs for the assessment of machine functions and the use of machines in industry'. Anonymous: The Flow of Material, undated, Rudolf Laban Archive, © University of Surrey, L/E/75/11, p. 1.
- 42 Launay: *A la recherche d'une danse moderne*, p. 95.

on the human body's kinetic expression, but could also expand towards movement qualities discerned in the actions of things. In this way, Laban's factories displayed both a human-centred choreography and a hybrid, expanded, non-anthropocentric one, stressing the need to historiographically acknowledge the – perhaps contradictory – plural nature of Laban's choreographic views. His focus on human corporeality thus anchors him in the physicalised 20<sup>th</sup>-century choreographic landscape, but it does not preclude him from relating to earlier – like Guglielmo's non-anthropocentric views [Chapter 3] – or later – like Forsythe's dancing trees [Chapter 6] – choreographic embracings of the non-human.

### Expanded movement

Laban's view of choreography was not only anchored in human corporeality. As suggested by the motional analysis of effort, it was also founded upon this corporeality's being-in-motion. This kinetic attachment – be it in factories or beyond – was, in turn, implicated in the relations – and dichotomies – he envisaged between human and non-human entities. Echoing Forsythe [Chapter 6] and later theorisations of affordance, Laban espoused that objects, products, and equipment may invite, or generate, motion. He tried to understand the movement qualities necessary for operating new products and machinery – the movements they required their users to perform (one of the devices Laban considered capable of producing qualitatively new movement experiences was the war-related mechanism of the parachute<sup>43</sup>). But some of his observations led to a pessimistic conclusion; he noted that new products and pieces of equipment could generate nothing more than jerks, micro-movements, or even immobility in their users. Identifying a possible elimination of (loco)motion through mechanisation, Laban writes: '[w]e live in a time of racing machines, destined to take soon the last vestige of motion out of us'.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, Laban theorised that modern lifestyles would concentrate "mental mobility" – the new way to display human mobile skills.<sup>45</sup> An antagonism thus appears in a humanity confined to corporeal motionlessness, partly because of mechanical and other equipment. But just like the unclear limits between the human and

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43 Laban & Lawrence: *Effort*, p. 83.

44 Laban, Rudolf. *The Renaissance of the Art of Movement*, undated [1946?], Rudolf Laban Archive, © University of Surrey, L/E/74/1, p. 3 [handwritten notes, attributed to Laban by handwriting comparison].

45 Laban, Rudolf. *The Renaissance of the Art of Movement*, undated [1946?], Rudolf Laban Archive, © University of Surrey, L/E/74/1, pp. 3b–4a.

the non-human, the limits between movement and non-movement are not clear-cut. Undoing this double dichotomy points to a further expansion of Laban's choreography, diverging from its association with a kinetic human body.

Laban's analysis of micro-movement – possibly relating to the exhaustion of 'the last vestige of motion out of us' (quoted above) – starts with a focus on human subjects. In the field of work, he was interested in analysing and assessing not only manual labour motions but also "minimal" movements in white-collar, office jobs. The liminal status of office work, in which 'visible rhythm of movement seems to disappear entirely', was interesting because it still consumed 'rhythmical energy'.<sup>46</sup> This imperceptible movement is related to the Labanian notion of "shadow moves" – slight, often unconscious micro-movements which accompany larger movements or (apparent) immobility (e.g. sitting). The analysis of shadow movements complemented and nuanced a worker's effort graph, expanded motional assessment to managerial positions, and played a role in the evaluation of the working person.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, Laban's writings imply that in shadow movement the rhythms and effort patterns that a person has been habituated, or forced, to absorb are made visible; '[w]atching workmen departing in the late afternoon from factories, one can recognise the rhythms which they have exercised during the day in the flow of their tired or excited shadow moves'.<sup>48</sup> In other words, shadow moves reflect traces of previous movement that have shaped a person's body.

But, this vision of movement was not restricted to human subjects; just as shadow movements indicate movement-traces in the person, Laban saw, in objects, traces of the movements that created them. The movements executed in creating something are perceivable in the resulting form; '[w]hen the dancer looks at an object – be it an instrument, a container or a roof – then the image of movements and thoughts, even the feelings of the people who created the article, becomes immediately alive'.<sup>49</sup> In this perspective, an object contains traces of movement, even in its immobile state; it manifests the movement process that resulted in it. In this way, the relevance of movement in immobile, non-motorised objects is identified, focussing not on *their movement* but on them *in terms of movement*. The movements of production in the field of

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46 Anonymous: The Rhythm of the Office Worker III, 1943, Rudolf Laban Archive, © University of Surrey, L/E/66/13, p. 1.

47 Warren Lamb points at the – unfalsifiable – reliance that Laban exhibited in favour of shadow movement analysis: 'Laban made much use of the shadow movement category to substantiate his conclusion about a person. "You can see from her shadow movements" he would say "that she is disequibrated"'. Lamb, Warren: The Development of Action Profiling (Part 1), in: *Action News* 1978, unpaginated.

48 Laban: *The Mastery of Movement*, p. 124.

49 Quoted in McCaw: *The Laban Sourcebook*, p. 64.

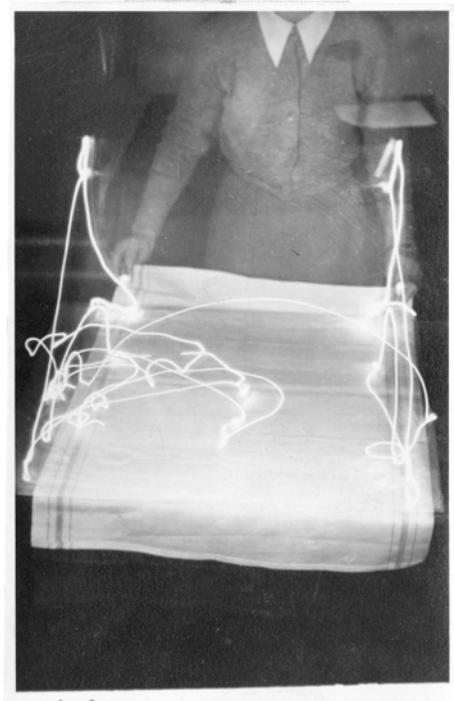
work provided Laban the opportunity to observe the relationship between the actions performed by workers and the result of their labour. He saw an interaction, and a connection, between product and producer: '[i]n work, a physical-spiritual-mental exchange of forces must take place between the creator and his creation'.<sup>50</sup> Consequently, he considered that the product of work depends on, and embodies, the work processes and intentions that created it: '[w]ell conceived and applied, rhythm of operational performance is the congenial link between the idea of the planning designer and the perfect fulfilment of his intentions *in* the product by the manual worker'.<sup>51</sup> In a fascinating series of photographs in the Rudolf Laban Archive of the University of Surrey [one is reproduced in Figure 29], workers' movements are captured by "lightlines" – bright lines tracing their trajectories, allowing a timelapse to be condensed into one image – thus manifesting the outcome of their work (a folded tea towel, a set of medicine vials packed in cartons) in terms of their movements.

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50 Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 64.

51 Laban, Rudolf: *The Rhythm of the Operator II*, 1943, Rudolf Laban Archive, © University of Surrey, L/E/65/42, p. 16, emphasis added [attributed to Laban by handwriting comparison and the archive catalogue].

Figure 29: A photograph showing the lightlines from folding a tea towel, 1952 (L/F/3/19). From the Rudolf Laban Archive, University of Surrey, © University of Surrey. No re-use without permission.



*Laban Lawrence Industrial Rhythm  
Lightline : Folding a tea towel by  
one method - 1952.*

The relevance of movement to immobile objects is not limited to what their human creators may have done, but also concerns inorganic objects themselves, to which Laban extended the organic notion of growth: 'the manufacture of an

object is a process almost comparable to the growth of a living organism'.<sup>52</sup> Growth can be modified and directed by external sources but is an inherent tendency of the organism; similarly, Laban's use of the concept highlights that while human action can influence manufactured products' form, materials contribute to, and interact with, these actions. Beyond identifying the external movements that created an object in its form, Laban identified internal movement proclivities in materials:

Movement is indicated in the shapes of all things. Not only that movement is indicated to which an object or a life form owes its final shape, such as the movement of development and growth. There is also that movement which seeks to break out of the shape, the gravity and weight of a large rock indicate the enormous force with which it could fall into the valley as part of an avalanche. The grace of a plant indicates the movements by means of which it is ready to push out a blossom from its stem, the blossom from which later sprouts fruit and new seed.<sup>53</sup>

Laban's vision – of micro-movement, movement-traces, and movement-proclivities present in immobility – are part of a wider motion-bound conception of the world surrounding him; he applied this conception to human and non-human, animate and inanimate, organic and inorganic, locomotor and immobile entities – comparable to a choreographic perspective on willow trees [Chapter 6]. Indeed, if movement is relevant when displacement is minimal, this is because Laban, (as well as some of his contemporary and Renaissance colleagues [Chapter 3]) saw the entire universe as being in motion, despite apparent stillness. Warren Lamb, one of his long-time collaborators, recounts that 'Laban was so absorbed by movement. The world consisted in movement. Stillness for him was something that he abhorred. He would often refer to everything as being in a state of flux'.<sup>54</sup> For Laban, thinking itself was performed through motion: '[o]ne's thoughts move in and through one's mind and so do one's feel-

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52 Laban, Rudolf [& Lawrence, Frederick Charles?]: *New Efforts Appearing in Massagglomerations*, undated (Part of typescript report entitled 'Synopsis of a lecture by Rudolf Laban and F.C. Lawrence, at the Manchester Association of Engineers: 'Motion and Movement in Modern Engineering Practice' 3 June 1946). Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, Faculty of Dance, Laban Archive, LC/B/16/320.58, p. 36.

53 Laban, Rudolf: *Gymnastics and Dancing* (typescript of translation commissioned by Gordon Curl), 1926, Special Collections, Leeds University Library, BC MS 20c Theatre/Hodgson/1/1/65. <https://explore.library.leeds.ac.uk/special-collections-explore/419899>, Part 2, p. 9.

54 Quoted in McCaw, Dick: *An Eye for Movement: Warren Lamb's Career in Movement Analysis*, London: Brechin Books 2006, p. 115.



ings, which are therefore called emotions [...] or results of moving'.<sup>55</sup> Some of Laban's more-pragmatic industry collaborators may have considered such beliefs more akin to mysticism than useful choreographic thinking.<sup>56</sup> Nevertheless, his universal vision of movement might have been – more than just one of the widely-applicable dance metaphors present since the early-20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>57</sup> – related to the very model through which he conceived of industry. Beyond the motions performed within it, the factory can be understood through Laban's vision of a world in rhythmical movement.

Initially, this factory choreography concerns human teamwork. Possibly following the movement-choir-related idea of collective rhythm, a vision of the factory as an orchestra – a large-scale rhythmic entity that needs to work harmoniously – was developed. Workers in different levels of production and management can thus

be compared with musicians who play a special instrument in a great symphony [...] As soon as they understand the common purpose and their personal role within it, they will fit into the rhythm of the whole without any outside driving, because of their enjoyment in the resulting harmony.<sup>58</sup>

Parallel notations juxtaposed each worker's rhythm to that of others, 'like the various voices of music in a score'.<sup>59</sup> The consultant's role was to understand

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55 Laban, Rudolf: Laban Lecture 1957, in: *The Laban Art of Movement Guild Magazine* 18 (1957), p.11.

56 Lamb remembers: '[a] word he used a lot was Cosmos. He would talk with me quite a lot about his Space Harmony research, and he really believed that he was touching on something that was of immense, epoch-making significance and that nobody else would have much of a glimmer of what he was talking about. [...] I got the impression of a man who explored and rambled in a way about all sorts of things, many of which were mystical!' Quoted in McCaw: *An Eye for Movement*, p. 29.

57 On this topic see Köhler, Kristina: Dance as Metaphor – Metaphor as Dance: Transfigurations of Dance in Culture and Aesthetics around 1900, in: Grabes, Herbert (ed.): *Metaphors Shaping Culture and Theory*, Tübingen: Narr 2009, pp. 163–178.

58 Laban, Rudolf [ & Lawrence, Frederick Charles?]: New Efforts Appearing in Massagglomerations, undated (Part of typescript report entitled 'Synopsis of a lecture by Rudolf Laban and F.C. Lawrence, at the Manchester Association of Engineers': 'Motion and Movement in Modern Engineering Practice', 3 June 1946); Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, Faculty of Dance, Laban Archive, LC/B/16/320.58, p. 36.

59 Laban, Rudolf [ & Lawrence, Frederick Charles?]: New Efforts Appearing in Massagglomerations, undated (Part of typescript report entitled 'Synopsis of a lecture by Rudolf Laban and F.C. Lawrence, at the Manchester Association of Engineers': 'Motion and Movement in Modern Engineering Practice', 3 June 1946), Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, Faculty of Dance, Laban Archive, LC/B/16/320.58, p. 30. See also Laban & Lawrence: *Effort*, pp. 86–87.

and possibly orchestrate this rhythm, working beyond the scale of the person on the supra-subjective level of collective movement.

Expanding the focus to the parallel actions of people and objects, Laban, Lawrence, and their colleagues developed consulting propositions that concerned the management of factories as a whole. By focussing on the flow of material through production lines, they could identify mistimings between these flows and workers' individual paces; by considering flow in the transfer of goods, they could re-orchestrate the coordination between human teams, crane drivers, transport machines, and goods to optimise dock works.<sup>60</sup> In order to make such analyses, Laban-Lawrence industrial movement notation included, beyond the movements of people and objects, 'the transport and flow of material through different departments of a production unit and [the] graphic representation of the rhythm of the manifold activities within a factory'.<sup>61</sup> Even though Laban did not attempt a single effort graph of an entire unit/factory in the consulted archival material, his writings imply that effort notions could apply to humans, objects, and 'the whole flow of material in production';<sup>62</sup> the qualitative dynamics of movement therefore also concerned the collective scale of the assembly line or factory.

While workers, materials, and machinery did *move* within industrial processes, the choreographic relevance of the factory went beyond the actual performance of motion, to stillness as an aspect of mobility, rather than its Other. Laban writes:

The personification of objects, and the belief that inorganic nature lives, have their source in the intuitive awareness of the universal and absolute presence of movement. This primitive view is an intuitive confirmation of the scientifically proved truth that what we call equilibrium is never complete stability or a standstill, but the result of two contrasting qualities of mobility.<sup>63</sup>

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60 For example: Paton Lawrence & Company: *Economy of Effort*, 1943, Rudolf Laban Archive, © University of Surrey, L/E/74/5, p. 2; Paton Lawrence & Company: *First Investigation into the Flow of Dock Work*, 1946, Rudolf Laban Archive, © University of Surrey, L/E/73/14, p. ii.

61 Laban, Rudolf: *Laban Lawrence Industrial Notation*, 1943, Rudolf Laban Archive, © University of Surrey, L/E/22/3, p. 5.

62 Laban, Rudolf [& Lawrence, Frederick Charles?]: *New Efforts Appearing in Massagglomerations*, undated (Part of typescript report entitled 'Synopsis of a lecture by Rudolf Laban and F.C. Lawrence, at the Manchester Association of Engineers': 'Motion and Movement in Modern Engineering Practice', 3 June 1946), Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, Faculty of Dance, Laban Archive, LC/B/16/320.58, p. 31.

63 Laban: *Choreutics*, p. 6.

Correspondingly, industrial choreography expanded from its performance by (non-)human bodies towards a generalised vision of a labouring world in motion. In this framework, rhythmic-kinetic aspects were identified in acts not involving visible motion – be they administrative tasks, or wider industrial and commercial (trans)actions. For example, Laban argued that with his notation ‘it is possible to demonstrate and eventually to regulate not only the rhythm of personal performances but also that of the flow of material and even of administrative concern’.<sup>64</sup> He noted that ‘man is embarking now into a venture which seems to surpass any human capacity. It is [in] this [sic] the regulation or better rhythmisation of international trade and economics’, that one could identify ‘the still more complex rhythms of trade and economics in their regional, national and finally international relationships’.<sup>65</sup> Similar to how individual (non-)human units of a factory must be considered part of the interconnected choreography to which they collectively contribute, multiple factories, enterprises, and productive activities may be considered actants of a global expanded choreography – as phenomena to be understood choreographically, as parts of a world in flux.

If choreography is attached to bodies in (loco)motion, Laban's reflections on industrial equipment and products trouble this conception by minimising movement imposed on human bodies. But, while Laban described a dichotomy of a moving human corporeality trapped into motionlessness by inorganic products, his work also recognised motions and non-motions shared by both. By identifying the kinetic relevance of seemingly-still human beings – through the notion of shadow movements – as well as the objects, materials, factories, and the wider agglomerations they belong to, Laban posited both a choreography of moving human bodies and an expanded choreography envisioning the (still) world in kinetic flow. In this way, he disengaged choreography from the human mover (challenging the 20<sup>th</sup> century's “bind” of motion to corporeality<sup>66</sup>), undid a clear dichotomy between motion and motionlessness (detaching his practice from a conception of choreography predicated on motion as opposed to immobility), and complexified the ways 20<sup>th</sup> century's attachment to motion can be understood. In doing so, the industrial Laban participates in a historical range of choreographic practices – pre- and post-20<sup>th</sup> century – that upset

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64 Laban, Rudolf: *The Revival of Rhythm*, undated, Rudolf Laban Archive, © University of Surrey, L/E/57/4, p. 41.

65 Laban, Rudolf: *Rhythm in International Trade and Economics*, undated, Rudolf Laban Archive, © University of Surrey, L/E/77/33, unpaginated [handwritten notes, attributed to Laban by handwriting comparison and the archive catalogue].

66 On the notion of “bind” see Cvejić, Bojana: *Choreographing Problems: Expressive Concepts in European Contemporary Dance and Performance*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2015.

the motion/stillness dichotomy. In Laban's case, this upsetting did not operate through containment (like Domenico's *fantasmata* [Chapter 3]) or virtual potential (like Forsythe's willows [Chapter 6]), positing human motion as a reflection of cosmic harmonies, or developing unpredictable ecologies. Instead, it was the determinism of trace, the teleology of proclivity, and a universalism of motion that reconfigured a wider problematic for early-20<sup>th</sup>-century modernity.

## Managing movement

Several ideas present in the industrial Laban sources indicate a deontological, non-exploitative approach in his management of work. The regulation of industrial processes was portrayed as beneficial to the human community:

To become aware of the dance of material is also to become more clearly aware of the dance of man in his work and his whole life, and the speeding up and regulation of production should achieve the adaptation of the dance of material to the dance of life – benefitting [sic] the worker as well as the consumer and avoiding many of the disturbances of an industrial civilization.<sup>67</sup>

Moreover, Laban and Lawrence were critical of the profit-seeking labour management of the Fordist tradition;<sup>68</sup> they were opposed to the injunction to work at the highest speed possible. For example, they diagnosed Mars Bars as 'suffer[ing] from an over-estimation of time-efficiency and an under-estimation of effort-efficiency'.<sup>69</sup> The multi-faceted conception of work effort implies that different types of jobs require different approaches to, and combinations of, Weight, Space, Time, and Flow. This analysis of effort allowed Laban and Lawrence to remain within the Taylorist logic of efficiency and productivity –

67 Laban, Rudolf: The Revival of Rhythm, undated, Rudolf Laban Archive, © University of Surrey, L/E/57/4, p. 40.

68 For example, Laban writes: 'all the other factors of usefulness, profit, expansion etc are subordinated to the best form of rhythmical functioning'. Laban, Rudolf: Introduction, undated, Rudolf Laban Archive, © University of Surrey, L/E/77/4, unpaginated [handwritten notes, attributed to Laban by handwriting comparison and the archive catalogue].

69 Anonymous: Concerns our Offer to Mars-Bar Limited, 1942, Special Collections, Leeds University Library, BC MS 20c Theatre/Hodgson/1/1/151, <https://explore.library.leeds.ac.uk/special-collections-explore/419984>, p. 1. Laban also writes: '[t]he perfect performance, and therefore the quality and quantity of output, does not depend on mechanical speed only, but rather on the rhythm in which effort and relaxation as well as speed and thoroughness are compounded': Laban, Rudolf: Report on the Introduction of Laban Lawrence Industrial Rhythm to Dartington Hall Trustees, Dartington Hall Ltd., Totnes South Devon [extract], undated, Special Collections, Leeds University Library BC MS 20c Theatre/Hodgson/1/1/132, <https://explore.library.leeds.ac.uk/special-collections-explore/419965>, p. 12.

wherein inappropriate effort was considered wasteful, and skill was considered “economical” effort<sup>70</sup> – while simultaneously rebutting speed-based industrial motion management as simplistic. Based on effort theory’s highly-subjective, qualitative approach to movement as an indicator of the person’s profile and skills, Laban and Lawrence also assumed an individualised approach in selection and training. Job effort graphs were matched with workers’ effort graphs, including “mental” effort graphs that depicted psychological aptitudes; training was used to augment latent but necessary capacities.<sup>71</sup> If movement qualities are related to inner impulses, then being the right person – or being trained to express one’s potential – in the right job is the only way to do the job well. The correspondence between personality traits and movement qualities guaranteed job enjoyment; for Laban and Lawrence, ‘keep[ing] the inapt person on the wrong job is less an educative measure than the expression of ignorance and sometimes perhaps of sadism’.<sup>72</sup> As Romana Schmalisch, a contemporary artist who has conducted artistic research on the industrial Laban, succinctly puts it: ‘[t]hrough efficient and collective efforts, labour for Laban assumes an aesthetic value, bringing pleasure to the workers’.<sup>73</sup> A hint of Taylor’s equating of prosperity with optimal efficiency is discernible in Laban and Lawrence’s approach to labour: ‘REMEMBER – the particular aim of the Laban-Lawrence Training is to make efficiency a pleasure’.<sup>74</sup>

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70 Laban & Lawrence: *Effort*, pp. 8, 14.

71 Laban, Rudolf: *The Job Effort Graph and its Application*, undated, Rudolf Laban Archive, © University of Surrey, L/E/62/27 [Laban’s name is written in pencil on the first page of the typescript]. The essential veracity of movement analysis was argued to be a way of confronting selector bias in recruitment. For instance, Laban-Lawrence “control sheets” were given to training supervisors in order to ‘arrive at conclusions without the danger of psycho-moralistic of other prejudices’. Laban Lawrence Industrial Rhythm: Laban Lawrence Effort-Value Control Sheets, 1942, Special Collections, Leeds University Library, BC MS 20c Theatre/Hodgson/1/1/132, <https://explore.library.leeds.ac.uk/special-collections-explore/419965>, p. 2.

72 Laban Lawrence Industrial Rhythm: Laban Lawrence Effort-Value Control Sheets, 1942, Special Collections, Leeds University Library, BC MS 20c Theatre/Hodgson/1/1/132, <https://explore.library.leeds.ac.uk/special-collections-explore/419965>, p. 2.

73 Schmalisch, Romana: *The Choreography of Labour*, in: *Notes sur les mouvements* 1, Aubervilliers: Les Laboratoires d’Aubervilliers 2013, p. 4.

74 Taylor, Frederick Winslow: *The Principles of Scientific Management*, New York/London: Harper & Brothers 1919, p. 11; Laban-Lawrence Industrial Rhythm: Laban Lawrence Training Manual, undated, Special Collections, Leeds University Library, BC MS 20c Theatre/Hodgson/1/1/132, <https://explore.library.leeds.ac.uk/special-collections-explore/419965>, p. 5. Certain workers were reported to have expressed their own interest in training: Laban Lawrence Industrial Rhythm: Laban-Lawrence Observations and Training, 1942, Special Collections, Leeds University Library, BC MS 20c Theatre/Hodgson/1/1/132, <https://explore.library.leeds.ac.uk/special-collections-explore/419965>, p. 4.

But, important ethical questions emerge in Laban and Lawrence's approach to industrial choreography, most notably concerning the need to train workers in order to achieve efficiency and pleasure. This is echoed in both Laban's earlier activities – which aimed to 'enlighten the guilds, from the masters down to the apprentices about their own traditions [...] to awaken in working people a feeling for their work rhythm'<sup>75</sup> – and in Taylor's belief that the "scientific manager" knows how to do a task better than the worker performing it.<sup>76</sup> While Laban and Lawrence urged trainers to adopt the working person's viewpoint of tasks,<sup>77</sup> the very concept of training meant that workers had to *learn* how to optimally perform movements, balance effort factors, and avoid spending energy purposelessly so they could enjoy their work. Laban and Lawrence admitted there was some individual trial-and-error learning, but they argued these natural capacities should be combined with guidance by an observer-trainer.<sup>78</sup> Similarly – while it was assumed that workers could understand effort notions by an 'awakening of the understanding'<sup>79</sup> – the movement analysis terms were defined by the consulting team, and the exercises integrated pre-defined knowledge, not open movement possibilities. The Laban-Lawrence training method did transfer responsibility to trainers, after a consultation period; again, however, these trainers were given detailed instructions to perform their role in a way that was scripted by the consulting team.<sup>80</sup> The partial removal of the worker's agency within the work ethic of pleasure may not have been Laban's intention; but, his ideal of an optimal, enjoyable mode of labour was shadowed by an external observer who imposed their vision of the enjoyable and the efficient – potentially dispossessing the worker of a personal grasp of their labour.

The worker, between guided and pleasurable motions, tunes into more than just the job's optimal effort arrangement. While the individual worker was an important part of expanded industrial choreographies, their personal action options were limited to those that did not interfere with overall functioning of a supra-individual choreography: '[d]eviations of single persons from the flow

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75 Laban: *A Life for Dance*, p. 143.

76 Taylor writes: 'in almost all of the mechanic arts the science which underlies each workman's act is so great and amounts to so much that the workman who is best suited actually to do the work is incapable (either through lack of education or through insufficient mental capacity) of understanding this science'. Taylor: *The Principles of Scientific Management*, p. 41.

77 Laban & Lawrence: *Effort*, p. 53.

78 *Ibid.*, pp. 14, 25.

79 *Ibid.*, p. 14.

80 See, for example, Laban-Lawrence Industrial Rhythm: Laban Lawrence Training Manual, undated, Special Collections, Leeds University Library, BC MS 20c Theatre/Hodgson/1/1/132, <https://explore.library.leeds.ac.uk/special-collections-explore/419965>.

of work cause disturbances in the flow of material. [...] individual movements may develop freely within certain well definable margins'.<sup>81</sup> The factory is thus presented as an organism in which individual actants should function in a cell-like contribution to the whole:

To make all the individual cells of an industrial organism aware of the way which leads from the single intention to the precision of the whole. To convey to everybody working within an industrial organism the experience of wellbeing which accompanies personal and common rhythmical function.<sup>82</sup>

This tuning-in concerns collectives of human workers, and requires that each worker combine their movement to the hybrid, collective, expanded choreography of the entire factory; worker movements are interrelated with those of machines and tools.

Rhythm is one of the ways to achieve this synergy; rhythmic sense is relevant 'far beyond the assessment of the operation of a single workman to the flow of work within a whole department or factory or chain of factories'.<sup>83</sup> Laban argued that '[a]s any production consists of a chain or series of individual actions, the greater rhythm within a department or even a whole factory can be assessed', both as the sum of individual acts and 'as the rhythm of the material flow of a product or of other details of the work'.<sup>84</sup> Correspondingly, 'an entirely new rhythm appears, which demands new efforts and a more complex planning. The various gang rhythms must be co-ordinated together with that of the machines between them'.<sup>85</sup>

Rhythm – as a means of ordering the expanded choreography of the factory – is accompanied by the notion of harmony, often also mentioned in Laban's

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81 Paton Lawrence & Company: First Investigation into the Flow of Dock Work, 1946, Rudolf Laban Archive, © University of Surrey, L/E/73/14, p. i.

82 Laban, Rudolf: The Idea of Industrial Rhythm, undated, Rudolf Laban Archive, © University of Surrey, L/E/77/5, unpaginated [handwritten notes, attributed to Laban by handwriting comparison and the archive catalogue].

83 Laban, Rudolf: The Revival of Rhythm, undated, Rudolf Laban Archive, © University of Surrey, L/E/57/4, pp. 41–42.

84 Laban, Rudolf: The Observation of Rhythm in Work, undated, Rudolf Laban Archive, © University of Surrey, L/E/40/z1, p. 12 [attributed to Laban by handwriting comparison and the archive catalogue].

85 Laban, Rudolf [& Lawrence, Frederick Charles?]: The Planning of Collective Effort, undated (part of typescript report entitled 'Synopsis of a lecture by Rudolf Laban and F.C. Lawrence, at the Manchester Association of Engineers': 'Motion and Movement in Modern Engineering Practice', 3 June 1946), Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, Faculty of Dance, Laban Archive, LC/B/16/320.58, p. 17 [document not signed but attached to a 1946 lecture by Laban and Lawrence. Page numbers are not regular].

dance-related writings. The efforts, rhythms, and movements of humans, machines, and administration must be regulated by harmonious relationships; this was once again Laban's pre-requisite for optimal, productive, and enjoyable work:

[T]o be satisfying and to give satisfaction, every movement, whether of people, machinery or moving objects must be rhythmical [...] in relation to preceding and succeeding movements and when other people, machinery or objects are involved, in relation to their movements. Everything must be so timed, spaced and emphasised as to create one harmonious whole.<sup>86</sup>

An ideal Labanian factory did not allow a disorderly, disorganised choreography; it was based on a harmonious one. Moreover, despite the fact that individual actants were attributed agency and initiative, it was a tightly-controlled harmony that emerged from their actions. A common rhythm was to be set by a decision-maker other than the working agents – indeed, the notion of harmony implies the existence of an observer and an external gaze, whose position allows perception and projection of harmony. Laban maintained that individual human beings were capable of awareness of, and agency within, their working group:

The cells of the body of a murderer will remain unconscious of the crimes of their master. And I do not think that the cells of a holy man are all aware of the enhanced moral tendencies of the individual of whom they are parts [...] But human individuals have, as we hope [...] more responsibility towards the behaviour of the collective organism to which they belong.<sup>87</sup>

But, he also stressed a hierarchical figure's role in facilitating such awareness: '[t]he leaders of collective organisms are bound to train individuals for communal purposes. The individual has the tendency to revolt against such training if he does not understand or appreciate the collective purpose'.<sup>88</sup> As important as individual efforts and rhythms may be, the factory's expanded choreography also included figures of choreographic industrial authority. In most cases, these figures were the founders/owners, managers, and other executives of industrial plants, portrayed as the sources of the factory's choreography: '[t]he mental rhythms and efforts displayed by [the executive] are the *initiators* of the flow of

86 Anonymous: Excerpts from the Report of a Meeting between Mr. Laban and the Heads of a Large Company, in: *The Laban Art of Movement Guild News Sheet 1* (1948), p. 12.

87 Laban, Rudolf: *The Industrial Organism*, undated, Rudolf Laban Archive, © University of Surrey, L/E/65/14, pp. 5, 7 [attributed to Laban by the archive catalogue; the document is a typescript followed by handwritten pages; handwriting comparison also points to Laban as its author].

88 Laban, Rudolf: *The Industrial Organism*, undated, Rudolf Laban Archive, © University of Surrey, L/E/65/14, p. 4.



material'.<sup>89</sup> The manager had to 'listen and to respond actively to the language of evolution and growth manifesting itself in the tender buds of his plant and serve it cunningly rather than using brutal and mechanical will power'.<sup>90</sup> At the same time, the manager regulated and controlled other workers' work; being 'aware of the rhythm and acquiring the faculty to observe, to *regulate* it with increasing efficiency is [many managers'] main task'.<sup>91</sup> Laban noted that 'any labour management is in itself a rhythmical organisation of the manifold working processes'.<sup>92</sup> In other words, the manager had to be benevolent – indeed, the orchestral understanding of collective rhythm suggests that Laban and Lawrence did not propose a complete, disciplinary homogenisation of individual rhythms – but their position also centralised the industrial regulation, rendering the factory a supra-subjective entity. The hierarchy of this “regulatory” process is visualised in a graph for tea manufacturers J. Lyons & Company Ltd. [Figure 30]; the administration was on top and in charge of planning and selection, while the workers received foremen and trainers' input.

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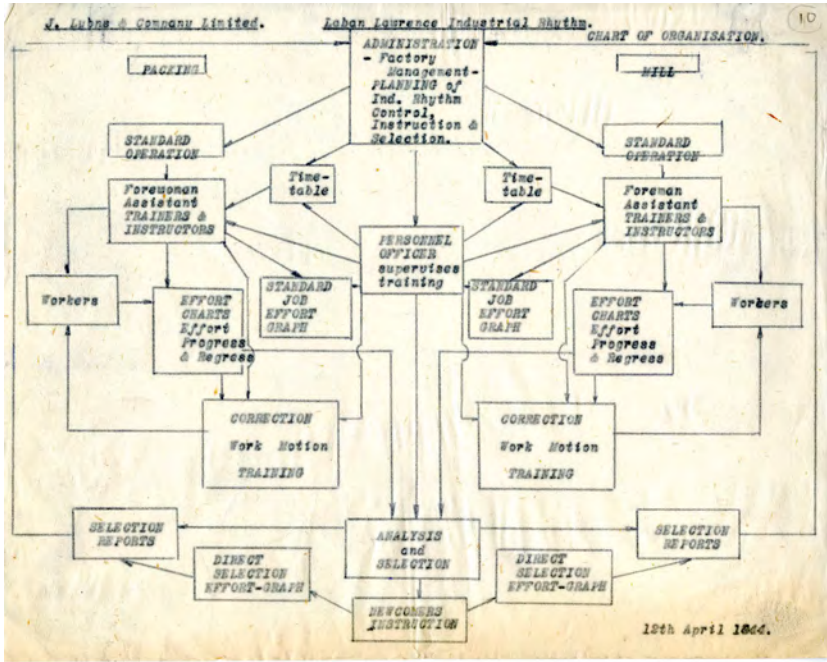
89 Laban, Rudolf: Untitled notes, undated, Rudolf Laban Archive, © University of Surrey, L/E/73/12, p. 1, emphasis added [handwritten notes, attributed to Laban by handwriting comparison and the archive catalogue].

90 Laban, Rudolf: The Industrial Organism, undated, Rudolf Laban Archive, © University of Surrey, L/E/65/14, p. 2.

91 Laban, Rudolf: Untitled notes, undated, Rudolf Laban Archive, © University of Surrey, L/E/77/34, p b2, emphasis added.

92 Laban, Rudolf: Introduction, undated, Rudolf Laban Archive, © University of Surrey, L/E/77/4, unpaginated.

Figure 30: Industrial Rhythm chart by Rudolf Laban, 1944 (L/E/72/6). From the Rudolf Laban Archive, University of Surrey, © University of Surrey. No re-use without permission.



The expanded choreography of the factory was therefore based on a hierarchy in which the manager-choreographer was not an instigator of purposefully-unknown potential, but, rather, a director of action. Nevertheless, cracks appear in this choreographic ideology. For Laban, 'the main preoccupation of many managers is to deal with [materials' and fabrications'] rhythm, *even if they do not recognise it always as the fundamental factor of production. [...] to regulate [the rhythm] with increasing efficiency is their main task*'.<sup>93</sup> This quotation confirms the manager's hierarchical superiority in the industrial choreography, while also expressing their limited knowledge about their task. Indeed, the external observer/consultant/choreographer could direct the manager, by identifying and/or projecting a harmonious, optimal choreographic functioning. The founder/manager was presented as the 'germ-cell' of the industrial organism,

93 Laban, Rudolf: Untitled notes, undated, Rudolf Laban Archive, © University of Surrey, L/E/77/34, p. b2, emphasis added.

a 'storehouse of possibilities' – but not its 'creator'.<sup>94</sup> In effect, the germ-cell manager was also part of the industrial organism, subject to an (external) gaze; thus, the dispossession of one's work inherent in consulting concerned more than just the manual workers. Laban and Lawrence identified managers in need of guidance themselves, who were otherwise hindering the industrial organisms for which they were responsible. For instance, in *Effort*, the authors recount a case of a problematic working atmosphere in which '[t]he only obstacle to a complete cure was the manager, who was himself [...] not able to think in terms of effort and was strongly opposed to a systematic effort training. His conversion would have required the training of himself.'<sup>95</sup> Perhaps unwittingly, Laban and Lawrence's approach meant human hierarchical superiors were also subjected to choreographic order.

This choreographic order may even exceed the grasp of the consulting choreographer:

Like any other growth which we encounter on our earth [industrial organisms] should be looked upon as the inescapable result of the evolution of material energies and not as wanton creations of individuals or even of communities. There is no mind or consciousness that could plan or invent those intricate patterns of thousands and thousands of co-ordinated factors and facts which constitute the life stream of industrial organisation. The amount of the hitherto hardly recognised and therefore unexpected complications which arise day by day in any industrial organism and in the co-operation of the total sum of them surpasses any human phantasy.<sup>96</sup>

In other words, the expansion of choreography beyond individual human bodies and towards the supra-individual scale of the factory introduced a margin in which choreographic control was lost, wherein the performers of the expanded industrial choreography acquired a (de-individuated) agency. Laban alluded to this possibility when he wrote that the resulting "growth" of industrial organisms would be different from the pre-conceived vision of them;<sup>97</sup> the organically-construed choreography of the factory could have escaped the manager or even the consultant.

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94 Laban, Rudolf: *The Industrial Organism*, undated, Rudolf Laban Archive, © University of Surrey, L/E/65/14, p. 2.

95 Laban & Lawrence: *Effort*, p. 85.

96 Laban, Rudolf: *The Industrial Organism*, undated, Rudolf Laban Archive, © University of Surrey, L/E/65/14, p. 1.

97 Laban, Rudolf: *The Industrial Organism*, undated, Rudolf Laban Archive, © University of Surrey, L/E/65/14, p. 1.

In Laban's expanded industrial choreography, the dancing labourer – or labouring dancer – is meant to achieve motional harmony, economy, and pleasure. And since this choreography also includes dancing tools and machines – or mechanical and inorganic dancers – they, too, are part of the motional harmony and rhythm; they are meant to perform a well-oiled, smooth choreography along with their human counterparts. To achieve this harmonious, pleasurable performance of work, the labourers' individual agency is active; but, their dispersed choreographic initiatives are counterbalanced through top-down – albeit benevolent – guidance and direction from a manager or consultant. The ethics and politics of Laban's industrial choreographies cannot be summarised as a threat of mechanisation upon humanity, or motionlessness upon a fundamental tendency towards (loco)motion. Instead, they concern how hybrid, rhythmically moving-and-pausing entities function between individual initiative and centralised management. Just as Laban's industrial work both underscores and subverts dichotomies between the human and the non-human, the ethics of his expanded choreography, partly dispossessing individual workers of their work in favour of a harmonious choreographic totality, is itself partially subverted by the ghost of a swarming industrial organism, whose cells cannot be fully controlled.

The industrial Laban saw – like Guglielmo and his Renaissance colleagues [Chapter 3] – human (labour) motion as belonging to a wide-reaching realm. He envisioned – like Forsythe's ecology in Groningen [Chapter 6] – the factory as a supra-individual, more-than-human choreography. But contrary to Domenico and Guglielmo's integration of the concept of nature and Forsythe's distributed collection of (non-)human agents, the source, author, and control of Laban's expanded choreography is a centralised – albeit fallible and potentially failing – hierarchical (hu)man figure. In this sense, Laban's expanded choreography of the factory completes the Renaissance's oscillation towards a human choreographic author(ity) while manifesting modernity's failure to fully attach itself to that model, losing ground to unpredictable systemic potentials that contemporaneity has accepted and, at times, celebrated.

## Conclusion

An expanded choreographic perspective on the industrial Laban focusses on the motional activity and possible agency of non-human entities, while also concentrating on the human mover, their intentions, interiority, and expression. By deviating from the human focus of his notation with signs for tools and equipment, viewing effort as relevant to analysis of machine motions, and observing the interactions between human and non-human labourers in order

to adapt them to one another, Rudolf Laban appears less dichotomous than some of his own writings suggest. This expanded choreographic perspective may move focus away from human specificity, but it does not efface the centrality that the human body had for Laban. Similarly, the expansion of his choreography (and choreo-graphy) to the non-human coexists with a choreography of human subjects.

An expanded choreographic perspective on the industrial Laban also identifies – in the midst of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century's entanglement of choreography, subject, body, and movement – motions that were not limited to the displacement of human bodies in space and time. Industrial choreographies collectively encompassed (non-)human agents implicated in rhythmical production processes, micro-motions of body parts, traces of motional patterns in exhausted workers, vestiges of movements implicated in production, and material proclivities in objects. Once again, this expanded perspective does not negate Laban's interest in human (loco)motion, but allows it to co-develop with a kinetic perspective on entities such as factories and products. Correspondingly, the expansion of choreography beyond human (loco)motion and towards a choreographic vision of a world in flux complements and juxtaposes itself with a choreography of moving (human) bodies.

As Laban's industrial choreographies were both human-centred *and* not human-centred, their ethics concerned both human labourers and the tools, machines, and other equipment that assisted and permitted their work. And, as Laban's industrial choreographies were both locomotion-oriented *and* not locomotion-oriented, their ethics were found in the effective motions of their performers and in the management of their collective, at times pausing, rhythms. Regulated by harmonious relationships, this choreography of work suggests that expanded choreographies implicate relations of power, authority, hierarchies, and negotiations about agency and individual freedoms, just like dance-based ones. In the case of Laban's factories, these negotiations may have favoured a harmonious whole and a knowledgeable external guide or leader, but also introduced cracks through which collective, supra-individual choreographies escaped full external control. If expanded choreography acts as a reminder of the multiplicity of Laban's industrial choreographies, it also acts as a reminder that an ethical assessment of his choreography of work at the scale of the moving human person is incomplete; there are ethical issues that can only be addressed if the ethics of an expanded choreography are recognised.

Like *Relâche* [Chapter 7], Laban's work in industry paints a portrait of modernity that oscillates away from its own choreographic models. Thus, it affirms the centrality of humanity and motion while undoing their dichotomous conception against the non-human and the still; practices a politics of control enmeshed with an aesthetics of harmony, while recognising the limits of control; cen-

tralis choreographic authorship to a human agent, while postulating that this agent may be surpassed by large-scale, agglomerate structures. An expanded choreographic perspective considers Laban's industrial work in its very contradictions and diverse directions, pointing to the need for historiography to accept deviations, paradoxes, differences. In the horizontal axis of synchronicity,<sup>98</sup> this reading of the industrial Laban requires acknowledging choreographic diversity, while the vertical axis of transhistoricity demands taking into account his relevance both for an expanded choreography of contemporaneity and for those pre-20<sup>th</sup>-century pasts to which this contemporaneity branches out. Laban's particular – harmonious, teleological, universalist, hierarchical – performance of choreographic expansion may distance him from Guglielmo and Domenico's Renaissance [Chapter 3] or Forsythe's present [Chapter 6]. But, it is also a sign of the diverse configurations in which early modernity, 20<sup>th</sup>-century (hyper-)modernity, and contemporaneity each probed the limits of a choreographic attachment to a motion-driven human subject; and allowed – as animist figures, in Elizabeth Povinelli's sense of the term<sup>99</sup> – choreography to spill out of that subject and into the posited aliveness of a more-than-human world.

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98 Cf. Foster, Hal: *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*. Cambridge/London: MIT Press 1996, pp. xi-xii.

99 Povinelli, Elizabeth A.: *Geontologies: A Requiem to Late Liberalism*, Durham & London: Duke University Press 2016, p. 17f.

## Chapter 9: Creation, imagination, paradise: lettrism's excursions into choreography

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August 1945. Jean-Isidore Goldstein, young and resourceful, leaves his native Romania and arrives in post-war Paris under the name Isidore Isou. Goldstein/Isou enters into contact with Jean Cocteau, Tristan Tzara, André Breton, and Gaston Gallimard (of the publishing house) – among others – and prepares to trouble the Parisian art scene. He starts attracting other young artists, and together they form a movement that came to be called *lettrisme*. Lettrism marked its presence with scandal-provoking actions – such as interrupting a theatrical piece by Tzara and publishing texts that bore the assertive mark of the manifesto – starting with a journal aptly-titled *La Dictature lettriste* [The lettrist dictatorship].<sup>1</sup> Isou's movement was inscribed in the context of the aesthetic, civil, and cultural transformations of post-war Europe; it reflected the deadlocks of a binary abstract-figurative paradigm in the visual arts,<sup>2</sup> the social pressures that progressively took form in the May 1968 protests, and the media consciousness that surrounded the beginnings of computing and the virtual. Notably, lettrism reflected such tendencies through an association with *pre-war* European modernity. Isou considered lettrism to be a – or, rather, the last – movement of the *avant-garde*; contemporary historians agree, by considering the movement a post-war *avant-garde*.<sup>3</sup>

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1 For a brief overview of these beginnings, see Girard, Bernard: *Lettrisme: L'Ultime avant-garde*, Dijon: Les Presses du réel 2010, pp. 7–20.

2 Cf. Fabrice Flahutez's argument is quoted in the conclusion of this chapter.

3 Flahutez, Fabrice: *Le Lettrisme historique était une avant-garde*, Dijon: Les Presses du réel 2011, pp. 47–48; Simone, Cristina De: *Le Lettrisme dans l'après-guerre: Oralité poétique et soulèvement de la jeunesse*, in: Collective: *Fragments pour Isidore Isou, Perspectives inactuelles* 2, Paris: Art Book Magazine/ENSA Limoges 2017, p. 24; Blanchon, Philippe: *Apprendre d'Isidore Isou, seul, à travers l'hypergraphie*, in: Collective: *Fragments pour Isidore Isou*, pp. 43, 56. Fabrice Flahutez titles his book on the movement *Le Lettrisme historique était une avant-garde* [Historical lettrism was an avant-garde], while Bernard Girard titles his above-quoted study *Lettrisme – L'Ultime avant-garde* [Lettrism – The last avant-garde].

Lettrism primarily started its course in poetry; proclaiming the destruction of the word, Isou suggested that poetry was based on the letter, a unit which the lettrists used both phonetically, in letter-based poems to be recited – their sounds included, but were not limited to, existing phonemes – and later, visually – in images containing letter-signs. Therefore, while it does not fully overlap with any of these practices, lettrism is associated with concrete poetry, visual poetry, and Dada typographic works. Lettrism also invented concepts that went beyond the primacy of the letter, and soon widened its scope to encompass multiple art forms – including, but not limited to, painting, music, film, architecture, theatre, and choreography. It continued to develop as a diverse movement, whose members did not always agree. Thus, the movement should not be confused with the position of its founder – even if the unavoidable figure, discourse, and concepts of Isou cast a shadow over the writings of most lettrists.

Isou did not always hold dance in great esteem – he wrote of it as a “derisory” art.<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, he dedicated considerable attention to it, by writing about it and making (and sometimes performing in) his own dance works. His productions, and those created by other lettrist artists, were performed both in theatrical spaces and galleries.<sup>5</sup> Lettrist choreography included absurd actions, provocation, audience participation, increased floor contact, reciting text, prolonged immobility, and absence of performers from the stage. Through several of these traits, lettrist dance can be associated with certain manifestations of post-modern dance – forming a figure of a European post-modern dance – and is strikingly relevant to contemporary dance practices in Europe and elsewhere. Nevertheless, its work remains largely unknown in Dance Studies<sup>6</sup> and, consequently, is not seen as an important part of European contemporary dance’s genealogy.

Lettrist choreographic creations were accompanied by notions theoretically and historically framing dance, elaborated by the lettrists themselves. Lettrism constructed its own theory about the historical evolution of the arts – including dance – by envisioning consecutive art phases that encompassed or even led to

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4 Isou, Isidore: *La Danse et la pantomime de l'antiquité aux lettristes*, in: Lemaître, Maurice: *La Danse et le mime ciselants, lettristes et hypergraphiques*, Paris: Grassin 1960, p. 39.

5 Isou, Isidore: *Ballets Ciselants, Polythanasiques, Hypergraphiques et Infinitesimaux*, Paris: Roberto Altmann 1965, unpaginated introduction.

6 An exception to this in contemporary dance studies is Frédéric Pouillaude’s essay that presents lettrist dance in relation to French contemporary dance, as background to the analysis of Olivia Grandville’s 2011 work that restaged certain lettrist dance pieces, *Le Cabaret discrèpant*. Pouillaude, Frédéric: *To the Letter: Lettrism, Dance, Reenactment*, in: Franko, Mark (ed.): *The Oxford Handbook of Dance and Reenactment*, New York: Oxford University Press 2017, pp. 165–176.



lettrist work. Indeed, the movement was carefully defined through abundant, (ir)regular internal publications, in which members of the group took the role of historians and theorists writing *about* the group; in this way, lettrism acquired a past and a present, a goal and function, a heritage to the future and a nomenclature. (Isou – a pseudonym – was, to a great extent, a staged figure; Goldstein not only wrote *as* Isou, but also *referred to* Isou within Isou's texts in the third person singular.<sup>7</sup>) This writing of lettrist history has been read as one of the lettrists' artistic endeavours,<sup>8</sup> like Isou's created personage, the movement's historical definition of itself may be seen as an artistic project. In lettrism, theory and history do not just explain, analyse, interpret, contextualise, or critically assess artworks – artworks are also the *result* of theory and a theoretically-construed history.<sup>9</sup> Understanding lettrist dance, then, relies on understanding lettrist choreographic works as well as lettrist dance theory and history; this chapter therefore focusses on several works and texts as a *system*. The primary sources available on lettrist dance and choreography – those drawn on here – include scores, images, and descriptions of works, as well as dance history/theory texts in books, journals, and informal publications written by lettrists. In these sources, lettrist choreography refers to both ballet history and dance modernity – modern ballet and modern dance artists of the pre-war period.

Lettrist dance, history, and theory reveal a complexity in the movement's view of choreography; diverse conceptions of choreography emerge in the lettrists' texts about dance and in their stage works. Isou and his colleagues adopted the 20<sup>th</sup>-century association between dance and choreography by insisting on making dances, despite their works being unconventional. They also exemplified the 20<sup>th</sup> century's association of choreography with a moving human corporeality, proclaiming dance to be '*l'art des mouvements purs ou géométriques du corps* [the art of pure or geometrical movements of the body]'.<sup>10</sup> But, lettrism challenged its own views by proposing works in which the body, movement, or both were absent; therefore, lettrist dance also contains an expanded concep-

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7 According to the editors of the 1953 *Revue musicale* issue to which Isou contributed an article, Goldstein-Isou wrote in the first person when making personal and subjective, non-absolute claims. Isou, Isidore: Manifeste de la danse Isouienne: La Danse ciselante, in: *La Revue musicale, Numéro special "La musique et le ballet"* (1953), p. 111.

8 Flahutez: *Le Lettrisme historique était une avant-garde*, p. 15.

9 Roland Sabatier notes that artworks must be understood in relation to the theories of the framework in which they were conceived. Sabatier, Roland & Blanchon, Philippe: *Quelle exposition pour le lettrisme?*, in: Collective: *Lettrisme: Vue d'ensemble sur quelques dépassements précis*, La Seyne-sur-Mer: Villa Tamaris Centre d'Art/La Nerthe 2010, p. 32.

10 Isou: *Ballets Ciselants, Polythanasiques, Hypergraphiques et Infinitesimaux*, p. 7.

tion of choreography, by widening dance and marginalising the moving human body.

This chapter explores the dance-historical and -theoretical framework proposed by lettrism and the works that emerged from it – mainly focussing on pieces from the 1950s-60s – to argue that the different conceptions of choreography active within lettrism are a crucial part of the movement's historical inscription. Their multiplicity allows lettrism to position itself among its dance-historical "concurrents". At the same time, this variable synchronous inscription crosses a transhistorical one, in which lettrist choreographic expansions respond to earlier – like Raoul Auger Feuillet's early-17<sup>th</sup> century [Chapter 2] – and later – like Mathilde Chénin's early-21<sup>st</sup> century [Chapter 4] – choreographic histories that differentially multiply choreography's (im)material substrates. Thus, lettrist dance – and lettrist history of dance – appear as territories of at times contradictory conceptions of choreography, contributing to lettrism's positioning within dance history – and thereby commenting upon how that history is told.

### Neither Diaghilev nor Graham, but Isou

Lettrism associates dance and choreography with the corporeality of the dancing medium – the human body. For Isou, the '[l]'art chorégraphique ne peut pas se déprendre, comme les domaines abstraits, spirituels, de la matière unique dont il se forge [choreographic art cannot, like abstract, spiritual domains, separate itself from the unique material out of which it is made up]'.<sup>11</sup> Based on this interest in the body, lettrist dance countered choreography's exclusion of certain body parts in favour of others (e.g. the legs) and of general movement.<sup>12</sup> Isou argued against neglecting the neck, torso, and head – and their subparts: forehead, mouth, eyebrows<sup>13</sup> – and suggested a dance of turning thumbs, smiling, spitting, and body-fragments.<sup>14</sup>

*Je veux retrouver un sourire sans aucun sens au delà du plissement des lèvres. [...] Je veux que la danse redécouvre en deçà de ses grossièretés actuelles des nuances et des riens [I want to find again a smile without any meaning beyond the folding of the lips [...] I want dance to rediscover, short of its present coarseness, nuances and nothings]*<sup>15</sup>

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11 Isou, Isidore: *Fondements pour la transformation intégrale du théâtre*, Vol. II, Paris: Centre international de création kladologique 1970, p. 218.

12 Isou: *La Danse et la pantomime de l'antiquité aux lettristes*, pp. 29–32.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 30.

14 Isou: *Manifeste de la danse Isouienne*, p. 113.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 115.

he wrote, suggesting that his goal was to strip choreography down to a non-instrumental interest in the human body itself. Isou's work *14 petits ballets ou Somme chorégraphique, ciselante, destructive, hypergraphique et infinitésimale* (1960) illustrates how these interests were translated into practice. His ballet included a score – prescribing performer actions – and a script – recited alongside the live action. The corporeal score included movements of body parts that Isou felt were neglected in conventional choreographic practice: opening the mouth, dilating the lips, smiling, chattering one's teeth, winking, flapping an eyelid, lifting a pinkie finger... Isou's text draws attention to these actions and their significance, in order to critique choreography's habitual use of the body in motion:

*Regardez mes lèvres tandis qu'elles vous invitent à une nouvelle danse. Indifférents au reste du corps, soyez attentifs aux nuances gesticulaires produites par cette parcelle unique du danseur [...] cette bouche, pour la première fois inscrite comme figure essentielle dans la danse, jusqu'ici réduite aux positions grossières des jambes et des bras, cette bouche nous découvre qu'elle est riche en éléments utilisables, comme les deux lèvres, la langue et les dents, et que les combinaisons purement esthétiques, non-significatives, pures, de ses éléments sont aussi infinies que les positions des jambes [...] Il y a tant de virtualités inexploitées dans chaque main que je m'étonne de la rapidité grossière avec laquelle les chorégraphes jusqu'à présent ont sauté directement à l'ensemble du corps et ont négligé l'essentiel [Look at my lips while they invite you to a new dance. Indifferent to the rest of the body, be attentive to the gesticular nuances produced by this unique fragment of the dancer [...] this mouth, for the first time inscribed as an essential figure in dance, until now reduced to crude/vulgar positions of the legs and arms, this mouth reveals to us that it is rich in usable elements, such as the two lips, the tongue and the teeth, and that the purely aesthetic, non-meaningful, pure combinations of its elements are as infinite as the positions of the legs [...] There are so many unexplored virtualities in each hand that I am surprised by the crude/vulgar rapidity with which choreographers have until now jumped directly to the totality of the body and neglected what is essential].<sup>16</sup>*

This turn towards the body-medium was accompanied by an organisation of choreographic practice and knowledge through a system of body analysis and research into the '*particule anatomique de base* [basic anatomical particle]'.<sup>17</sup> This

16 Isou: *Ballets Ciselants, Polythanasiques, Hypergraphiques et Infinitésimaux*, pp. 13–16.

17 Lemaître, Maurice: *La Danse, le mime et l'art corporel d'avant-garde*, Paris: Centre de créativité 1982, p. 15. It is also in this systematic analysis of the body that the lettrist dance joins the movement's interest in the letter: '*[o]n ne peut pas dire que la danse possède des phonèmes ou des vocables purs [...] Il faut donc se débarrasser des phrases afin d'atteindre les termes élémentaires; plus loin, il faut saisir les phonèmes, les particules les plus minimes de l'art corporel* [we cannot say that dance possesses pure phonemes or terms [...] We must then get rid of phrases in

system was meant to allow an understanding of all, and any, existing, or yet-to-be-discovered, choreographies, regardless of historical context;<sup>18</sup> it went beyond the specificities of Western dance history to embrace ‘*les enseignements des écoles du monde entier* [the teachings of schools of the whole world]’.<sup>19</sup> To do so, lettrism divided the body into non-pliable or “inert” sections (such as the heel or toe) and pliable or “motor” sections (such as muscles or genitalia)<sup>20</sup> – a process that, Frédéric Pouillaude suggests, paralleled Rudolf Laban’s movement analysis.<sup>21</sup> In this way, corporeal mobility became a criterion for the organisation of choreographic practice.

While some of their dance works focussed on the movement of “marginal” body parts, the lettrists were also interested in internal – and therefore invisible – corporeal motions, in a radical turn of choreography towards the body medium; for Isou, the organs, mucous, and liquid body parts could dance.<sup>22</sup> Correspondingly, Maurice Lemaître’s series of *Chorées surprenantes* (published 1965) included a ballet in which muscles were tensed, as if to perform visible motion but never actually doing so; a ballet where an apparently-immobile dancer was juxtaposed with a film showing their wrinkles’ micro-motions; and a third ballet in which staged spectators touched an immobile dancer to verify their internal dance.<sup>23</sup> In his *Le Ballet du cerveau* (1968), an immobile dancer was accompanied on stage by a film that purportedly showed the images and sounds crossing their mind, and by a second performer who explained the internal movements of their “dancing brain”:

*Comment pourrait-on en effet résister à l'appel des névroglies, ces mystérieuses et enchantées névroglies, dont la croissance et la multiplication mêmes sont des gestes purs, dont le rythme et l'anti-rythme, le saut et l'anti-saut, la vitesse et l'immobilité progressive, poussée jusqu'à la mort et le retour au minéral, graveront à jamais dans vos propres névroglies le souvenir inoubliable de ce spectacle rare* [How could we,

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order to attain the *elementary* terms; further than that, we must grasp the *phonemes*, the most minimal particles of corporeal art]: Isou: *La Danse et la pantomime de l'antiquité aux lettristes*, p. 35.

18 Cf. Lemaître: *La Danse, le mime et l'art corporel d'avant-garde*, p. 15.

19 Isou, Isidore & Lemaître, Maurice: *Danse: Le Ballet ciselant*, in: *Front de la jeunesse* 11 (1956), unpaginated. This text was presumably co-written with Robert Estivals, Gabriel Pommerand, Vasco Noverraz, and Roland Vogel, as their names are crossed out in the consulted copy at the Bibliothèque Kandinsky, Paris.

20 Isou: *La Danse et la pantomime de l'antiquité aux lettristes*, p. 36.

21 Pouillaude: *To the Letter*, p. 168.

22 Isou: *Manifeste de la danse Isouienne*, p. 118; Isou, Isidore: *Œuvres de spectacle*, Paris: Galilimard 1964 [1961], p. 192.

23 Lemaître, Maurice: *Chorées surprenantes*, in: *Lettrisme* 4 (1965), pp. 10, 15, 18.

indeed, resist the call of the neuroglias, these mysterious and charming neuroglias, whose growth and multiplication are themselves pure gestures, whose rhythm and anti-rhythm, jump and anti-jump, speed and progressive immobility, pushed to death and the return to the mineral, will inscribe forever in your own neuroglias the unforgettable memory of this rare spectacle].<sup>24</sup>

This focus on the body in dance and choreography is consistent with the lettrist perspective on art history, wherein each art goes through phases termed *amplique* and *ciselant* [“amplic” and “chiseling”, respectively].<sup>25</sup> The former, considered the starting-point phase of each art form, entailed works and creative approaches that referred to elements “extrinsic” to the art itself – such as textual narration or figurative depiction, or the use of the body’s motions and gestures to tell stories. The *amplique* phase was, in time, replaced by the *ciselant*, in which the lettrists saw arts turn inwards, working on their “own” forms and elements – in the case of dance, the body itself. The use of the body as a medium to be explored “in itself” also distinguished dance from other artistic bodily practices. For example, Isou believed mime and dance were initially bound together, but dance differentiated itself in his eyes because it uses corporeal gesture without meaning.<sup>26</sup> Dance thus became the art of ‘*les expressions corporelles pures* [pure corporeal expressions]’.<sup>27</sup> This insistence on “purity” is paralleled by Isou’s negative evaluations of previous dance paradigms that were defined through a specific context; for instance, he criticised ballet’s positions as merely pointing to their social origins – such as the reverential bow or the posture of combat.<sup>28</sup> In these ways, an insistence on the body’s non-instrumentalised importance in choreographic practice contributed to dance’s medium specificity and potential “purity”. These points are further related to Isou’s compartmentalised, modernist<sup>29</sup> view of the arts leading to a strict division between artistic practices

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24 Lemaître, Maurice : Le Ballet du cerveau : Ballet infinitésimal, in : *Lettrisme 2* (1972), unpaginated.

25 Cf. Lemaître, Maurice : *Qu'est-ce que le lettrisme?*, Paris : Fischbacher 1954, pp. 151–152; Pouillaude : *To the Letter*, pp. 167– 68.

26 Cf. Isou: *La Danse et la pantomime de l'antiquité aux lettristes*, p. 10.

27 Sabatier, Roland: *La Danse*, undated, <https://www.lelettrisme.org/danse--pantomime.html> (August 2020).

28 Isou: *La Danse et la pantomime de l'antiquité aux lettristes*, p. 29.

29 Lettrist art history particularly expresses a conception of art associated with modernism, as presented by Clement Greenberg when he writes that ‘the unique and proper area of competence of each art coincided with all that was unique to the nature of its medium. The task of self-criticism became to eliminate from the specific effects of each art any and every effect that might conceivably be borrowed from or by the medium of any other art. Thereby each art would be rendered “pure,” and in its “purity” find the guarantee of its standards of quality as well as of its independence.’ Greenberg, Clement:

and their media. This was made manifest in his separation of theatre into textual, corporeal, and material/scenic branches; and his concept of “discrepance” which – in a Cunningham-Cage-like way – suggested the causal dissociation, juxtaposition – and, therefore, autonomisation – of different media within a single work.<sup>30</sup>

This theory was transferred to the lettrists’ dance-historical narrative in particular, and diverse, ways. The first of these concerns ballet, with which the lettrists had strong links. For example, members of the movement often used the term “ballet” to describe their works. Certain lettrist dance pieces directly referred to material from the ballet tradition; Isou’s history of dance was punctuated by references to widely-known figures of European ballet – including Marie Sallé, Marie-Anne Camargo, Jean-Georges Noverre, and Marius Petipa – as well as modern ballet figures – such as Sergei Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes or Maurice Béjart. Based on this affinity, Isou recognised ballet’s contributions to dance as an art form. For the lead lettrist, “pure” choreography began in Thoinot Arbeau’s *Orchésographie* and Pierre Beauchamp’s five ballet positions; similarly, the 1581 court ballet by Balthasar de Beaujoyeux *Le Ballet comique de la Reine* acquired a privileged place in lettrist dance history because it displayed abstract combinations and a ‘purificatory analysis’.<sup>31</sup> Thus, in certain respects, the lettrists were aligned with ballet-proponents André Levinson and Lincoln Kirstein, who associated medium specificity and anti-representationality with the genre of ballet. In some ways echoing Isou, Levinson complained that

[p]ersonne [...] ne se préoccupa des caractères propres de la danse, ni ne tenta d’élucider les règles spécifiques de cet art considéré non plus à travers les autres genres, mais dans sa réalité intrinsèque [nobody [...] was concerned with the traits that are proper to dance, nor attempted to elucidate the specific rules of this art, considered not through other genres anymore but in its intrinsic reality];<sup>32</sup>

while Kirstein argued that it was not until Vaslav Nijinsky’s ballet innovations that movement was conceived ‘simply as movement [...] used for the sake of

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Modernist Painting, in: Frascina, Francis, Harrison, Charles & Paul, Deidre: *Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology*, New York: Harper and Row/Westview Press 1987 [1960], pp. 5–6. Following this association, here the terms “modernism” and “modernist” are used to reflect this association with “purity”, a focus on an art’s “specific” medium, and aesthetic autonomy. For a wider definition of “modernism” in the theatrical arts see Hulfeld, Stefan: *Modernist Theatre*, in: Wiles, David & Dymkowski, Christine (eds.): *The Cambridge Companion to Theatre History*, New York: Cambridge University Press 2013.

30 A typical example of discrepance is Isou’s film *Traité de bave et d’éternité*, presented at the 1951 Cannes film festival, in which sound and image are made distinct.

31 Isou: *Fondements pour la transformation intégrale du théâtre*, Vol. II, pp. 216–217.

32 Levinson, André: *La Danse d’aujourd’hui*, Paris: Duchartre et Van Buggenhoudt 1929, p. 180.

its own interest alone'.<sup>33</sup> On the other hand, the lettrists also diagnosed ballet's failure to accomplish the precepts of the *chorégraphie ciselante*. The lettrist critique of ballet (and other dance forms) is partially based on it having submitted 'à des idées ou à des anecdotes extérieures à l'art des gestes [to ideas or anecdotes external to the art of gestures]'.<sup>34</sup> In other words, in Isou's eyes, while certain ballet works contributed to a conception of choreography based on "purity", ballet history countered this by embracing a choreography associated with narrative and non-analytical uses of the body. These features of ballet place it in the *phase amplique* of dance, the timespan marked at one end by Beauchamp and, on the other, the neoclassical ballet figure of Serge Lifar – Isou's contemporary in the Parisian scene. Indeed, Isou's treatment of modern ballet artists – notably those associated with the Ballets Russes – suggests he was doubtful about their capacity to make dance enter the *phase ciselante*; he argued their contributions to dance (history) were limited to stage design and music.<sup>35</sup>

Isou's critique of ballet aligns with modern dancers' and modern dance writers' critique of classical dance; but lettrist views are also mirrored in modern dance discourse. Reflecting the lettrists' willingness to liberate dance from the potential-storytelling aspects of the *amplique*, Mary Wigman insisted that '[t]he absolute dance is independent of any literary-interpretative content; it does not represent, it is'.<sup>36</sup> Reflecting the lettrists' focus on the body and their universalist tendencies, Martha Graham wrote: '[i]n its essentials, dance is the same over the entire world. These essentials are its function, which is communication; its instrument, which is the body; and its medium, which is movement'.<sup>37</sup> Reflecting the attraction towards an ideal of "purity" that lettrist dance-related discourse exemplified, Roger Copeland considered modern dancers, like Graham, to be 'reject[ing] modernity', as it was Merce Cunningham (and bal-

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- 33 Kirstein, Lincoln: *Dance: A Short History of Classic Theatrical Dancing*, New York: Dance Horizons 1977 [1935], p. 284.
- 34 Isou: *Ballets Ciselants, Polythanasiques, Hypergraphiques et Infinitesimaux*, p. 10.
- 35 Isou: *La Danse et la pantomime de l'antiquité aux lettristes*, pp. 16–17. The lettrist critique of ballet and its conventions was, at times, translated into works literally staging an attack on classical dance and including, in certain cases, the performance of aggression. For instance, in Isou's *Essai d'anti-ballet*, classical dancers were teased, blocked from acting, or even had aggression thrust upon them. Isou: *Ballets Ciselants, Polythanasiques, Hypergraphiques et Infinitesimaux*, pp. 37–39.
- 36 Wigman, Mary: *The Mary Wigman Book*, Middletown: Wesleyan University Press 1984 [1973, trans. Walter Sorell], p. 108.
- 37 Graham, Martha: *A Modern Dancer's Primer for Action*, in: Cohen, Selma Jeanne (ed.): *Dance as a Theatre Art: Source Readings in Dance History from 1581 to the Present*, Princeton: Dance Horizons 1992 [1941], p. 137. (However, Isou would consider the function of communication as incompatible with the *ciselant*.)

let choreographer George Balanchine) that ‘exemplified Greenbergian purism’.<sup>38</sup> Crucially, however, Isou did not consider artists associated with modern dance as having achieved the *ciselant* either. His overview of dance history mentions that Isadora Duncan attempted to liberate dance from academic constraints and had a revolutionary dimension, although it evaluates that she did not manage to go beyond dilettantism and a negatively-construed simplicity; similarly, Isou refers to certain modern dancers from Europe (e.g. Kurt Jooss) and across the Atlantic (e.g. Graham), but considers them followers, in their expressionism, of romanticism’s tendency towards anecdote.<sup>39</sup>

Susan Manning has pointed out similar concerns, regarding the realm of, and discourse about, post-modern dance<sup>40</sup> – especially the Judson Dance Theater, which was chronologically and, in certain cases, stylistically closer to lettrism. Isou’s focus on the corporeal medium and his avoidance of anecdote thus mirrors the words of Sally Banes, when she wrote that it was

in the arena of post-modern dance that issues of modernism in the other arts have arisen: the acknowledgment of the medium’s materials, the revealing of dance’s essential qualities as an art form, the separation of formal elements, the abstraction of forms, and the elimination of external references as subjects.<sup>41</sup>

Once again, however, post-modern dance is not used as a reference point for developing the *ciselant* in lettrists’ dance historical narrative – perhaps out of lack of familiarity with their work.

The lettrists’ body-focussed, modernist view of choreography can therefore be put in relation – in some cases, by the lettrists themselves – with (modern) ballet, modern dance, and post-modern dance, revealing commonalities – all, in certain manifestations, respond to a Greenbergian/modernist ideal – that proponents of these genres may not admit. In this way, lettrism replaces a genre-specific view of choreographic modernism with a more-complex one that has overlapping layers. At the same time, lettrism’s lack of acknowledgment of its commonality with these genres – themselves synchronously coexisting

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38 Copeland, Roger: *Merce Cunningham: The Modernizing of Modern Dance*, New York: Routledge 2004, pp. 102, 105.

39 Isou: *La Danse et la pantomime de l’antiquité aux lettristes*, p. 16; Isou: *Ballets Ciselants, Polythanasiques, Hypergraphiques et Infinitesimaux*, p. 9. Here, Isou mistakes Jooss’ name for “Karl Joss”.

40 Manning, Susan: *Modernist Dogma and Post-Modern Rhetoric. A Response to Sally Banes’ Terpsichore in Sneakers*, in: *TDR – The Drama Review* 32/4 (1988), pp. 32–39; see also Burt, Ramsay: *Undoing Postmodern Dance History* 2004, <http://sarma.be/docs/767> (August 2020).

41 Banes, Sally: *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post-modern Dance*, Hanover: Wesleyan University Press 1987 [1977], p. xv.



but also institutionally and aesthetically competing – situated the movement in an external position. Indeed, while Isou admitted that a non-lettrist artist, Maurice Béjart, displayed aspects of the *ciselant*, he also claimed that Béjart only falsely achieved it and drew from lettrist ideas.<sup>42</sup> Isou thus formed an alternative to dance history's conventional "chapters", replacing their dialectic with a third option: lettrism. Counter to what some modern dancers/dance writers claim, ballet for him was not just succeeded by (post-)modern dance; rather the *amplique* – encompassing ballet history, modern ballet, and modern dance – was succeeded by the (lettrist) *ciselant*. The lettrists' discursive and practical performance of chiseling choreography exemplified and perpetuated modernist aspects common with these genres, while simultaneously embodying their succession.<sup>43</sup>

Although the lettrists appeared as purveyors of a modernist body-focused choreography, they also staged multiple excursions beyond these choreographic principles. While the lettrist *ciselant* classified the body into mobile and inert sections, this organisation was counterbalanced by disorganised dance.<sup>44</sup> The *ciselant* troubled dance, exploding its perceived fixations: the lettrists elaborated various ways of upsetting previous dance paradigms – for example, by valourising the a-rhythmical or focussing on crawling (instead of elevation and jumps).<sup>45</sup> Similarly, while discrepance contributed to an autonomisation of different arts, it also disorganised resulting works, whose elements were out of synch. By the same token – despite their focus on corporeality – the lettrists produced choreographic works which questioned the treatment of the moving body as dance's primary medium. In doing so, they challenged their positionality as both successors and continuators of a heterogeneously-constructed 20<sup>th</sup>-century dance modernism – and foregrounded their relations with former, and later, expanded choreographic paradigms.

## Expanded choreographic excursion one: media crossings

Lettrist choreography's display of expanded aspects is exemplified, in the first place, by the movement's distinction between what they termed aesthetics – the

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42 Isou: *La Danse et la pantomime de l'antiquité aux lettristes*, p. 25.

43 Susan Manning, to whose writings this chapter owes a lot, developed a comparable argument when she described the similarities between modern and post-modern modernist dance writing. Manning: *Modernist Dogma and Post-Modern Rhetoric*.

44 Cf. for instance Isou: *Fondements pour la transformation intégrale du théâtre*, Vol. II, p. 243.

45 Isou: *La Danse et la pantomime de l'antiquité aux lettristes*, p. 18.

“forms” (e.g. painting, poetry, novel) and styles (e.g. classical, romantic, symbolist) of art – and mechanics – the type of medium or material (e.g. paper, film, people, objects, paint) used in art-making.<sup>46</sup> Creativity in the field of mechanics took the form of *méca-esthétique* [mecha-aesthetics] – where artistic focus was on the choice and/or use of the medium/material – and *anti-méca-esthétique* [anti-mecha-aesthetics] – in which the medium/material was purposefully subverted and altered.<sup>47</sup> This framework allowed artists to widen the mechanics of their practice:

*L'artiste peut utiliser l'intégralité des ressources existantes ou à inventer, dans le cadre de la “méca-esthétique intégrale”. Ainsi, un réalisateur de films peut concevoir une oeuvre dont le support serait le cosmos, un végétal singulier, une fourmi ou une comète* [the artist can use the entirety of existing or to-be-invented resources in the framework of “integral mecha-aesthetics”. Thus a film director can conceive of a work whose medium would be the cosmos, a unique plant, an ant or a comet]<sup>48</sup>

– like how an expanded choreographer can conceive of a choreographic work whose medium is a book, video, code, or installation. In effect, the choreographic activity of the lettrists – like that of Chénin [Chapter 4] and to a certain extent Feuillet [Chapter 2] – is associated with an expansion that distinguishes between choreographic practice and the bodily-kinetic medium.

The first way in which this distinction operated was by considering the body as simply one-among-many possible media and materials of the mecha-aesthetic framework.<sup>49</sup> This explains how the body may be used both as the habitual mechanics of dance and as subverted, unexpected mechanics of other types of artistic expressions. Indeed, the body was extensively present in lettrist art in general – from the very moment when poetry became an art of the letter. For lettrists, a letter-based poem was not to be individually read, but recited and listened to, as part of a corporeal act shared with the spectator. The poem became a score for live performance and the body became an instrument of sound; the voice was opposed, in Isou's early writings, to the *‘inhumanité mécanique* [inhuman mechanics]’ of musical instruments.<sup>50</sup> In further

46 Cf. Isou, Isidore : *Introduction à l'esthétique imaginaire et autres écrits*, Paris : Cahiers de l'externité 1999, p. 48; Devaux, Frédérique : *Untitled*, in : Satié, Alain (ed.) : *La Méca-esthétique lettriste*, Paris : Salons art, vidéo, cinéma et écritures 1996, p. 7.

47 Sabatier, Roland : *Vue d'ensemble sur quelques dépassements précis*, in : Collective : *Lettrisme. Vue d'ensemble sur quelques dépassements précis*, p. 18.

48 Devaux : *Untitled*, p. 8.

49 Cf. Isou, Isidore : *L'Art corporel lettriste, hypographique & esthapeiriste*, in : Collective : *Lettrisme. Vue d'ensemble sur quelques dépassements précis*, p. 190.

50 Isou, Isidore : *Introduction à une nouvelle poésie et à une nouvelle musique*, Paris : Gallimard 1947, p. 229. Isou was also doubtful about mechanical means of recording the live

experimentations, the lettrists produced “a-ponic” poems, in which the body silently and entirely replaced the text.<sup>51</sup> This corporeal tendency of lettrist poetry was elaborated in a field Isou termed ‘*art corporel* [corporeal art]’, in which the lettrists created installations that contained living creatures, orchestrated strip-teases, offered their body as a public canvas, and offered medication to their audience.<sup>52</sup> Thus, it shared several points with body art, performance, and happenings.

Additionally, the lettrists used the body medium in non-dance practices *within* the choreographic field. The music in Roland Sabatier’s 1965 dancework *Omega 3* was partly performed by a soloist improvising step arrangements; the weight, speed, and texture of their steps contributed to the work’s soundtrack.<sup>53</sup> Interestingly, choreographic works themselves contained the body as a subverted mechanics, bringing choreography close to the letter. The body was envisaged as a canvas, and lettrist works were painted on dancers’ costumes or directly projected onto their bodies.<sup>54</sup> Without the intermediary of the costume, the dancer folded their body or manipulated props to form letters and signs [e.g. Figure 31, in the work of Sabatier], their motions mediating particles of text.<sup>55</sup> Lemaître gave another example of this in his description of one of his *Chorées*, where the body’s actions were to spell out the phrase ‘*qui veut danser doit penser* [one who wants to dance must think]’ [Figure 32]; the body represented letters and words visually – e.g. standing erect to form an “i” – and phonetically – the word “*doit* [must]” was represented by raising a finger [“*doigt*”, phonetically identical with “*doit*”].<sup>56</sup> Here, the audience was invited to read corporeal motions and positions as text, processing them at different linguistic levels (sound, letter, word). The 1965 work’s title, *Prose hypergraphique gesticulaire* [Hypergraphic gesticular prose], explicitly pointed to a choreographed version of a literary form. In this way, lettrist dance was associated with hypergraphics – a field

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voice/performance; see Girard: *Lettrisme*, p. 92. Cf. also Flahutez: *Le Lettrisme historique était une avant-garde*, p. 105.

- 51 Isou, Isidore: *L'Art corporel lettriste hypergraphique et esthapéiriste*, Paris: Psi 1977, p. 8.
- 52 Ibid., pp. 20, 24. For Lemaître’s stripteases see Lemaître, Maurice: *L'Anti-sexe: Spectacle de strip-teases ciselants (1967)*, in: *Lettrisme* 10 (1972).
- 53 Sabatier, Roland: *Omega 3*, Paris: Editions Lettrisme et hypergraphie 1966, unpaginated, BnF. In other cases, the body as mechanics was used to create works referring to the universe of painting; Jean-Paul Curtay proposed representing Mondrian’s canvases in the form of *tableaux vivants* – horizontal lines embodied by women, vertical ones by men. Isou: *L'Art corporel lettriste hypergraphique et esthapéiriste*, unpaginated.
- 54 Lemaître: *Chorées surprenantes*, p. 7.
- 55 Sabatier: *Omega 3*, unpaginated; for a related *chorée*-mime see Lemaître: *Chorées surprenantes*, p. 21.
- 56 Lemaître: *Chorées surprenantes*, p. 22.

in which multiple media become carriers of the letter, and the moving body becomes material for a universal practice of lettrist scripture.

Figure 31: Detail from Sabatier's Omega 3. Source: Sabatier, Roland: Omega 3, Paris: Editions Lettrisme et hypergraphie 1966, unpaginated. No re-use without permission.

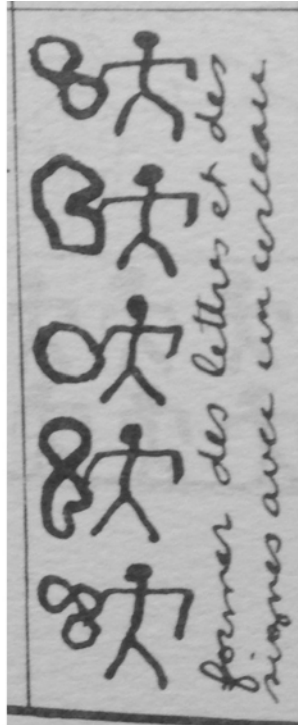
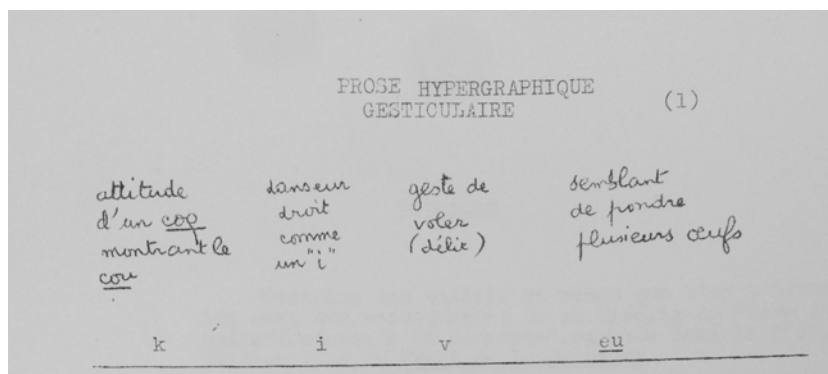


Figure 32: Detail from Lemaître's *Prose hypergraphique gesticulaire*. Source: Lemaître, Maurice: *Chorées surprenantes*, in: *Lettrisme 4* (1965), p. 22, Courtesy of the Bismuth Lemaître Endowment Fund. No re-use without permission.



Beyond depicting letters or signs on/through the body's motions, the lettrists also organised choreography through principles of literature and text. In Lemaître's works *Fugue mimique no. 1* (1959) and *Sonnet gesticulaire* (1959), the body performed movements that were organised based on poetic principles of versification or 'physical rhyme'.<sup>57</sup> Lemaître clarifies how this was realised in his construction of a choreography in the form of a sonnet:

*14 vers, divisés en deux strophes de quatre vers sur deux rimes, et une de six vers sur trois rimes. Mes "vers" chorégraphiques se composaient de "syllabes" constituées par une attitude (danse) ou un geste significatif (mime), les rimes étant naturellement le retour d'une même attitude ou d'un même geste. [14 verses, divided into two stanzas of four verses with two rhymes and one of six verses with three rhymes. My choreographic "verses" were composed of "syllables" constituted by a posture (dance) or a meaningful gesture (mime), the rhymes being naturally the return of one and the same attitude or gesture].*<sup>58</sup>

The piece was performed by three interpreters; the corporeal gestures and motions of each corresponded to the syllables of a choreographic poem, and, combined, they formed a composition of three sonnets. Here, while the choreography used the body in motion, its construction was literary and the audience was invited to approach it as a poem. Indeed, although presented as a "ballet",

57 Isou: *La Danse et la pantomime de l'antiquité aux lettristes*, p. 22; Lemaître: *La Danse et le mime ciselants, lettristes et hypergraphiques*, p. 60.

58 Lemaître: *La Danse et le mime ciselants, lettristes et hypergraphiques*, p. 60.

its title refers to it as a sonnet. Like Chénin's works that illustrated a choreography adaptive to multiple media and penetrated by their different logics [Chapter 4], lettrist expansions introduced the moving body into choreographies that were conceived in literary and textual ways.

These hypergraphic/expanded choreographies undo the non-instrumental, “pure”, non-representational corporeal movement that the *ciselant* implicated; against the idea that dance's corporeal medium should refrain from external reference, the moving body is used to transmit a message or follow a textual form. Indeed, Isou refers to ‘*un nouvel amplique, l’hypergraphie, grâce à laquelle chaque particule corporelle représente un signe et dont le ballet devient un message en lettres* [a new *amplique*, hypergraphics, thanks to which each corporeal particle represents a sign and whose ballet becomes a *message in letters*].<sup>59</sup> Therefore, despite lettrism's serial, sequential view of dance history between the *amplique* and the *ciselant*, this linearity is troubled by loops where previous phases re-appear in new form; the lettrist history of art includes a post-*ciselant amplique* phase, in which hypergraphics were referential. This loop, by admitting commonalities with the past, casts doubt upon genres – (modern) ballet and modern dance – as consecutive “chapters” in an ever-progressing history. It also complexifies lettrism's own position as a *ciselant* “successor”.

The use of the body as a form of mechanics to produce hypergraphic-like artworks was paralleled by the lettrists' integration of the non-human in choreographic work; “corporeal art”, in this sense, was not restricted to “human corporeal art”. The movement introduced animals and non-organic elements to the choreographic stage. For example, in Sabatier's *Omega 3*, movements of (human) dancers' fists, thumbs, tongues, eyes, cheeks, and eyelids were accompanied by a turkey circulating in the performance space, a fish in an aquarium, an electric fan, trickling water, and a choreography of cigarette smoke.<sup>60</sup> These works were concurrent with a progressive acceptance of non-human and even non-organic sounds – such as sirens – in live lettrist poetry performance.<sup>61</sup>

Such an interest in non-human elements on stage introduced a second way in which the division between the mechanics and aesthetics of dance helped develop a lettrist expanded choreography – in which the moving body was not the privileged, or sole, mechanics. This is discernible in Sabatier's score for *Omega 3*, where bodily-performed gestures are both described and illustrated; as the score progresses, illustrations dissociate from textual explanation, and the action or movement is communicated by the image-sign. Through such

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59 Isou: *La Danse et la pantomime de l'antiquité aux lettristes*, p. 18.

60 Sabatier: *Omega 3*, unpaginated.

61 Flahutez: *Le Lettrisme historique était une avant-garde*, p. 208 note 4.

replacements, and by writing that *performs* on paper what it is meant to convey – for instance, squiggly writing for the word “trembling” [Figure 33] – Sabatier's score appears as a means to provoke corporeal action in performance *and* an image-based performance of his work – a kinaesthetic document. Lemaître also manifests the possible forms of expanded choreographic works in non-corporeal media – or, to use lettrist vocabulary, mechanics:

*Je veux qu'on représente désormais les mimes et les ballets par des peintures, que ces peintures, ces romans, ces poèmes ou ces oeuvres dans tous les éléments de toutes les mécaniques possibles (sauf le geste du corps humain) soient considérés eux-mêmes comme des morceaux gestuels. On filmera ensuite ces oeuvres [...] et ces combinaisons nouvelles de leur reproduction seront des ballets ou des mimes inédits. Que les balletomanes ou les fanatiques du mime se réunissent pour offrir des textes joyciens qui seront autant de pantomimes ou danses originales. Des sculpteurs installeront des blocs de granit taillés qui seront applaudis comme des danses inconnues* [I want that from now on we represent mimes and ballets by paintings, that these paintings, these novels, these poems or these works in all elements of all possible mechanics (apart from the gesture of the human body) be considered themselves as gestural pieces. We will then film these works [...] and these new combinations of their reproduction will be original ballets or mimes. May ballet and mime fanatics unite to offer Joycian texts which will be original pantomimes or dances. Sculptors will install carved granite blocks which will be applauded as unknown dances].<sup>62</sup>

This programmatic wish is followed by Lemaître's three *Chorées* from 1963, taking graphic forms: one is composed of four lines of non-meaningful words; another is a small drawing that includes non-letter signs; the third includes a meaningful phrase, non-meaningful text material, and drawings [Figure 34]. Following the preceding argument, these letters, signs, and drawings are not a score leading to corporeal action. Here, the moving body's performance of a textually- or poetically-construed choreography is paralleled by works whose choreography resided in non-corporeal media (be they granite blocks, film, or text) – as also illustrated by Chénin's tripartite works [Chapter 4].

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62 Lemaître: *Chorées* surprenantes, p. 4.

Figure 33: Detail from Sabatier's Omega 3. Source: Sabatier, Roland: Omega 3, Paris: Editions Lettrisme et hypergraphie 1966, unpaginated. No re-use without permission.

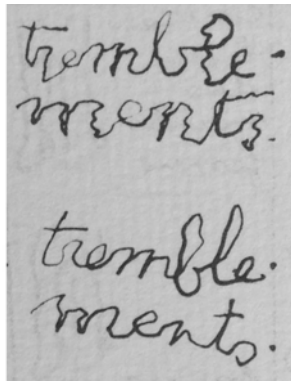
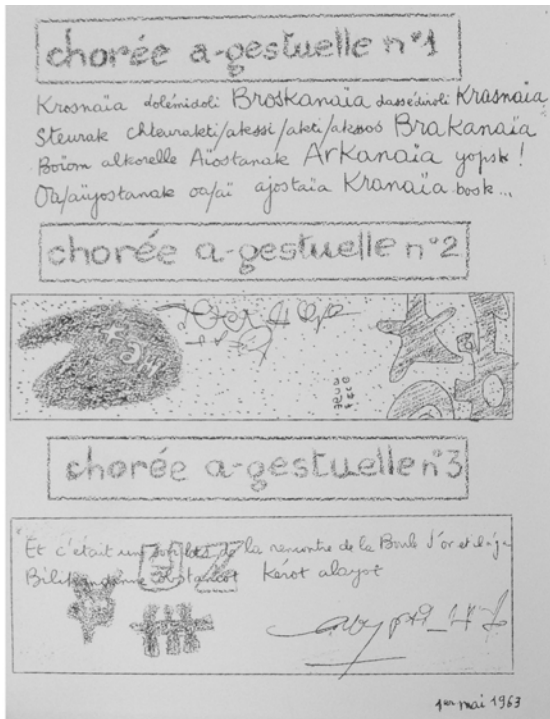


Figure 34: Detail from Maurice Lemaître's Chorées surprenantes. Source: Lemaître, Maurice: Chorées surprenantes, in: Lettrisme 4 (1965), p. 5, Courtesy of the Bismuth Lemaître Endowment Fund. No re-use without permission.





This expansion away from the corporeal-kinetic medium counters lettrism's focus on the body's "pure movements" as a guarantor of choreographic specificity – and therefore casts doubt upon that purity as the artistic aim that defined the dance field's "progress". Indeed, while medium "purity" is, for the reader of lettrist writings, associated with progress, the ultimate end – in the teleological sense of the word – of art is an altogether-different notion for lettrists: creation. Isou was unequivocal on creation – construed as innovation, invention, and discovery<sup>63</sup> – writing that it is '*le seul droit à l'existence qu'un art possède* [the only right to existence that an art possesses]'.<sup>64</sup> According to contemporary lettrism theorists and historical members of the group itself, creation characterises lettrism more than a sole focus on letters and signs.<sup>65</sup> Isou relatedly notes that (artistic) systems are not necessarily destroyed by subsequent ones; rather, all systems may find their own death by exhausting themselves<sup>66</sup> – in other words, if they are no longer capable of producing creation. He writes that

*[l']aplatissement (couché par terre) et l'exécution des mouvements dans cette position remet sur un plan différent toute l'histoire des figures de la danse. Les envols, les pirouettes, les arabesques, les entrechats, acquièrent un milieu différent et une dimension inusitée* [flattening out (lying on the floor) and the execution of movements in this position puts the whole history of dance figures on a different plane. The jumps, the pirouettes, the arabesques, the entrechats, acquire a different milieu and an uncommon dimension].<sup>67</sup>

Thus, crawling and contact with the floor are expressions of a system that – rather than annulling and replacing the classical dance of elevation – provides dance vocabulary with new margins of creation. Similarly, replacing the moving body with other media widens the kinds of materials and forms with which choreography may work, thus broadening its creative potential. If the hypergraphic "new *amplique*" introduces loops into an only-apparently-linear dance history, the notion of creation replaces the singularity and unidirectionality of (modernist) progress with the possibility of multiple, creative endeavours functioning together – indeed the lettrists simultaneously produced chiseling, hypergraphic, and other types of dance works.

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63 Cf. Girard: *Lettrisme*, pp. 55–56, 59; Sabatier: *Vue d'ensemble sur quelques dépassements précis*, p. 11.

64 Isou: *Introduction à une nouvelle poésie et à une nouvelle musique*, p. 232.

65 Sabatier: *Vue d'ensemble sur quelques dépassements précis*, p. 11; Girard: *Lettrisme*, p. 78.

66 Cf. Isou, Isidore: *Fondements pour la transformation intégrale du théâtre*, Vol. I, Paris: Bordas 1953, p. 214.

67 Isou: *Manifeste de la danse Isouienne*, p. 117.

Through works using the body as a mechanics for non-dance-related expressions – be it images or texts – the lettrists allowed their choreographic art to turn its gaze away from its medium and become, once again, expressive. In this way, the expansion of lettrist choreography allowed lettrism to counter a linear history which – crucially – it had partially adopted. Through choreographic works using media other than the body – image, text, or anything else – the lettrists dissociated themselves from an essentialisation of the moving body as the primary choreographic material. In this way, lettrism performed an elegant twist, replacing the corporeal medium specificity of dance – on whose purity lettrism insisted – with a focus on the ever-widening scope of creation.

These expansions of choreography, which complexify lettrism's own choreographic position, also influence its positionality in the dance historical landscape. Such expanded lettrist choreographic practices parallel works created by other artists within the lettrists' historical context. For example, Lemaître's organisation of choreographic pieces based on poetic structures recalls Robert Dunn's experiments with future-Judson choreographers, in which the structure of Erik Satie's musical compositions became the basis for composing dances.<sup>68</sup> These parallels are a useful reminder of the development of this type of experimentation outside of the New-York scene, and suggests lettrism be considered European post-modern dance. But, the lettrists employed their own terms (*ciselant-hypergraphique*) rather than the modern/post-modern dialectic; similarly, their dance history's loops and non-linearity subvert the successive replacement inherent in the notion of "post". Through expanded hypergraphic choreography and choreographic works in non-corporeal media, the lettrists upset the linearity and forward-directionality of a (modernist) history that they also partly adhered to – potentially casting doubt on (modernist) historiography itself.<sup>69</sup>

Along with their association with post-modern dance, these expansions turn lettrism into a field that exemplifies and solidifies the 1950s and 1960s (European) dance field's interdisciplinary links with performance art. But, beyond allowing for intra- and inter-disciplinary connections, these expansions present lettrism as being comparable with other historical practices that doubt the exclusivity of the relationship between corporeality and choreography. The lettrists' transformations of choreographic mechanics performed a media and ontological pluralisation of choreography, which is also discernible in Feuillet's late baroque period [Chapter 2] and Chénin's contemporaneity [Chapter 4]. These transformations are not akin to Feuillet's system of translatability between body,

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68 McDonagh, Don: *The Rise and Fall and Rise of Modern Dance*, London: Dance Books 1990 [1970], p. 50.

69 For different visions of modernist historiography see Manning: *Modernist Dogma and Post-Modern Rhetoric* (in dance); Hulfeld, Stefan: *Modernist Theatre*, p. 16 (in theatre).

writing, and sign, or Chénin's extraction and transfer of choreographic information; rather, they can be read as a 20<sup>th</sup>-century reconfiguration of choreographic multiplication manifesting modernity's quest for limitless creation.

## Expanded choreographic excursion two: imagining choreography

Some of the aforementioned works in this chapter replaced the moving body with other choreographic media. The lettrists also produced pieces in which this body disappeared and was replaced by nothing at all. The progressive elimination of corporeal movement from the lettrist dance stage developed in works where actions were deliberately made unavailable to the audience; movements were invisible due to the darkness of the stage, and steps were only (at times) heard.<sup>70</sup> The removal of bodily action was further elaborated in pieces of complete immobility, where the apparent lack of movement was not an indicator of an internal dance, but, rather, embraced dance's absence. Thus, Lemaître's *Chorées* included a ballet of total stillness – a naked solo performer, standing in a neutral position and trying to avoid all movement, even controlling their breath – titled *La Mort du ballet* [The Death of Ballet] (1964).<sup>71</sup> In other works, the body was not present at all; for example, Isou's 14 *petits ballets* included a section where the ballet was reduced to a text read from backstage: '[a]u fond, vous avez entendu un grand discours et vous avez vu très peu de danse [in the end, you have heard a grand discourse and you have seen very little dance]'.<sup>72</sup>

Exchanging the body for nothingness, choreographic expansions did not only take the form of an absence; choreographic mechanics also included non-physically-existing media. In other words, the moving body was not, strictly speaking, replaced with nothing, but with something that was not or could not be there.

*[M]ême si un artiste ne peut pas immédiatement accomplir une oeuvre sur un astre ou sur une pensée; de même qu'il ne lui est pas aisé de trouver comme support un tigre ou un crocodile, une fleur rare d'Océanie, une flotille de Spitfire; j'ai dû envisager ces éléments de l'outillage [even if an artist cannot immediately accomplish a work on a star or on a thought; just like he cannot easily find, as a medium/support,*

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70 Lemaître: *Chorées* surprenantes, p. 17.

71 *Ibid.*, p. 11.

72 Isou: *Ballets Ciselants, Polythanasiques, Hypergraphiques et Infinitesimaux*, p. 22.

a tiger or a crocodile, a rare flower from Oceania, a flotilla of Spitfires; I had to consider these elements of equipment]<sup>73</sup>

writes Isou, noting that any such medium – even if not readily available – can be a valid mechanics. If, however, an artist's envisaged medium does not exist, it is part of the realm of the imaginary, and resulting works are also part of the imaginary.<sup>74</sup> While this quotation does not refer to dance in particular, imaginary or inconceivable artworks – termed “*infinitesimal*” by the lettrists, as a new “chapter” of their artistic history – were represented in lettrist (expanded) choreography.

“*Infinitesimal*” art – dance, but also music, poetry, theatre – existed only in the domain of the imaginary or the virtual, according to lettrist nomenclature. Like how Chénin's videos [Chapter 4] adapt to materially-existing media – a camera filming to produce a video on a screen – and the virtuality of code, lettrist choreography also expands to the immateriality of the imagination. A 1967 *Ballet de poche* by F. Poyet illustrates this: a performer, having announced that the work is taking place in their pocket, turned the pocket out and made the inside of the pocket visible. They thus transformed a “hermetic” ballet – one in which actions are merely concealed from the audience – into an infinitesimal one;<sup>75</sup> the visible lack of action pointed to a virtual ballet. Isou and other lettrists theorised that in infinitesimal dance anything actually presented should make the viewer think of other, imaginary – even nonexistent or inconceivable – choreographic elements. Certain infinitesimal choreographic works presented no physical input at all; Isou explains in his introduction to his *Recherches pour un ballet infinitesimal* (1965) that

[l]a chorégraphie est ici proposée par des éléments étrangers à la chorégraphie habituelle, basée couramment sur les mouvements du corps, car mon oeuvre est formée de paroles qui composent la dimension transcendente de l'art gesticulaire [the choreography is proposed here through elements foreign to habitual choreography, commonly based on the movements of the body, because my work is formed out of words that compose the transcendental dimension of gesticular art].<sup>76</sup>

His ballet then unfolded through a scenario about the unlikely adventures – involving a mutilated corpse – of a character named Pierre de Montfargue, whose actions were narrated by a person on stage or, in the complete absence of a body, through a loudspeaker. Like the “*nouvel amplique*”, this infinitesimal

73 Isou, Isidore: *Pour une connaissance plus précise de la méca-esthétique et de l'esthapéirisme*, Paris : Psi 1976 [1972], unpaginated.

74 *Ibid.*, unpaginated.

75 Poyet, F.: *Œuvres*, in: *Lettrisme 28-30* (1974), p. 12.

76 Isou: *Ballets Ciselants, Polythanasiques, Hypergraphiques et Infinitesimaux*, p. 51.

choreographic expansion points back to codes of narrative dance-making – again forming loops in lettrist choreographic history.

Such disappearances of physically-instantiated dance were related, in Isou's view, with the notion of purity. In his *Somme chorégraphique*, for instance, while a dancer stood immobile on stage, a spoken text expressed that

[s]'il est vrai que la danse obéit à une certaine intention ou à un certain idéal, il est naturel que l'idéal finisse par détruire le corps et la danse pour s'exprimer dans toute sa pureté [if it is true that dance obeys a certain intention or a certain ideal, it is natural that the ideal will end up *destroying the body and dance in order to express itself in all its purity*].<sup>77</sup>

After this text was recited, the dancer disappeared completely, leaving the stage empty. Just as lettrism pursued modernist tendencies that aimed to purify the choreographic medium, it also introduced the possibility of fully “purifying” choreography by removing its physicality altogether. But once again, lettrism's tendencies towards purity and abstraction are complicated by lettrism itself. Infinitesimal art could indeed be anchored in the real and have effects within it, despite its ideality.

If infinitesimal works activated the imagination as a realm in which art – in this case, dance – could be produced and/or perceived, then they constituted a space in which choreography could expand by adapting to the largely-solipsistic – but potentially-linguistically-shareable – and ephemeral medium of imagination. In this construal, the physical inexistence of infinitesimal works – or the indifference for their physically-present “springboards” towards the virtual – does not necessarily imply an escape from mediality, but a further expansion of choreographic media to include the non-physical. Sabatier implies that issues of infinitesimal art mediality were of interest to the lettrists; he notes that this new aesthetic paradigm led to questions about the perceptibility and sensibility required to experience infinitesimal art.<sup>78</sup> While, then, infinitesimal art does not need the justification of concrete reality in order to acquire meaning or purpose,<sup>79</sup> this does not suggest it does not mediate real experiences. Mirella Bandini agrees with this reading:

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77 Ibid., p. 22, emphasis added. Roland Sabatier also associates infinitesimality with a ‘*beauté à l'état pur* [beauty in a pure state]’. Sabatier: *Vue d'ensemble sur quelques dépassements précis*, p. 19.

78 He specifically considers *télésthésie* – or sensation at a distance – as a candidate for sensory access to immaterial, imaginary media. Sabatier: *Vue d'ensemble sur quelques dépassements précis*, p. 19.

79 Isou: *Introduction à l'esthétique imaginaire et autres écrits*, p. 12.

*Dans le cadre de l'exploration immatérielle de l'art, les lettristes sortent de la dimension du tableau et du livre pour s'approprier une nouvelle réalité comprenant l'existant, l'imaginaire et l'idéal, sous forme de retour à l'immédiateté, aux perceptions physiques, sensorielles et esthétiques inscrites dans l'indicible, l'inconcevable et l'impossible [In the framework of the immaterial exploration of art, the lettrists leave the dimension of the painting and the book, in order to appropriate a new reality containing the existing, the imaginary and the ideal, under the form of a return to immediacy, to physical, sensorial and aesthetic perceptions inscribed within the unsayable, the inconceivable and the impossible].<sup>80</sup>*

Ballets that took place on no stage, as mental acts of their spectators, had their own reality. Infinitesimal art also had an effect on the real. For example, Sabatier writes of the

*glissement du signifié habituel vers un signifié complètement idéal, irréel, in-existant et inimaginable. En cette occurrence, elle [la beauté transcendée de l'art infinitésimal] s'affirme comme la forme la plus perverse et la plus discrèpante du réel. On met un nom là où il n'y en a pas, là où aucune réalité n'existe et sur laquelle nous ne pouvons pas mettre de nom [shift of the usual signified towards a completely ideal, unreal, non-existent and unimaginable signified. In this case, it [the transcendental beauty of infinitesimal art] affirms itself as the most perverse and most discrepant form of the real. We put a name where there is none, where no reality exists and on which we cannot put a name].<sup>81</sup>*

This suggests that infinitesimal works do not describe or refer to an existing part of reality, but name the nonexistent as an act of intervention *in* the real. Indeed, infinitesimal works were acts and products of creation; this holds for the lettrists' privileged field of letters and signs – the movement considered “potential” letters; Isou theorised about lettric infinity, widening the creatability of letters to an endless virtual field<sup>82</sup> – as well as their imaginary works in other domains. Infinitesimal works, then, may display an ideality that, in its turn, is associated with purity; but they complexify this ideality by being parts of a non-physical yet very-much-experienced reality, and by generating effects in the real.

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80 Bandini, Mirella: *Pour une histoire du lettrisme*, Paris: Jean-Paul Rocher 2003, p. 32.

81 Sabatier: *Vue d'ensemble sur quelques dépassements précis*, p. 20, emphasis added.

82 Isou: *Introduction à l'esthétique imaginaire et autres écrits*, p. 11; Sjöberg, Sami: *The Vanguard Messiah: Lettrism between Jewish Mysticism and the Avant-Garde*, Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg 2015, p. 41. On the relationship between imaginary aesthetics and creation see Theodoropoulou, Vanessa: *Isidore Isou, entre nominalisme, réalisme et conceptualisme*, in: *Collective: Fragments pour Isidore Isou*, p. 103.

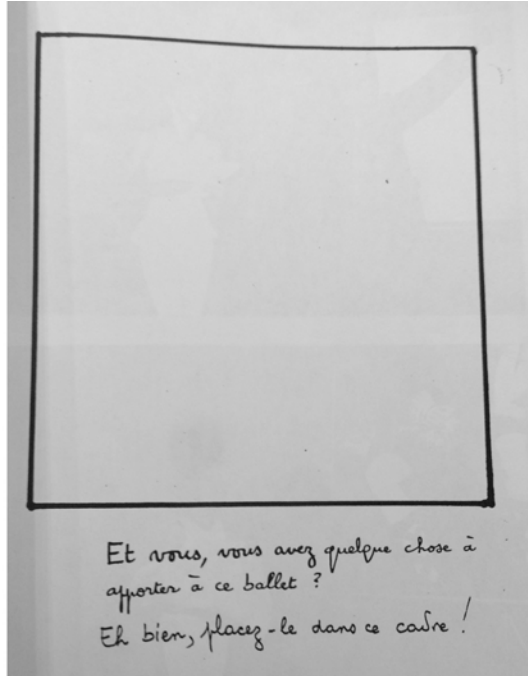
The capacity of infinitesimal art to enter reality further depended on its spectators, whose imaginations became artistic territory as they participated in infinitesimal creation. Infinitesimality has indeed been associated with the lettrist field of the “supertemporal”<sup>83</sup>, which implicates – often long-lasting – artworks, open to successive appropriations and interventions by viewers [Figure 35]. The lettrists combined audience participation with the imaginary realm, resulting in works that audiences contributed to, but that never actually existed. For example, in *Manifeste de la danse aoptique ou de la danse-débat* (1961) Isou proposed that a discussion about nonexistent dance would replace physically-instantiated performance, calling for dance lovers to ‘*se réunissent et réfléchissent ensemble dans un silence profond sur les conditions d’un chef-d’oeuvre inexistant et invisible* [unite and think together in deep silence on the conditions for a nonexistent and invisible masterpiece]’;<sup>84</sup> he called on them to contribute to creation even though they were not creating something material – and, thus, implicated them in a non-technologically-mediated virtual reality. By proposing such works, the lettrists point to potential shifts in choreographic authorship through its collectivisation with spectators and by refusing the necessity of producing a tangible, visible, uniformly-perceptible result.

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83 Melin, Corinne: Esthétique imaginaire et tendances conceptuelles, in: Collective: *Fragments pour Isidore Isou*, p. 82, Sabatier: Vue d’ensemble sur quelques dépassements précis, p. 20.

84 Isou: *Ballets Ciselants, Polythanasiques, Hypergraphiques et Infinitesimaux*, p. 48. Maurice Lemaître’s 1982 ‘*ballet romantique supertemporel*’ *Et la Sylphide?* proposed – as a framework for audience activity and as a physical presence leading to mental associations – a photograph projected on a screen and a dancer in a tutu and *pointe* shoes, inviting the spectators to reflect on Marie Taglioni and her genre. Lemaître: *La Danse, le mime et l’art corporel d’avant-garde*, unpaginated.

Figure 35: *Ballet to be completed by viewers*, by Maurice Lemaître. The text reads: 'And you, do you have something to bring to this ballet? Well then, put it in this frame!'. Source: Lemaître, Maurice: *La Danse, le mime et l'art corporel d'avant-garde*, Paris: Centre de créativité 1982, p. 91, Courtesy of the Bismuth Lemaître Endowment Fund. No re-use without permission.



Implicating audiences is associated with the lettrists' desire to bring about change in the world around them – despite Isou's refusal to equate art with everyday life.<sup>85</sup> Indeed, social change was a general principle of the movement's artistic practice, with the ultimate goal of creating a '*univers paradisiaque* [a heavenly universe]'.<sup>86</sup> In this idyllic world, the act of creation was generalised to a community of creators:

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85 Isou: *Fondements pour la transformation intégrale du théâtre*, Vol. 1, p. 32.

86 Sabatier: *Vue d'ensemble sur quelques dépassements précis*, p. 11. Isou's willingness to form a utopian society based on creation may be the result of his Jewish origins and cultural background. For such a reading see Coadou, François: *Lettrisme, mystique juive et messianisme chez Isidore Isou*, in: *Collective: Fragments pour Isidore Isou*, pp. 113–132.



*La Créatique ou la Novatique révèle la méthode par laquelle les individus peuvent se transformer en explorateurs de l'inconnu, de l'inédit, afin d'atteindre un niveau plus élevé de savoir et pouvoir, en devenant des génies cohérents et profonds, destinés à remplacer les dirigeants actuels, réactionnaires et abrutis, productifs, justement afin de transformer leur monde et même leur galaxie en un Paradis de Joie infime [La Créatique ou la Novatique [these terms refer to notions developed by Isou in a book of the same title] reveals the method through which individuals can transform themselves into explorers of the unknown, of the original, in order to attain a more elevated level of knowledge and power, by becoming coherent and deep geniuses destined to replace the present leaders, reactionary and idiotic, productive, precisely in order to transform their world and even their galaxy into a Paradise of minute Joy].<sup>87</sup>*

In this perspective, lettrism was a movement of the avant-garde because of its historical affiliations – dadaism and surrealism were recurring (criticised) reference points – and because of its insistence on bringing about social change through artistic acts. Through its necessary implication of the spectator, imaginary expanded choreography allowed lettrism to approach the historical avant-gardes' willingness to inscribe art in the social fabric, disrupting the potential purity of an ideal artwork detached from physical reality.

Through infinitesimal, physically-nonexistent, expanded choreographic works, then, the lettrists flirted with an abstraction from reality but ultimately resisted it in favour of the realness of imaginary acts and the possibility of audience participation within them. They approached a “purifying” detachment from physical creation, but deviated from it by insisting on the creative act and its teleological function of rendering the world better. By expanding their choreography to the imaginary, the lettrists reflected purity-seeking tendencies – associated with their modernism – while also resisting the ideal of an art autonomous in its medium and social (non-)inscription – thus aligning themselves with the historical avant-gardes. By doing so, they function as a reminder that a purity- and medium-specificity-seeking modernism was not opposed to the engaged practice of the avant-garde; the two can coexist within the work and worldview of a single artist or movement.<sup>88</sup>

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87 Isou, Isidore: Explication sur la créatique ou la novatique, in: Collective: *Lettrisme: Vue d'ensemble sur quelques dépassements précis*, p. 108.

88 Susan Manning developed a similar idea while analysing German *Ausdruckstanz*, a more mainstream dance form than lettrism: ‘*Ausdruckstanz* blurs the distinction between modernism and the historical avant-garde posited by Peter Bürger. [...] For Wigman, Laban and their many followers endeavored to conceptualise dance as an autonomous language *and* to reintegrate the dancer's experience of movement into everyday life. Although Wigman was more commonly associated with the modernist project of conceptualising dance

Once more, the infinitesimal and supertemporal expanded choreography that relates lettrism to the historical avant-gardes is paralleled with works by artists active in U.S.-based post-modern dance. Gus Solomons Jr.'s *Two Reeler* (1968) – in which two tape recorders replaced the live presence of a performer – or artists interested in the public's participation – like Anna Halprin – are just two examples. Again, however, the lettrists' relationship with *post*-modern practitioners is counterbalanced by their relationship to the historical avant-gardes, casting doubt upon the successivity of the “post-”. In this way, the lettrist history of dance places the movement as a continuation of the historical avant-gardes' work, while the history of lettrist dance links the avant-gardes of the early-20<sup>th</sup> century and post-modern dance of the 1960s.<sup>89</sup>

Beyond its multiple inscription in its contemporaneous and/or historically proximate context, the expansion of lettrist choreography to the imaginary necessitates a wider historical perspective on work questioning choreography's materialisation. The lettrist infinitesimal joins Feuille's *figure* – an ideated representation postulated by the page, embodied by dancers, but reducible to neither – and his system of choreo-graphic signs – graphic designs, but also means for thinking of an only-potentially incarnated dance – [Chapter 2]; it joins Chénin's algorithmic choreography – an inaccessible code whose actions define the potentiality of what can be seen – and focus on choreographic informational content – intangible, invisible *data* that constitute choreographic material [Chapter 4]. Whether in the late baroque's taxonomic, the 20<sup>th</sup> century's universalist and revolutionary, or the early-21<sup>st</sup> century's digitised way, an investment in the invisible, intangible, and immaterial can be acknowledged and analysed in its contextually-diverse manifestations *as* choreography – and thus counter the suggestion that the deincarnation of choreography is merely a matter of (bodily) absence.

## Conclusion

Lettrist choreography had multiple facets. In some cases, it insisted upon corporeality as the foundation of dance and dance-making; in others, it was closer to expanded visions of choreography that upset the previous one. By expanding

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as an autonomous language (absolute dance) and Laban with the avant-gardist or populist project of reintegrating dance into everyday life, I argue that both worked along a continuum between the two projects and that this continuum defined *Ausdruckstanz*. Manning, Susan A.: *Ecstasy and the Demon: Feminism and Nationalism in the Dances of Mary Wigman*, Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press 1993, p. 7.

89 On this topic see also Burt, Ramsay: *Judson Dance Theater: Performative Traces*, Oxon: Routledge 2006.

choreography and adapting it to literary principles – turning the body into a carrier of letter and text, regaining its capacity to refer to elements beyond itself – lettrism undid its own insistence that moving corporeality marks choreography's purity, autonomy, and medium-specificity. By producing imaginary or inconceivable choreographic works, lettrism flirted with an ideality on the verge of absolute "purity"; however, this expansion undid its own tendencies by inscribing itself in the real and the quest for social change. The introduction of expandedness into lettrist choreography turns the movement's choreographic work into a hybrid that is both progress-based and not, both "pure" and not, both corporeal and not; both affirmative in its creation and distributive in its approach to choreographic authorship; both modernist and with an avant-garde sensibility, complexifying its way of being "modern"; both affirming its autonomy and adopting an interdisciplinary stance, creating links with performance and visual art.

Fabrice Flahutez has argued that lettrist painting is distanced from both figurative – in Isidore Isou's context, associated with the Eastern bloc's realist tendencies – and abstract – the Western bloc's dominant forms – visual art, fitting in neither pole of the dichotomy characterising its era.<sup>90</sup> Indeed, lettrism's distance from the *amplique* and its representative functions allowed it to differentiate itself from figurative art; its transgression of the *ciselant* and its self-reflexive functions allowed it to *also* mark its difference from abstraction. Whether or not lettrism's position as an outsider of 20<sup>th</sup>-century European art history was due to an insistence on embodying a third alternative, this interstitial position was characteristic of the movement. A similar claim can be made for dance history as well. Lettrism's corporeal/chiseling vision of choreography has commonalities with other dance practices, including ballet and modern dance. But, lettrism refutes the capacity of these practices to fully achieve *ciselant* idea(l)s, and thus appears as a third figure distanced from both. Additionally, through its "expanded" choreographies, lettrism circumvents the very goals it claims ballet and modern dance failed to achieve while – purposefully or not – leaving out accounts of post-modern works comparable to those of the lettrists. Thus, the multiplicity and contradictions of lettrist choreographies – more apparent through an expanded perspective – negotiate lettrism's position among already-competing genres in the complex post-war dance landscape; in both performing and expanding beyond the choreographic *ciselant*, lettrism sculpts a place for its own practice. In this perspective, the movement's relative historical unclassifiability is a constructive way of upsetting the categories lettrism flirts with and simultaneously – sometimes partly, sometimes wholly – rejects.

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90 Flahutez: *Le Lettrisme historique était une avant-garde*, pp. 28–29.

In this process, lettrism carves itself a position in (canonical dance) history, both embodying its accomplishment and exceeding its posited limits. But, lettrism's links with Feuillet's late baroque context [Chapter 2] and Chénin's contemporaneity [Chapter 4] – be it through their media transformations of choreography or their reconfigurations of its immateriality – highlight that Isou's movement is multiply relatable to (an expanded choreographic) history, rather than merely exceeding or subverting its historical precedents. The omnivorous and radical nature of lettrist choreography is therefore a context-specific manifestation of issues inherent, albeit to a great extent unacknowledged, in choreographic history. In this perspective, lettrism – much like contemporary expanded choreography – is not just an exceptional response to a dominant historical narrative, but part of extra-canonical, expanded choreographic histories.

## Conclusion to Part 3

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An ex-dadaist painter, a “*Les Six*”-related composer, a ballet-trained dancer-choreographer, a young but promising filmmaker, and a daring impresario collaboratively create a ballet in which a partial striptease coexists with a non-narrative film, lights blind an audience from which performers emerge, and a dancer stops moving when music plays, to enjoy the sound while smoking. The result of their work is choreographic because it relates to – while also subverting – a ballet-based association of choreography with narrative dance-making; it is choreographic because it exemplifies the internal conflicts of a choreography based on the human body in motion; it is choreographic because its orchestrations of dance, film, light, sound, costume, theatre, and audience are relational, expanded choreographic arrangements. A renowned dance practitioner leaves Germany just before the outbreak of WWII and installs himself in England, where he finds an unexpected partner in industrial management consulting. Together, they transfer dance experience and knowledge to factories, train labourers’ movements, read motional patterns as indications of job adaptation, and theorise about the overall function of factories as large, rhythmic wholes of people, materials, and equipment. Their work is choreographic because it is associated with notions and practices of a choreography based on the human body in motion; but, it is also choreographic when it accepts a choreography of the non-human – of tools, machines, and materials; when it explores choreography beyond (loco)motion, in materials giving rise to new forms, in aggregates of (non-)human industrial systems; when it looks at the factory in choreographic terms of motion and rhythm. A Romanian-born poet and his fellows turn their attention to dance; the results include choreographies of apparent immobility, choreographies on paper and in words, choreographies existing solely in the imagination. The poet and his fellows practice choreography when they focus on human corporeality, through which dance gains a desired autonomy; but, they also practice choreography when they subvert this focus by admitting unexpected (non-)materials, allowing choreography to be penetrated by text, poetic structures, and immaterial thoughts. Despite being linked to choreographic models of dance, body, and/or motion, then, Part 3’s

three examples are relevant to expanded choreography. Moreover, they do not form an exclusive dialectic between these two poles; along with moving bodies and expanded excursions, their associations with, for instance, choreography as narrative (*Relâche*) or writing/notation (Rudolf Laban) indicate a wide diversity of choreographic models, rather than a bi-polar antagonism.

The multiple choreographies of *Relâche*, the industrial Laban, and lettrism crucially underline that their reversals of dancing, body-in-motion-based choreographic models do not negate the role of dance, motion, or the human body. Dance is present in *Relâche*, in the non-cinematographic pockets of what remains a ballet; it is present in Laban's thinking, in his dancerly metaphors about industry; it is present in lettrist ballets, even if imaginary. The human body is present in *Relâche*, strutting in glittering costumes and flirting with nudity; it is present in Laban's factories and workers' bodies – which wrap, cut, and feed machines, and walk home at the end of the day, traces of their work lingering in shadow moves; it is present in lettrism, affirmed as the very basis of choreographic art, exposed in its internal dance. Movement is present in *Relâche*, on its stage and in its film; it is present in labourers, tools, machines, and materials' industrial activity; it is present in lettrist choreographies' rhymed phrases and internal dances of moving organs and cells. In other words, the expandedness of these works and artists complements – without effacing – a choreography of dance, body, motion, and/or their connection. Moreover, these analyses point to the heterogeneity of dances (subversive ballet dances, dances of materials, imaginary dances), bodies (physical, cinematographically-mediated, mechanical), and movements (cinematographic, imaginary, supra-individual) entailed by this complementarity. In this way, an expanded choreographic reading of these works points to the multiplicity of an inclusive choreographic – but also dance, kinetic, bodily – history.

Such an expanded historiographic perspective invites reconsideration of binary oppositions, acceptance of coexisting but contrasting facets, and identification of the productivity of contradictions; it draws attention to works' responses to their own ambivalences (*Relâche*), articulates a second facet of their at times contradictory nature (Laban), and contributes to an understanding of their complex positionality within their historical context (lettrism). By illustrating the diversity of choreographic models active within a single work, artist's or group's *œuvre*, this reading of *Relâche*, the industrial Laban, and lettrist choreography also points to – without exhaustively portraying – the multiplicity of choreographic models present within early- and mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century dance history; in other words, it demonstrates that the plurality of 20<sup>th</sup>-century dance modernity is also identified in its choreographic histories. Against the dominance of a choreography bound to dance and/or entangled with human corporeality in motion, such a reading allows choreographic history to include, in Christina

Thurner's words, 'partiality over totality, plurality and diversity over homogeneity'.<sup>1</sup> Against a historical narrative where a single criterion – such as the “purity” of movement or the “authenticity” of corporeal expression – could define a singular “progression”, it allows ‘contingency over teleological necessity, as well as discontinuities over linear progressions’<sup>2</sup> to appear. This plurality concerns various aspects of early- and mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century choreographic history; it concerns different chronological moments and genres, and historiographically-relevant notions, such as dance modernity.

This multiple history of the early- and mid-20<sup>th</sup> century requires recognising its interdisciplinarity, taking form through collaboration and transversal experimentation both within (*Relâche*, lettrism) and beyond (Laban) the arts; its inter-media understanding of the body (*Relâche*), motion (Laban), and performance (*Relâche*, lettrism); its complexification of choreographic authorship, detaching it from the sole creation of corporeal or kinetic products, and reminding us that collapsing the figures of “choreographer” and creator of embodied motion excludes crucial parts of artistic labour (*Relâche*, lettrism); and its expanded politics, exploring the subversive potential of immaterial choreographies, or encompassing human bodies in supra-individual, hierarchical agglomerations along with non-human agents.

As these considerations prefigure, the horizontal-synchronous choreographic multiplicity of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is doubled by a vertical-transhistorical dimension that manifests its relevance to expanded choreography – be this in contemporaneity or in the (expanded) past. Again, this relevance does not suggest causal and linear relationality or similarity; but it does suggest there is a need for a diverse, macro-historical view of choreographic expandedness, to which 20<sup>th</sup>-century modernity contributes. By enriching choreographic assemblage practice with an aesthetics of abruptness, distinct from the centralising *sujet* (of its baroque manifestations) and emergent fleetingness (of its contemporary ones); by proposing rhythm and harmony as factors that organise supra-individual, more-than-human choreographies, thus reconfiguring a preoccupation with proportion (in the early-modern period) and the unpredictability of distributed agency (in contemporaneity); by fostering a subversively-participative, immaterial choreography, thus refusing the late baroque's systematicity and the inaccessible abstraction of the contemporary digital realm, *Relâche*, the industrial Laban, and lettrist choreography become members of a heterogeneous but densely-populated expanded choreographic history.

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1 Thurner, Christina : Time Layers, Time Leaps, Time Loss: Methodologies of Dance Historiography, in: Franko : *The Oxford Handbook of Dance and Reenactment*, p. 527.

2 Ibid., p. 527.





## Conclusion

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*Imagine you would be sick of choreography, know all too well what it is, incarnate it, become choreography – and go totally nuts. [...] Imagine choreography is both your guardian spirit and your worst nightmare.<sup>1</sup>*

Stories depend on those who tell them; and histories are, partially, symptoms of the situation in, and from, which they are told. The (hi)stories told here are written from the perspective(s) of expanded choreography: a 17<sup>th</sup>-century ballet-*poietics* not centred on dance [Chapter 1]; a 1700 choreo(-)graphy residing in signs and on paper [Chapter 2]; a 15<sup>th</sup>-century dance practice expanding beyond the human, with movements based on non-kinetic principles [Chapter 3]; a 1920s ballet emerging through the relations of body, music, lights, and film [Chapter 7]; a choreographer managing factories and their dances of labourers, tools, machines, and materials in the 1940s and 1950s [Chapter 8]; and post-war choreographies circulating from bodies to letters and then into the realm of imagination [Chapter 9]. The situated, expanded-choreographic perspective from which these stories are told is not a warning to the limited “truth” of the historical narratives, but is a condition for their very existence; recognising the situatedness of these “expanded choreographic” histories does not reduce their validity.<sup>2</sup>

From this expanded-choreographic perspective, pre-18<sup>th</sup>-century European choreographic sources question the centrality of dance, the essential place of the human/physical body, and the necessity of (loco)motion that characterised

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1 Jeroen Peeters quoted in CORPUS: Survey What does “choreography” mean today?, 2007, <http://www.corpusweb.net/introduction-to-the-survey.html> (Archive copy from October 2015).

2 On the ‘constructive character of historiography’ and its relation to a notion of truth see also Thurner, Christina: Time Layers, Time Leaps, Time Loss: Methodologies of Dance Historiography, in: Franko, Mark (ed.): *The Oxford Handbook of Dance and Reenactment*, New York: Oxford University Press 2017, p. 526.

later conceptions of choreography. Therefore, if “choreography” – referring to practices and sources from these periods – is defined by dance-making and/or a moving corporeality, this requires awareness of its partiality and bias against certain aspects of the practices and sources in question. Similarly, early- and mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century dance history may display a choreographic model strongly attached to dance or organic corporeality and its motion, but cannot be reduced to that. Rather, this history reflects the period’s diversity through varied, coexisting, sometimes-contradictory choreographic models. Attaching “choreography” to dance-making and/or the moving body should therefore be employed less as a necessary, all-encompassing notion – a canon betrayed by certain works – than as an important aspect of a nevertheless-complex reality.

Looking at choreographic history through the perspective of expanded choreography, however, does more than decentralise dance and/or moving bodies; it also recognises “expanded” aspects in historical practices. Contemporary expanded choreography widens what choreography is and can be; from customers moving in a shopping mall to birds migrating for the winter, and from the structure of a building to the spatial distribution of sounds, the notion of choreography stretches to encompass a wide range of phenomena and actions. In this spread, it also encompasses historical practices and notions – court etiquette and the dance of the planets, the motions of factory workers and a loudspeaker replacing a dance performance – as choreography. To put it differently, if Olga Mesa’s in-between, floating arrangement is choreography [Chapter 5], the work of a *maitre d'ordre* can be choreography too [Chapter 1]; if an installation of trees is choreography [Chapter 6], a factory can be choreographed as well [Chapter 8]. This does not mean that the term “choreography” should be anachronistically projected onto historical practices, but it does mean acknowledging that in the *present* conception of (expanded) choreography, such practices cannot be excluded from choreographic history. An expanded perspective of choreographic history, then, pluralises this history by drawing attention to its multiple facets, and pluralising the very category of “choreography”.

The contemporary situation from which these histories have been told is far from an all-encompassing view based on a generic notion of contemporaneity. While writing this book, many – most – of the choreographic works in (both mainstream and not) European venues staged human bodies moving, dancing, jumping, sweating, swirling; human bodies of technical skill and performative brilliance; human bodies expressing, emoting, experiencing. In other words, a large part of choreographic contemporaneity was not “expanded”. At the same time, resistance to choreographic expandedness was dwindling. Even within this short timeframe, discussions with students, other professionals in the dance field – dancers, choreographers, theorists, researchers, curators –, and non-specialised audiences indicated that staging the non-human and non-kinetic,

and choreographing non-human and non-moving media, were increasingly accommodated. The present of expanded choreography was, then, simultaneously becoming more-steadily anchored, *and* counter-balanced by alternative choreographic practices. Just as the abstract choreographies possible in the Feuillet system coexisted with a technical discipline of the body by dance masters [Chapter 2], and like expressionist dance coexisted with *Relâche*'s explorations of non-physical motion [Chapter 7], the historical present of expanded choreography coexists with other paradigms, resisting marginalisation without becoming dominant. It is not a failure that expanded choreography remains “a” paradigm, but, rather, a welcome limitation against a colonisation of the present. The fact that expanded choreography does not fully encompass the present is coupled by this book's non-exhaustive treatment of expandedness itself; these are (hi)stories waiting to be complemented and complexified by other manifestations, notably by non-European and non-Western perspectives of choreographic expansion.

As a fragment of a particular historical present, expanded choreography tells equally-particular choreographic histories, which are to be neither marginalised nor generalised. In this sense, the historical readings in this text are not claims against the utility and relative validity of other (corporeal-kinetic) readings of history – but, they are claims that both the latter and an expanded choreographic perspective are equally symptomatic of their visions of choreography. It may be preposterous<sup>3</sup> to consider Domenico da Piacenza [Chapter 3] or even Rudolf Laban [Chapter 8] under the notion of an expanded choreography; however, considering *any* notion of choreography as neutrally applicable in a transhistorical way – rather than insisting on the multiplicity that characterises choreographic history – is preposterous.

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If the stories we tell of the past are symptoms of our present situation, the stories we tell of our present are also, as the notion of the parallax<sup>4</sup> implies, the results of our views of the past. The three histories of the present explored in Part 2 – of choreographed/ic algorithms and videos [Chapter 4], choreographed/ic relations [Chapter 5], and choreographed/ic trees [Chapter 6] – are therefore told from the perspective of a multiple choreographic history. This is a history in which choreography can be diverse and contain paper choreographies, intermedia dramaturgies, and kinetic containments.

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3 Cf. Bal, Mieke: *Quoting Caravaggio: Contemporary Art, Preposterous History*, Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press 1999.

4 Cf. Foster, Hal: *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*. Cambridge/London: MIT Press, 1996, p. xii.

The multiplicity and diversity of choreographic history influences this text's reading of contemporary expanded choreography, by indicating that it does not follow a singular evolution – rather, it transforms itself – and that its different beings exist in multiple, overlapping ways. Consequently, this book's contemporary analyses identify expanded choreography's shifts and changes from – and not simple widenings of – pre-existing choreographic models, while discerning *several* different shifts and changes. A multiple choreographic history gives rise to a multiple present; thus, expanded choreography is a plural response to a non-linear history – a multiplicity that cannot be construed as a uni-directional phenomenon.

A choreographic-historical perspective reframes readings of the present by identifying the relevance of the past within the expanded present. As the case studies in this book have shown, it is not only aspects of contemporaneity that can be reflected in historical practices. A court ballet's decentralisation and de-hierarchisation of dance [Chapter 1], a *bassadanza's* non-moving movement [Chapter 3], a choreo-graphy's conception of choreography in written signs [Chapter 2], Francis Picabia's a-narrative dramaturgy and his collage-like stage constructions [Chapter 7], Laban's vision of a world in flux [Chapter 8], and the lettrists' explorations of a graphic or imaginary choreography [Chapter 9] form echoes or reflections in Mathilde Chénin, Mesa, or William Forsythe's works [Part 2] – and in expanded choreography in general. These links are not markers of proximity or resemblance, but of a possibly-unexpected relevance, appearing in the juxtapositional space between different historical moments. If no direct causal relations exist between the majority of the case studies analysed here, a multiple choreographic history sediments a conceptual and practical diversity within the notion of choreography that becomes manifest in their nevertheless existing relations. This leads to a view of expanded choreography that is neither a deterministic result of the past – uniformly continuous with history, moving in a smooth linear progression – nor can it be construed as a break, or a rupture, from the past. Choreographic/dance history is not effaced – victimised by new “nows” – or something that expanded choreography must liberate itself from; it is wholly relevant to the contemporary context.

Expanded choreography is a particular – rather than an all-encompassing – present, which shapes its historical perspective. Similarly, the choreographic history discussed here is a multiple *and* specific narrative – one that coexists with histories of body and kinaesthesia, movement and gesture, dance steps and phrases – which does not exclude other instances of expandedness, in other works, other artists, other periods not explored here. Consequently, the view of the present that this history informs is an equally-particular one, and it coexists with other contemporary dance histories. Indeed, while the specific historical narrative adopted in this text is largely focussed on decentralising

dance and moving bodies in choreographic conceptions, it does not aim to marginalise them. This decentralisation is an invitation to better understand a dancerly, kinetic, bodily choreographic model as well; to understand the discursive, artistic, intermedia, institutional, socio-political ways in which such a paradigm became dominant; to examine this dominance's effectiveness within its context(s); to nuance how motion, dance, and body are construed and relate to one another in this choreographic model; to understand the entanglements between the notion(s) of modernity and its choreographic model(s). In this way, a partial historical narrative may insist upon its own specificity, but not on its exclusions.

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These chapters do not only highlight (expanded) choreography's departures from – and critical relations and frictions with – dance and moving bodies; they also point to the potential of choreography being something *else*. Correspondingly, this book has considered how (expanded) choreography may itself become more plural, rather than focussing on what a dance-based, kinetic/physical choreography can do when journeying to other fields. This plurality implies that choreography cannot be understood in an “essential”, all-encompassing way. Rather, different conceptions of choreography penetrate each other and overlap; these penetrations and overlaps are markers of diverse conceptions of choreography that form a network, rather than pointing to a global commonality. A multiple and capable-of-becoming-other choreography thus appears. This multiplicity and diversity underlines that while expanded choreography may initially seem to imply that choreography can be universally applied to almost anything, it is choreography's capacity to pluralise in nevertheless always-particular ways that is at stake, not choreography's universality as a neutral or stable practice. A plural, non-essentialist view of expanded choreography does not suggest everything could be choreography, in a generic and undifferentiated way – rather, choreography can be ever-more multiple, but always specific. In this pluralist construal, the label “expanded” has a functional role – referring to specific kinds of choreographic practices – but it does not qualitatively distinguish “expanded choreography” from “choreography”. If choreography is multiple, expandedness is part of choreography, without being differentiated from it.

Circulating within this network in the present and past, this book has moved along horizontal planes of synchronicity – to reveal the choreographic diversity within a given timeframe – and vertical planes of transhistoricity – to juxtapose chronologically-disconnected choreographic instances and develop (particular) expanded choreographic histories. For example, Saint-Hubert's *La Manière de composer* [Chapter 1], Picabia's *Relâche* [Chapter 7], and Mesa's *Solo*

[Chapter 5] all point to a conception of choreography as assemblage. Their assemblages differ distinctly – from Saint-Hubert's order-based arrangement to Picabia's Dadaist collage-aesthetic and Mesa's emergent, fleeting effect. But, in their distinctive difference, they bear witness to the fact that the contemporary focus on choreographic assemblages needs to be framed by an understanding of historical variations. In other words, rather than the early-21<sup>st</sup> century ushering in a choreographic aesthetics and praxis of the assemblage, what appears in this context is *a specific kind* of choreographic assemblage. Similarly, Feuillet's choreo-graphy [Chapter 2], Isidore Isou's choreography [Chapter 9], and Chénin's choreographic works [Chapter 4] all illustrate choreography's multiple existence in different (im)material states. The conception of this existence and the choice of materials is different for each – from Feuillet's papers and signs, to Isou's empty stages, and Chénin's videos and algorithms – but their difference implies that choreography's ontological diversity is a chronologically wide-ranging phenomenon. Once again, the early-21<sup>st</sup> century shifts this multiplication of choreographic media towards data and information, rather than initiating the ontological multiplication itself. Finally, Domenico and Guglielmo [Chapter 3], Laban [Chapter 8], and Forsythe's [Chapter 6] choreographies are inscribed in non-anthropocentric frameworks that render the binarity of (im)mobility obsolete. Their transgression of anthropocentrism and this binary is, once more, variable – from Renaissance's containment to 20<sup>th</sup>-century modernity's universalist motion, and contemporaneity's virtual potential. But, this variability demands acknowledgement of its transhistoricity, again pointing to the present as a reconfiguration – rather than an initiation – of choreography's questioning of anthropocentrism and the imperative to move. More of these histories can be developed; for example, contemporary expanded choreography's focus on motion in urban space, or the choreography imposed by devices upon bodies, can also shift from the horizontal to the vertical – looking not for their ancestors, but their historical interlocutors.

In the contemporary works explored here – and in contemporary expanded choreography in general – choreography disengages itself from the teleological function of producing a specific kind of object or working with a specific kind of material. Chénin's works posit that choreography can have multiple ontologies, and can exist through different (in)tangible, (in)visible, (im)material substrates [Chapter 4]; Mesa's work proposes that, beyond this plurality of produced forms, choreography can also be associated with an act – be it the creative praxis of the choreographer or the choreography's own emergent happening – that occurs between, rather than within, choreographic media [Chapter 5] ; Forsythe's installation allows consideration of choreography as thought, perspective, and understanding, rather than as (non)physical “stuff” or as an act [Chapter 6]. Contemporary expansions thus demand radical recon-

sideration of ontological expectations about choreography – expectations about what choreography is. But, because these expansions happen on transhistorical planes, they also demand recognition that choreographic history counters such expectations, requiring an equal reconsideration of the entities that are historiographically validated as choreography.

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A plural view of choreography shows that (expanded) choreographies are also articulated in complex relationships with notions they at times (appear to) refuse. Choreographic expansions multiply corporeality to non-human, dephysicalised, depersonalised, microscopically-fragmentable or macroscopically-systemic bodies; they multiply motion to virtual, contained, possible, tendential, trace; they multiply dance formats, media, and performance. Past and present (expanded) choreography heterogeneously relates to a multidimensionality of dances, bodies, motions, and their interlinkages. In their very instability, these diverse relations point to the need to historicise and complexify ideas of dance, body, and motion, in order to add to the intersecting, shifting relationships they form with (expanded) choreography.

The non-essentialist diversity of choreography is also important to choreography's political being. From disciplining embodied subjects to structuring movement, from imposing repeatable – and therefore predictable – patterns of motion to inscribing postures and gestures, choreography takes up ethical and political dimensions, which are also prominent in discourse about expanded choreography.<sup>5</sup> However, because choreography is not essentially defined through a singular trait, this implies that its politics are not *a priori*, and do not transcend the multiplicity and diversity of its manifestations; rather, they are found in the specific configurations of different choreographic models. The blending of power with virtue in Domenico and Guglielmo's dances [Chapter 3]; the notion of order in court ballet and its potential association with the socio-political status of its practitioners [Chapter 1]; the ambivalent relationship of Beauchamp-Feuillet notations with monarchic, disciplinary, and nation-bound goals [Chapter 2]; the open-ness of a relational-algorithmic score [Chapter 4]; the fleetingness of an account of war told through fragments imbricating themselves in audience members' lived memory [Chapter 5]; the resistance and initiatives of a group of trees in response to a choreographic proposition [Chapter 6]; the subversion of institutionalised and class-related dance formats in a

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5 Cf. for example, Expanded Choreography. Situations, Movements, Objects..., Conference presentation, MACBA 2012, <http://www.macba.cat/en/expanded-choreography-situations> (August 2020).

1920s ballet [Chapter 7]; the rhythmical, harmonious, centralised management of (non-)human labour forces [Chapter 8]; a social project mediated through choreographic creation [Chapter 9] – these are all instances of choreographic politics that are not uniform, instances of choreography's diverse relations with diverse politics, instances forming a heterogeneous choreographic politics that can only be explored as a function of choreographic multiplicity.

A similar claim can be made about choreographic authorship. To be sure, questions such as who authored a work and what authorship itself implies depend on the institutional, economic, discursive, social, and other factors that structure the choreographic field at any given time. But, in order to consider a figure a choreographic author, compare their work and status to other understandings of the term, and have that figure participate in a heterogeneous history of choreographic authorship, a conception of choreography is needed that is not limited to the makers of bodily motions. This book provides several examples of figures whose choreographic authorship needs to be, at the very least, (re)assessed – not against a homogeneous diachronic standard but as an opportunity to diversify understandings of choreographic authorship. This includes interdisciplinary authors and projects, like Saint-Hubert's *maîtres d'ordre* [Chapter 1], Picabia's work for *Relâche* [Chapter 7], Isou's transfers between choreography and poetry [Chapter 9], Chénin writing motion with her body before coding it [Chapter 4]; multiple authors, as in the doubling of choreographer by a choreo-grapher [Chapter 2], or creating a choreographic task to be completed by trees [Chapter 6]; authors with (in)tangible creative products, from 17<sup>th</sup>-century *maîtres d'ordre* to Picabia, and from Picabia to Mesa [Chapter 5]; authors sharing their work with non-human models or agents, like Domenico and Guglielmo following the aesthetic precepts of nature [Chapter 3], or Laban observing the dance of materials [Chapter 8]; and authorship distributed across multiple beings, from the communities of spectators of lettrist imaginary dance to the wires, trunks, and branches of Forsythe's installation in Groningen.

The multiple expansions of choreography further underline the need for an interdisciplinary understanding of the term and the practices to which it applies. This means recognising artistic-discipline-boundary-crossing choreographic practices – as illustrated by Saint-Hubert [Chapter 1], *Relâche* [Chapter 7], lettrist choreography [Chapter 9], and Mesa's [Chapter 5] work – or the crossing of the boundaries of art as a posited “discipline” – as illustrated by Laban [Chapter 8] and Chénin [Chapter 4]. It also means posing this recognition as a stepping stone for the development of cross-discipline histories: of the concurrent anti-narrative turn of cinema and dance/choreography; of the con-



current dramaturgical turn of choreography and post-dramatic turn of theatre;<sup>6</sup> of the concurrent development of expanded choreography and notions such as “the architectural”, applicable beyond the design of buildings;<sup>7</sup> of the concurrent disciplinary institutionalisation of dance, music, and the visual arts in late-17<sup>th</sup>-century France, reflected in the form of Feuillet notations [Chapter 2]. It can mean, too, radically questioning medium specificity as a lens that inadvertently colours the reading of choreography, instead focusing on the skills, practices, methods, and reception processes implicated in intermedia choreographic work.

A further implication of this multifaceted view of choreography concerns how Western definitions of choreography project onto, and conceptually colonise, both non-dominant, local Western practices and non-Western ones. Postulating a plural view of choreography open to transformations allows a “provincialisation”<sup>8</sup> of any single choreographic model and its possibly-disproportionate influence. A non-essentialist consideration of choreography may thus help reduce the dominance of a European/Western viewpoint in characterisations of choreography; if choreography in Europe is not singular, it may equally be more attentive to its non-European counterparts.

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By providing a series of case studies, this book develops a progressive argument – not in the sense of a linear succession in which each step builds on the previous one, but in the sense of multiple layers within an argument, where multiple blocks support an idea. What has been developed, here, is a series of particular histories; and it is in the juxtapositional space between them that their relevance to one another emerges – a space waiting for more such histories that may never complete it, but that may populate and diversify it, until a complexity is formed that might come close to describing reality.

The ideas and analyses developed here have resulted in the writing of a linear text, with a beginning, middle, and end. Connections exist between its parts; terms recur; ideas re-appear, sometimes under different names; similarities arise between the elements; juxtaposition is at work between the different

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- 6 Cf. Lehmann, Hans-Thies: *Postdramatic Theatre*, Oxon/New York: Routledge 2006 [1999, trans. Karen Jürs-Munby].
  - 7 Martin, Reinhold: ‘Architectural Infrastructures and Cultural Techniques’ seminar syllabus, Columbia University, 2014, [http://www.columbia.edu/cu/arch/courses/syllabi/20141/A8906\\_2014\\_1\\_Martin.pdf](http://www.columbia.edu/cu/arch/courses/syllabi/20141/A8906_2014_1_Martin.pdf) (August 2020). This text benefited from Giulia Bini’s mention of the notion of the architectural, cf. Bini, Giulia: *ZKM Zentrum für Kunst und Medien - HfG Hochschule für Gestaltung. Media Space Display*, PhD thesis, Venice: IUAV 2017.
  - 8 Cf. Chakrabarty, Dipesh: *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press 2000.

chapters. These ideas and analyses could, perhaps more adequately, be drawn out in a mind map, bundles and articulations colour-coded and made visible; or they could – reflecting Christina Thurner’s suggestion on a *networked* historiography<sup>9</sup> – be entered into a database, where hyperlinks can form complex connections between different elements. In such a networked view, (expanded) choreography (and all its variants), dance (and its different manifestations), body (and its different beings), motion and immobility (and their diverse conceptions) would be mapped out alongside autonomy, medium specificity, intermediality, virtuality, arrangement, space and time, humanity and the non-human, thing and material, page and subject, immateriality and act, assemblage and narrative, dramaturgy and ecology. If the linearity of a text points to the non-linear articulations of its contents, this text insists upon a historiographic complexity that may indicate the text’s own limits.

A networked historiography is a historiography of folds. It looks for multidirectional links and refracted connections in which disparate and different expansions cross one other. Georges Didi-Huberman noted that ‘[o]ne must not say that there are historical objects belonging to such or such a time: it must be understood that *in each historical object all ages meet, collide, melt into each other in their forms, branch out, or overlap one another*’.<sup>10</sup> A networked historiography folds time, again and again, so that historical objects touch each other’s surface without being removed from their woven textile. Finding the fold that makes a link manifest is the preposterous beauty of juxtaposition.

The plurality of choreographic notions that this networked view illustrates, and the historical and contemporary narratives developed in this text, are examples of the very specificity that upsets homogeneous narratives. In this way, choreographic history – as much as the choreographic present – appears in figures of heterogeneity, diversity, and, at times, dissensus: Feuillet *partly* integrated the body in his system [Chapter 2], *Relâche* responded to *diverse* choreographic models simultaneously [Chapter 7], Forsythe engaged with motion in Groningen while not producing much of it [Chapter 6]; expanded choreography is plural. Michel de Certeau notes:

If, for some time, [historians] hoped for a “totalization” and believed that they could reconcile diverse systems of interpretation in a fashion accounting for all of their information, by priority historians are now concerned with the complex manifestations of [...] differences. In this way the area in which they are settling

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9 Thurner: *Time Layers, Time Leaps, Time Loss*, pp. 529–530.

10 Quoted in Lista, Marcella: *Play Dead: Dance, Museums, and the ‘Time-Based Arts’*, in: *Dance Research Journal* 46/3 (2014), p. 9.

can still, by analogy, bear the venerable name of the “fact”: the fact, such is the difference.<sup>11</sup>

In the approach to historiography – both of the present and past – adopted here, accepting diversity, heterogeneity, and dissensus is not a refusal to take a position, but is the very basis for taking one. In his seminal text *The Landscape of History*, John Lewis Gaddis writes:

[W]ith the passage of time, our representations *become* reality in the sense that they compete with, insinuate themselves into, and eventually replace altogether the firsthand memories people have of the events through which they’ve lived. Historical knowledge submerges participants’ knowledge of what took place: historians impose themselves upon the past just as effectively – but also as suffocatingly – as states do upon the territories they seek to control. We make the past legible, but in doing so we lock it up in a prison from which there’s neither escape nor ransom nor appeal [...] To reconstruct the real past is to construct an accessible but deformed past: it is to oppress the past, to constrain its spontaneity, to deny its liberty.<sup>12</sup>

The writing of history as a fixation, stabilisation, and oppression of the past may be – if histories are symptoms of their contexts – a symptom of a fixed, stable, potentially-oppressive present. Telling multiple histories is a way of refraining from this stately control upon the past; accepting a multiplicity within historical “truth” avoids an imposition on the past *and* the colonisation of the present and its potentialities. Telling these expanded choreographic histories has not been an attempt to stabilise the past, but an attempt to make it move along with a shifting, multiple present.

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11 Certeau, Michel de: *The Writing of History*, New York: Columbia University Press 1988 [1975, trans. Tom Conley], p. 81.

12 Gaddis, John Lewis: *The Landscape of History: How Historians Map the Past*, New York: Oxford University Press 2002, pp. 136, 138.



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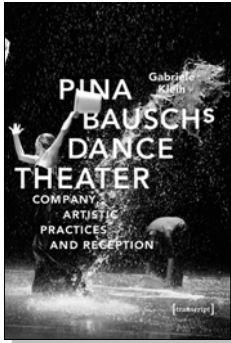
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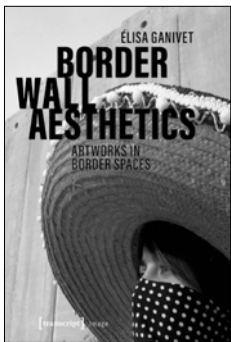
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