

Kind of Like Magic: Embodied Agency Explored Through Dance Practice

by

Ileanna Sophia Cheladyn

B.A., Simon Fraser University, 2018

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

in the

Department of Sociology and Anthropology
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

© Ileanna Sophia Cheladyn 2021

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

Summer 2021

Copyright in this work is held by the author. Please ensure that any reproduction or re-use is done in accordance with the relevant national copyright legislation.

Declaration of Committee

Name: Ileanna Sophia Cheladyn

Degree: Masters of Arts

Title: Kind of Like Magic: Embodied Agency Explored Through Dance Practice

Committee:

Chair: Jie Yang
Professor, Sociology and Anthropology

Lindsey Freeman
Supervisor
Associate Professor, Sociology and Anthropology

Peter Dickinson
Committee Member
Professor, Contemporary Arts

Dara Culhane
Committee Member
Professor, Anthropology

Alessandra Capperdoni
Examiner
Lecturer, Humanities

Ethics Statement

The author, whose name appears on the title page of this work, has obtained, for the research described in this work, either:

- a. human research ethics approval from the Simon Fraser University Office of Research Ethics

or

- b. advance approval of the animal care protocol from the University Animal Care Committee of Simon Fraser University

or has conducted the research

- c. as a co-investigator, collaborator, or research assistant in a research project approved in advance.

A copy of the approval letter has been filed with the Theses Office of the University Library at the time of submission of this thesis or project.

The original application for approval and letter of approval are filed with the relevant offices. Inquiries may be directed to those authorities.

Simon Fraser University Library
Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada

Update Spring 2016

Abstract

This thesis thinks about agency through dancing. It is also a text that senses into power, choice-making, vulnerability, care, and knowledge as they emerge in both agency and dancing. I use the notion of scores, specifically improvisation scores, as a theoretical and methodological framework to implicate the relationship between structure and agency alongside the sensation of movement (kinesthesia). Drawing on conversations with six local dance artists and my own dance practice, I consider how improvisation generates knowledge that is relevant to developing more nuanced accounts of agency. I posit that agency is a site of excess, something that exceeds the bounds of its score or structure, and that improvisation is an embodied modality that accesses this excess in meaningful ways.

Keywords: dance; agency; scores; improvisation; kinesthesia

Acknowledgements

This is a thank you. Thank you, Diego, Sarah, Lexi, Erika, Vanessa, and Alex, for being my participants, my focus group, my inspirations, and my friends. Your brilliance shines so bright and to think bodily in such nuanced, tender ways with you both within and beyond the context of research is an honour. Thank you, Dara, for always recentering me on what is important, for showing me the trail of sensory studies and guiding me along the way. Thank you, Peter, for extending your wide net of 'performance' to me as an essential framework for practice and writing. Thank you, Lindsey, for the perfectly timed "freaking out is okay!" and for the generosity to consistently encourage me to go, go, go beyond what is easy and immediate. Thank you, Bascom; it is a gift to think with you and be supported by you since my early days of wanting to dance with anthropology. Thank you, Pam, for your insistence that academia should not, will not flay me. Thank you, Cheyanne and Chantelle, without whom I would not have survived grad school; your support is nourishing and has kept me focused on the questions that matter. Thank you, Alex K. and Larisa, for being eager early readers of my work since childhood. You are all incredible.

Thank you to all the people I've been able to share a studio with over the past two years; everyone's diligence and commitment to make dance happen amidst a pandemic that challenged some of our fundamental practices of intimacy and connection has been nothing but inspiring and reassuring.

Thank you to SSHRC, BCGS, and the Department of Sociology and Anthropology for the funding they made available to me. Thank you widely to the Sociology and Anthropology faculty who have fastidiously challenged me to do what I do in all its strangeness. This has been a good academic home.

Thank you to Josiah. For being a superb partner as I endured so many weird growing pains in the course of this project, and for being exquisitely present as we throw ourselves into new growth. Thank you for literally sitting next to me while I wrote this.

And thank you to this fleshy body of mine, for all of its wisdom that humbles me every time I ask anything of it, for being so available and vulnerable, for holding everything.

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Declaration of Committee | ii |
| Ethics Statement | iii |
| Abstract | iv |
| Acknowledgements | v |
| Table of Contents | vi |
| List of Figures | vii |
| “Begin Whenever You’re Ready” | 1 |
| A Sense of the Score to Come | 6 |
| Scores | 10 |
| The Subscore | 11 |
| Caring Subscores | 17 |
| Consider an Epistemology of the Unknown | 22 |
| Distant Dancing: some methods | 25 |
| Practices of Knowing I Don’t Know | 27 |
| Self-Talk, Re-Chunking, and More Scaled Scores | 30 |
| Vulnerability: I have all my baggage with me and it’s neatly packed | 33 |
| Yes and No | 38 |
| What is Agency? | 42 |
| Iteration//Habit//Past | 42 |
| Practical-Evaluative//Impulse//Present | 45 |
| Projectivity//Desire//Future | 49 |
| Re-Chunking the Flux | 53 |
| Moving Things | 54 |
| Theory of a Crack | 55 |
| A Range of Knowledge is like a Range of Motion | 59 |
| Paranetical Reflexivity | 62 |
| Concern is Nice to Have | 63 |
| Re-Chunking as Sharing | 65 |
| CONCLUSION | 71 |
| References | 77 |
| Appendix Scores used during fieldwork | 80 |

List of Figures

| | |
|--|----|
| Figure 1: Zoom recording screen capture..... | 26 |
| Figure 2: Zoom recording screen capture..... | 26 |
| Figure 3: self-talk screen capture 1 | 28 |
| Figure 4: self-talk screen capture 2 | 29 |
| Figure 5: leg positions | 56 |

“BEGIN WHENEVER YOU’RE READY”

I’m in the studio. The sun is shining and I’m wearing my Adidas pants that are 4 sizes too big. I start on the floor, laying on my back, and I let myself breathe. This dance started a while ago, on my walk to the studio, maybe a few years ago. This is a dance in the midst of other dances. I breathe until the bones in my arms move to satisfy the need to stretch out and away from my body. I slide my arms from my hips along the floor over my head where I can take in a big, deep breath that initiates the bones in my legs to pull out and downwards. A spiral between hands and feet brings my spine into conversation with my limbs and I am now wiggling slowly sideways. Smooth and sequenced, I want to be with every step between joints and articulations that allow my movement to build in effort and size until I find myself upright. I find myself. I find myself somewhere I wasn’t before and sense the time between then and now as a moment of being temporarily lost. Attention has wandered and stuck; I’m caught on my activated verticality that was horizontality just a few beats back but this snag in my attention keeps me moving. I somehow arrived here in passing and my memory of the transformation is left blurry, yet the clarity of something remains.

What is the lineage of a weird moment in the studio becoming a theoretical impulse?

A weird moment of dancing is when a kinesthetic experience feels odd, out of place, even fantastic or brilliant without immediately disclosing why or how it is such. The brilliance shines a light on what is there. Weirdness compels me to sense into something in particular, a certain fullness that has an emergent direction. A weird moment is something noticed in the familiar territory of my dancing. A working definition of “weird” in the context of dancing and improvising is this: “Wow. How did I just do that? How did that happen? What even happened?”

To a greater or lesser degree, most moments dancing in the studio could be described as “weird” in the colloquial sense of strange and extraordinary; a dancer dancing can inspire a gamut of wide-eyed responses from an audience with their coordinated and proprioceptive excellence and contorted choreographed affectations. Yet the weirdness I write of here – as the danced experience of “whoa, what was that?” – has a tonality of a particular *something* that pushes past or out of sensation into a

thickened and weighty thought. The weirdness articulates with other ideas and begins to coalesce into something. To follow the lineage of movement-becoming-theory feels like a magical tangled process, chunked and reliant upon the imprecision of memory within a world (and self) in vulnerable flux. The magic of dancing is its weirdness. Weird moments hit my reflex of curiosity like a yawn of bodily desire; weirdness signifies that something is there to work with, move with, play with. The weird moment I notice most as my attention dilates around the sensation of something becoming-theoretical is the interstitial and transitional moment of choice, the always in-progress choice-making and decision-taking present in my improvising (Manning, 2007). How do I make a choice when I am improvising, how do I seize or act upon a field of possibilities when I dance, and how does this field of possibilities come into awareness such that it becomes available to action?

I approached these questions through my own dance practice as well as through weekly Zoom conversations with an invited group of six local dance artists. These two fieldwork sites – my body/practice and the words I shared with my peer/participants – allowed “choice” to unfurl into a sprawling vocabulary that spanned shared and divergent histories, techniques, habits, curiosities, values, tastes, and needs all tethered to the embodied experience of dancing. For 11 weeks between October 2020 and January 2021 Alex, Diego, Sarah, Vanessa, Erika, Lexi and I met over Zoom. These six artists all orbit and inhabit a shared dance community here in Vancouver and their practices are interdisciplinary in their expansion into music and sound, material arts, installation art, craft, text, film, and production. They are my friends, colleagues, and collaborators and they acted as my focus group, my advisory panel, my peer-mentors, and my participants. I asked these six to be part of my research because we share what feels like an aesthetic and critical sensibility towards the practice and field of dance. Each of my participants work with nuanced principles of care and this was something I wanted to both explore deeper and learn from.

Our unfurling of the concept of choice as it relates to our dance practices was grounded in conversation – in words and text. As a group, we gathered digitally knowing the limitations of Zoom and how it cannot fully communicate or share a feeling, a sense of presence, the fullness of a gesture. In other words, my body was the only body I had available during my research. The irony of doing embodied research without other bodies is not lost on me, but the constraint of digital gatherings in the midst of a

pandemic offered new and pressured possibilities for improvisation. The conversations we had as a group shifted and settled through my body as I improvised alone in the studio. Moving from words, to dancing, to words, to dancing, to words, this thesis is one part of a cycle of bodies, ideas, and choices that are always on the move.

Through the conversations with my peer/participants, a distinct vocabulary developed for us, between us. This vocabulary is oriented toward the drive to bring our practices, experiences, and sensations into relation and reflects our wordy digital encounters. Pleasure, care, consent, and magic were hyper-valuable words for us in our attempts to share and express our embodied understandings of choice in movement.

So too were ability, abstraction, accessibility, accidental aesthetics, accidents (generally), accountability, aesthetic, agility, archive, athleticism, attention, attunement, audiencing, authenticity, authorship, autonomy, awareness, baggage, bandwidth, beauty, being open to an audience, being seen, belief, change, choice, choreography, chunking, clarity, codes, communication, communing, complexity, consistency, constraint, control, creativity, crisis, curiosity, delight, denial, desire, divining, duration, endurance, evolving, feedback, force, form, freedom, future, generative, gesture, guilt, habit, history, holding, imagination, impossibility, impulse, innovation, intensity, intention, interesting, interpretation, jargon, judgement, knowledge, legibility, listening, mapping, masochism, memory, modality, need, nervous systems, newness, noodling, noticing, pain, perfection, performance, persistence, play, potentiality, power, presence/being present, prioritization, proprioception, range of possibilities, resistance, resources, responsibility, return, rigour, safety, scarcity, soft-no, sophistication, stamina, stealing, structure, subjectivity, subversion, support, tactics, temporality, “the work”, thing and thingness, threshold, tightness, translation, transparency, trauma porn, trust, trying, un/coolness, virtuosity, vulnerability, witness. This vocabulary is part of a shared lineage of kinesthetic moments becoming-theory and I activate some of these words further in the coming pages.

What does it feel like to make a choice when dancing? How do I know there is a choice to make, and what do I draw on to enact the choice? What is the flicker of a sensation as it begins to accumulate and form into something almost graspable? What is the language of this moment (and why value language here at all)? Through presence and attention, choice comes into awareness because I am open to the unknown next

moment, and the language of this moment remains mutable and full; full of possibilities, habits, desires, impulses, memories, and associative vectors of value and belonging.

These questions around choice and knowledge come out of a life entangled with dance (as a form and technique, a community, a cultural object of entertainment, an art object, a salable product, a history, a political site), and dancing (as an action, a practice, a performative mode, a modality of building and sustaining interpersonal relationships, a form of selfcare, a creative act). My dancerly lineage of technique, values, tastes, and aesthetics comes out of a eurocentric, western, ballet-adjacent history that can be called concert dance or contemporary dance. This means that I was trained to point my toes, lift my legs high, as well as lunge deep, slide and wiggle along the floor, use text and scripts, perform with a front-facing audience in mind, and integrate somatic principles like push/pull/reach/yield.¹ To think about choice is to face the history of this technical lineage as it has sedimented into and shaped my embodied presence in my world; to think about choice is to ask how dance's history and my own history come to inform the choices I make as I dance.

Choice, as something that I make when dancing, is also an activity of involvement or of being involved in the creation of the world through my capacity for action. This could also be called “agency” which is “attributable to those persons (and things) who/which are seen as initiating causal sequences of a particular type, that is, events caused by acts of mind or will or intention, rather than the mere concatenation of physical events... As a result of this exercise of agency, certain events transpire (not necessarily the specific events which were 'intended' by the agent)” (Gell, 16). For Carrie Noland, “a theory of agency that places movement center stage is essential to understanding how human beings are embodied within – and impress themselves upon – their world” (Noland, 2). Agency in dance becomes a container for thinking about the kinesthetic experience of choice-making.

¹ Push/pull/reach/yield is an idea developed by Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen that pairs push with pull, reach with yield as distinct and connected developmental movement patterns that begin at birth. To push something with my arms, I must pull my shoulders back in space; to reach out for something being given to me, I have to yield my hand to receive it. See Cohen, B. B. (2018).

This invites me to then ask: What does agency feel like, and what sort of agency do dancers have (And is agency something one can “have”)?

The agentic act of choosing a movement while dancing can exist on multiple registers at once. I can choose a movement in terms of gesture, image, shape, tone (muscular, emotional), pressure, quality, or speed. But these dynamics are not separate or independent; I have yet to find a way to separate these dynamic elements in my body with as much ease as I can with words. In practice, in the doing, certain embodied qualities tend to be linked to certain pressures, shapes, speeds, or tones. A floaty quality when paired with a rounder shape might move slowly, but when paired with more angular shapes floatiness can push my movement into quickness. When one dynamic is fixed through choreography the possibilities of other elements are tightened and the field of possible choices narrows. In the case of a set choreography (like a ballet) where every move from start to finish is accounted for, when every angle (and sometimes a way of breathing) has been determined and set by the choreographer, only small pockets of choice may remain. Emotional tonality and the accidental angle of a pinky may be all the room left for a dancer to choose within. Set choreography does not remove the possibility for agency completely, but it constrains the choices a dancer can move through into more nuanced spaces of action and expression. Tighter constraints reduce the space available for the movement of choice-making on the fly.

Yet, the knot of ideas and selves that activate a set and pinned-down choreography are always in motion. Even in the tightest, most constrained conditions, there is still movement. Like the movement of moments becoming-theory. My interest in following the motion of a moment, a sensation, an idea, leads me to look at the broadest possible field for agency in dance: improvisation. Improvisation can refer to those small moments within a set choreography that allows a pinky to wander out of its prescribed line, but here improvisation refers to the field of improvised dance that demands “nearly instantaneous responsiveness to a broad palette of sensation and perception” (Gere, xv). Improvisation is a practice of tacking “between the familiar/reliable and the unanticipated/unpredictable” (Foster, 3). Dance improvisation is, in the simplest terms, the spontaneous composition of a dance. Improvisation is not, for me or my peer/participants, the opposite of choreography. It rather sits in relation to choreography as another way to think about movement, choice, and presence in practice. In its spontaneity, improvisation can be a tool to generate set choreography, but it can also be

a “metaphysical practice” (Albright, 259), turning away from repeatability (as in replication or doing a choreography over and over with the goal of sameness) and instead turns toward the nexus of experience, sensation, and attention as they manifest in the present context. Improvising has for me become an automatic process of presence and action; like breathing, it can be easeful, supportive, and working quietly in the background, or it can be laboured, constrained, blocked, and interrupted. Improvisation, as tool and practice, means and end, is something that attunes me to my agency as I make choices in the moment.

These improvised choices are not made from nothing. The agentic mode of choice-making in improvisation is supported by a structure which can be called a score, or a set of broad instructions that more or less inform the field of possible choices I can make while dancing. We could think of “sit back, relax, and enjoy the show” as a popular score offered to audiences as they wait for the yet-to-be-known performance to unfold. Scores hold improvisation and improvisers to the task at hand as an invitation to experience something without pressures of being correct or incorrect. What “scores” as an analytic device can offer my kinesthetic questions of choice and agency is a thread to follow. When improvising, there is no guarantee that I can or will adhere precisely to the score’s instructions. The instant I stand (or lunge) on the edge of a choice, the possibilities to subvert, resist, turn away, reroute, or explode the score also become choices. The score cannot contain the excess that is my agency as I make and take choices. The score cannot account for the possibility that I might lie down and imagine the score. The score cannot predict my interpretation of an instruction as it becomes lived in movement. Alfred Gell, thinking about art objects and the social interactions they mediate, wrote: “As a result of this exercise of agency, certain events transpire (not necessarily the specific events which were 'intended' by the agent)” (Gell, 16). The excess is this moment of “not necessarily”; it is the instance when the knowledge generated by doing the score compels me further into the unknown spaces that the score cannot constrain.

A SENSE OF THE SCORE TO COME

My research continues a lineage of questioning the relationship between structure and agency (Bourdieu, 1990) but takes a distinctly embodied approach that slips into the underappreciated domain of kinesthesia (or the sense of movement) within

sensory ethnography (Sklar, 2008; Noland, 2009). I am thinking about how “actors reconstruct their agentic orientations and thereby alter their own structuring relationships to the contexts of action” (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998, 1009). My research draws on my doubled practice of scholarship and dancing and is a quirky artifact of their alonsideness in my body and thought. Scores and excess seem to solve some of the problems of structure/agency where neither can be privileged, and neither can be pinned down long enough to definitively categorize a gesture as being purely predetermined or wholly unique. Yet, my scholarly practice asks me to wrestle with the issue of “pinning down”, of writing a text that carries with it the baggage of a logocentric tradition (Derrida, 1988). The reliance on “our collective knowledge being stored outside of human bodies and minds in written texts” (Classen & Howes, 2014, 171) creates the unique challenge of citing a body of knowledge that is not inherently textual. I must wrestle with the dancerly knowledge in my body and in the words of my peer/participants that manifests as an associative bundle of growing ideas and histories too slippery and too large to adequately write into a thesis. To pin down an improvisation is the task of the score, yet what emerges within eludes language (even in its own polysemous prowess, language remains insufficient for the excess of movement). The wordiness of this research is intended to think – through practice and in the doing – about how the knowledge generated from improvisation can be shared, how ideas are softly paused in a moment of reflection before we continue on.

Arnd Schneider and Christopher Wright (2010), anthropologists who think about the intersection of contemporary art and ethnographic methodologies, write: “How can fieldwork (as a fleeting experience) be captured and represented in other ways than by an artificially crafted text, that frequently enclose forcible completion” (20). While I take issue with the “artificiality” of a text (especially as I squeeze my whole being to produce something I am proud of through my writing here), the question of how to communicate and think about something fleeting and experiential is a priority. It will not be enough to list all that happens in the fullness of a moment knowing that unknown-weirdness itself can eclipse such a list. Instead, this is a text that seeks to play with the framing, the score of writing, such that movement and fleeting experiences can continue to exist in their kinesthetic ways.

The task I have given myself is to look at how dancing, as a kinesthetic experience of choice-making, is also a way of dealing with agency and its discourse.

This is an experiment to describe how my dance practice becomes a container for practicing academic rigour without feeling over-constrained (without my choices feeling too tightly determined or calcified) by the implications of such rigour. What excites me generally about the connection between agency and kinesthesia is the potentiality to try something new. Both agency and kinesthesia suffer from a similar assumption: that their reality or experience is incommensurate with text or even description (Magnat, 2016; Spatz, 2015, 2019; Noland, 2009; Manning & Massumi, 2014; Samudra, 2008). I am concerned about agency because it is not ascribed to bodiliness in the same way that it is ascribed to “mind” and such disembodied orientations of ideas continue to alienate us from our own power, sense of self, or even the virtue of perception and experience. Confronting the primacy of “mind” by resituating knowledge and action into an embodied register is exciting. As Deleuze (1983) writes: “To remind consciousness of its necessary modesty is to take it for what it is: a symptom; nothing but the symptom of a deeper transformation and of the activities of entirely non-spiritual forces” (39). The “mind” attempts to exert control over the impulses and desires of a lustful, yearning, excitable body as it seeks and reacts to sensation. Dance, in its own entangled theories of sensation, might have something to say about how knowledge is generated as it exceeds the reigns of “mind”.

I hope to make sense of the methodological implications of using dance to think through agency and its challenges. With choice and constraint taking the lead, dance as method becomes less slippery as I poke at canons of legibility in both dance and anthropology. The sensate awareness that is well inscribed in my own body delineates an intimate kinesphere of knowledge that I employ to connect discourses of structure, power, subjectivation, and agency to the act and experience of dancing. Teasing out these threads through the shared vocabulary developed with my peer-participants requires an improviser’s tact and adaptability.

To do a score, a foundation of shared knowledge, skill, and values, or what I call a subscore, is needed. With the intention of offering the necessary information to you, the reader, the text moves from a place of description and explanation toward more playful ends so that we can improvise in the excess of ideas and experiences herein. Nonetheless, the intended may have unintended results. This text weaves in and out of itself, much like how the fieldwork process manifested; bits and spurts, here and there, alone and together, and always in excess of itself. There are hours of conversations,

years of practice, unnoticed habits and signifiers of local values and tastes that cannot be accounted for within the text proper, but come to support it, me, as it becomes-theory. The discontinuous feeling to fieldwork done during a pandemic remains integrated and continuous through its looping back and accumulating layers. My body is the constant in its inconsistent ways as it leads this attempt to share pieces of a practice on the move.

So, let us imagine this text like the roaming attention we can have in our body, and between our body and environment. With a swift turn or twitch, our attention can land somewhere new without our asking it; one moment we sense the weight of our bones settling into the chair, couch, floor, street, soil, and the next moment we are attending to the bird's song that reminds us of a different time. Memories and ideas are repeated but will not be identical as they articulate and intersect with other repetitions, voices, concepts, and ideas. Just as when I improvise, I return to familiarity to see where else I go from there.

I turn toward scores as a viable, interesting, and valuable methodology for practice-based research and a methodology for thinking about writing with movement because a score begins with an invitation. The implication of offering or giving someone a score to do is that it will be met with openness. A score immediately requires those involved to be willing to step into the unknown, willing to transform, willing to go through something unpredictable and vulnerable. To give you, the reader, a score, I need this preface to reiterate that we only approximately know what we are getting ourselves into. We must be open and prepared to meet something that challenges us and simultaneously allow "no" to always be an option.

SCORES

Scores are something I learned about while in dance school, but only took serious interest in once working as a professional, experiencing the ways a score can be employed to invite particular movements, sensations, themes, relationships, spatial organizations, and other, yet to be named axes of focus. I also encountered the term “scores” in a text by Joe Dumit (2018) that explained how anthropological theory can operate like an improvisation score; “at the core of any text is a theory of improvisation” (54). It reminded me of Charles Lemert’s sensitive introduction in Social Theory: the multicultural, global, and classic reader (2018) that sees theory as “a source of uncommon pleasure” (1). The playfulness, the profound and transformative experiences I have had in the studio while doing scores became scholastically valid by Dumit’s text. Or rather, what I had considered as an inarticulable dance-thing, the magic of improvising, was shown to me as potentially articulable with a scholarly practice. Dancing becomes a theoretical impulse.

A score can be many things, but in its most generous formulations it is:

- “a set of instructions that guides a group of people or an individual to interact with each other with particular materials” (O’Connor, 2019, 112)
- “a set of instructions that requires interpretation” (Dumit, 2018, 53)
- “a set of rules determined in advance [of the performance]” (Foster, 2003, 4)

A score can also be:

- “verbal propositions in improvising dance.” (Millard, 2016, 1)
- “a representation of the [dance] piece itself, a template which holds within it the detail, in linear time, of what you will eventually see or hear.” (Burrows, 2010, 141)
- and “a tool for information, image and inspiration, which acts as a source for what you will see, but whose shape may be very different from the final realisation.” (ibid)
- “a way of being with the world... in this state of presence and openness... accepting all stimuli.” (Alex)

A score, then, is a recipe for doing something that is situated within a nexus of technique, know-how, and legibility. More specifically, an improvisation score – because we can also think of scores in terms of set choreography or a musical composition –

constrains the possible choices to be made and taken in the forthcoming moments of dancing. We can also understand “score” to be the document itself, the archival survivor of a dance that once existed. With the written document of a score, the kinesthetic resonances and memories of what was done and felt can hold the possibility to return anew to the dance. Scores are the documentation of the past, present, and future; the remaining description of a dance done, what I am engaging in now, and what I might dance sometime soon.

A score gives the scaffolding for what will transpire; sometimes the scaffolding is intricate, sometimes the scaffolding is bare and open. A score requires that all participants know (explicitly or implicitly) the parameters of the subscore: the supporting principles, values, and beliefs that guide the dancers’ immediate choices to ensure they remain within the unspoken bounds of the score. These supporting elements are usually the implied, unspoken elements that foundationally constrain an improviser’s choices. A subscore could be considered a meta-score, or a set of meta-constraints found within the values of a community of embodied practice.

THE SUBSCORE

When doing score-based improvisation, I use three ingredients. The score, the subscore, and the practitioner.

This is an example of a score, created by my peer/participant Sarah during fieldwork:

- Insular score (a reflection of my dance training)
- Be in constant motion
- Notice the parts that refuse to be in motion with you
- Overcompensate, overexert, repeat repeat repeat
- Be simultaneously static and flowing

The score here gives us some open but explicit direction as to what we might do. It offers quality (static and flowing) and task (motion) and tells us the pacing or sense of time (constant, no pauses and no arrests). The subscore in this instance relies upon an unspoken shared physical vocabulary and set of values, as well as the contexts in which

it is received and enacted. The practitioner then employs their skills and knowledge, as guided by the score and subscore; here is where the unexpected, the novel, the new, and the subversive can emerge. Within the space for enactment that the score provides, we can find the excess that comes to shape the lived potentiality for the score, and ultimately the potential for meaning to become palpable in its own plurality.

We could read the above score to be inclusive of all motion: walking, swinging arms, flickering fingers, deep and slow squats, the mortal circulation of blood and breath, eye movement, shifting weight between the left foot and the right foot, as well as the more “dancey” choices that often involve increasingly complex organizations of limbs and weight. Perhaps if we received this score in the tight intimacy of our living rooms, we would be inclined toward movement that was stationary in space and pedestrian in quality. Conversely, if we were to receive this score in a studio-setting, surrounded by fellow dancers, the subscore might narrow to an increased virtuosity of spiralling trajectories, level changes, and sequencing through the spine, as well as a more performative quality.² The realm of possible “motion” the dancer draws on is predicated on the interpretation of the subscore. The subscore can also subtly define the performance space: can I leave the room or studio and it still be understood as being part of the score; is there an “on-stage” or “off-stage” area of the play-space; is there a “front” or imagined audience to perform towards; and is it okay to stay on the spot the whole time? The questions that emerge out of the subscore are not typically worked through or answered explicitly. Rather, these subscore questions are a sign of being part of a shared technique and disciplinary knowledge. The play of improvisation comes in when navigating the score, the subscore, and the performers’ or practitioners’ own interests, idiosyncrasies, and curiosities. This process of navigation, as a potential site of agency, is contentious. Is it a *conscious* process, am I actively tracking the relevant techniques? Is there any room in the quickness and the fullness of dancing to notice and act upon disciplinary knowledge?

² A “performative quality” here refers to the sense of performing for an audience where the legibility of one’s moves are placed within the context of dance discourses, techniques, histories, communities, and values. This quality is yoked with a feeling of performing for another and maintains a certain seriousness specific to the performance moment. In other words, a fourth-wall will likely be created between performer and witness/audience (even if there is no one watching).

I think of Pierre Bourdieu's "habitus" when I think about the subscore. Habitus is the set of "principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes" (1980, 56). Habitus encapsulates the relationship that structure has with personal action and agency as contextualized by a specific community, culture, or place. Habitus also refers to a sense of belonging, a sense of knowing the rules of the local "game" one is practically engaged in. Bourdieu (1980) writes: "Because native membership in a field implies a feel for the game in the sense of a capacity for practical anticipation of the 'upcoming' future contained in the present, everything that takes place in it seems sensible: full of sense and objectively directed in a judicious direction" (66). This "feel for the game" is the implicit knowledge of the subscore. The subscore is not explicitly relayed, but its logic comes to shape how one takes the dance-space and what gestures or techniques one draws on in the act of choice-making. Yet, the subscore is not something one can catalogue or know in its entirety. "It is because agents never know completely what they are doing that what they do has more sense than they know" (Bourdieu, 1980, 69). There is an element of unavoidable misrecognition that I will fall into when trying to identify, to understand the subscore of a score because sometimes dancing is just dancing without a theoretical impulse, without the need to know why or how it is that I am dancing a particular way. It must be enough that I trust the kinesthetic sensations or relationships and connections I move through while doing a score. This "unawareness of the unthought presuppositions that the game produces and endlessly reproduces, thereby reproduc[es] the conditions of its own perpetuation" (Bourdieu, 1990, 67). I reproduce the field of dance that the subscore of the score is shaped by reflexively, by virtue of my already belonging to the field.

Habitus, like the subscore, is something that exists across time and experience in the sense that the near-past (of learned technique) is brought into the present through practice. "The body believes in what it plays at: it weeps when it mimes grief. It does not represent what it performs, it does not memorize the past, it *enacts* the past, bringing it back to life" (Bourdieu, 1990, 73, emphasis original). I am enacting the past by enacting the history of principles and values that make up the subscore, and I may even enact my own past when I do a movement I know well. But I am also challenging the past, remaking the past to new ends, and bringing the past into a new situation that asks for that memory to be reconfigured to potentially take on new meaning beyond the scope of

the habitus I work within. Scores are not only traces of the past, but they are also in between stable temporal positionalities. As my peer/participant Diego said “we cannot fetishize the present, as if it’s cut off from past or future because we have to coexist with them. We also have to live in all points in time without expecting one will give us a correct answer.” To re-enact the pieces of the past that the subscore holds on to is also to be constantly updating, pushing, challenging, and bringing in new facets of excess that the subscore did not previously contain. Habitus seems to forget that history can be changed in an instant by virtue of reactivating its principles in a new present.

In this vein, habitus puts too much emphasis on unconscious (or unthought) enactments of technique and its conditions. Habitus glosses over the body of knowledge that lives both in and beyond unconscious action. Ben Spatz (2015) quotes Bourdieu to update the concept of habitus in this exact way: “According to Bourdieu, habitus is learned through a ‘practical mimesis’ that ‘implies an overall relation of identification’ rather than any conscious effort.” (Bourdieu, 1980, 73, quoted in Spatz, 2015, 51). Habitus lacks the “continuous and mutually constituting transformation, back and forth, between the two categories of conscious and unconscious knowledge, or what one *has* (knowledge) and what one *is* (identity)” (Spatz, 2015, 51). The subscore is consciously learned and it is an unconscious support to dancing. My reliance upon the subscore when I am improvising can be seen as unconscious, but it is something that I learned through practice and observation over years and through various experiences. The score might be considered more conscious than the subscore – the score is an explicit and communicated set of instructions – but the subscore has also tacked between the conscious and unconscious registers of knowledge and engagement.

As I am improvising, dancing through a score, I can play with the technical shorthand for the subscore that has emerged into a sort of habitus. When I push my upper body into a twist that delays my lower body in gliding along the floor, I am thinking about how this might relate to the above score in terms of overcompensation or refusal; but I am also sensing how such a twist is allowable given my relationship to the field from which the score was generated.

The score-subscore relationship gets messy when using dance as the example so let us use a familiar analogy relevant to our shared moment here: paper-writing.³

An academic paper has the basic score of:

- (Abstract)
- Introduction
- Body
- Conclusion
- References
- (Appendices)

The subscore in this example is that the enactment uses written language (maybe including images and diagrams and figures, but definitely typed on a word processing software), is set in a legible font and font size, the text remains within the boundaries of the margins, and a “really good” text will communicate an idea or argument clearly and with “style”. The writer of this text will draw on their explicit knowledge of the score (as well as the score of the idea they wish to lay out), their implicit knowledge of what a text “ought” to be (and who their audience is) and then allow their flair and personality to shape the qualities and textures of the text. The subscore is the disciplinary knowledge of techniques, values, tastes, and beliefs; the subscore is the understanding that I here need to cite my claims and explain my terms for academic folks who might not be involved in dance practice.

It is this presence of flair, personality, or even “je ne sais quoi”, that I consider to be the zone of excess, or agency, within the context of a score. This zone is where subversion, resistance, rejection, reification, and duplication of the score takes place. The zone of excess is where the various agentic actions of a body in motion meet – head on – the structure of the score. This space is where I see nuance and difference to arise out of a dichotomous application of agency: yes or no; do it or don’t do it. Engaging in the excess of a score, by way of one’s moving and reacting body, is to refine “agency” to also include the wide field of “what if we did it *this* way, rather than *that* way?” An improvisation score *could* be rewritten to then be given to a dancer in an updated form, but the doing of the score brings about the potential for its immediate and unpredictable

³ Or thesis-writing! I am just doing a score! This is all a score!

rewrite, negation, and reincarnation. Agency, as contextualized bodily in an improvisation score, happens in the doing. Agency and excess, as contextualized in the doing of this thesis-score, is how I avoid the headings of “chapter 1” and integrate information across sections rather than compartmentalize it.

Said differently, the relation between agency and the embodied directness of improvised dance can be understood through a Foucauldian conceptualization of power and subjectivation, or the process of subject-formation (Ness, 2011; Butler, 1997). Judith Butler (1997) describes subjectivation as the process by which one becomes a subject through a double movement of subordination and subject formation (29). Through forms of knowledge, discourses, institutions, and techniques of power, a subject is socially constructed through submission to these powers (3). This socially constructed nature of subjectivation makes subjectivity – the experience of being a subject – a situated and historical process, rather than isolated, individual, and ahistorical (Biehl, Good, & Kleinman, 2007). For Butler, subjectivation “consists precisely in this fundamental dependency on a discourse that we never chose, but that, paradoxically initiates and sustains our agency” (Butler, 1997, 2). Agency becomes the contradictory product of subjectivation whereby the discursive powers that delineate a liveable realm of sociality for the subject are both reiterated through the subject and transformed through this inexact repetition. Thus, subjectivation circumscribes an interior and an exterior in the relationship of ‘self’ to ‘power’ where the translation of the power from which the subject is fashioned is imperfectly reproduced through the life of the subject. This imperfect translation of power is the locus of agency. Agency is thus the “excess” of subjectivation.

A score then becomes a site and technology of subjectivation. Doing the score, while privileging the unknown bursts, swipes, and turns of a body in movement, can move with dissent against the boundaries of what is intended to be included in the score to subvert entrenched values and ideologies. Taken in a broader social context, doing a score and engaging with the implicit subscore can move with protest against the norms that shape and define social engagement. Susan Leigh Foster (2003), in thinking about nonviolent protests such as the sit-ins and occupations in recent US history writes:

When individuals choose to participate in these kinds of political demonstration, they commit themselves to physical action, whatever form it takes. Whether they become the reflexive body sitting at the lunch counter, the campy body lying on Wall Street, or the glocal body blockading

Downtown Seattle, they choose to spend their day constructing physical interference, and this engagement with the physical imbues them with a deepened sense of personal agency. In achieving this sense of agency, protestors are not enacting a script, where the body would function as mere instrument of expression, the meat that carries around the subject. Nor is agency the product of the heightened sense of physicality that results when the body steps outside the quotidian routines of daily life and into non-normative action. Agency does not manifest as the product of a transcendent state. Instead, the process of creating political interference calls forth a perceptive and responsive physicality that, everywhere along the way, deciphers the social and then choreographs an imagined alternative. (412)

Political protests of this kind embody the subjectivating forces of socio-political scores and subscores along with the inevitable zones of excess. Directly subverting the expectations of normative scores of obedience or compliance to the constraints of subjectivity (where you literally place your body in a space and in a way that it “ought” not to be) directly implicate moving bodies in the political landscape of subject formation. The “script” of being a subject cannot be perfectly filled like an empty vessel by a body. Rather, the embodied doing of such scripts and scores are opened by the inclusion of other embodied values. In other words, a score can frame a preferred expression, but in circumscribing such preferences it leaves open the question of “what if?” What if I enter a space I am barred from; what if I deviate from the script slightly (or a lot)? What new ends, values, feelings, relationships, structures are possible if the constraints are exceeded in my action? Doing a score in a codified dance space can have a similar power in the ability to resist and stake new claims for the constraints of the score. My dancing body simultaneously expresses the limits of a score and its excess.

CARING SUBSCORES

Working with an established artist in the city, I experienced what happens when the implied and unspoken constraints of a subscore are not shared. The group of us working on the project were given a simple score: “open score”. An “open score” can imply the total lack of constraints, a sort of free for all, but it became clear over time (and through endless error) that there were invisible electric fences that, if crossed, would shock the whole room with an unpleasant scolding. It felt at the time that “open score” was a euphemism for “read my mind and do what I want, or else...” There was a subscore that my belonging to the field could not pick up, and the trusted shared knowledge violently broke down communication and practice. The obedience to do what

a choreographer or director wants is conditioned into dancing bodies through training (Foster, 1986); this made an infraction on the untold rules of improvised choice feel like disobedience and resistance even if I experienced the transgression as exploration and connection with my colleagues. When the knowledge supporting the subscore is not shared, negative experiences can inscribe themselves into the body, creating an adjacent – and harmful – subscore based in unbalanced power dynamics and collective values.

I come from a particular lineage of dance where both training and professional work are notoriously exploitative, leaving trauma debts on bodies, in bodies, between bodies, a lineage that lives on through the commodification of highly skilled bodies and beautiful performance works (Banes, 2002).⁴ What could be considered the “bad behaviour” of a choreographer can amount to the lack of care given to the dancers, the people, who have chosen to pursue a career in dance. Trauma in the dance space can look like the difficulty of saying “no”, the difficulty of holding “bad behaviour” accountable out of fear of losing a contract, the difficulty of valuing one’s labour as worthy of payment, praise, and respect, or the distinct ability to stop feeling pain (Quinlan, 2017). With the aesthetic beauty and cultural value of entertainment placed on dance performances, this trauma is legitimated through the public acclaim and (sometimes) massive budgets that obscure these embodied dynamics. This exploitation is not exactly unique to the dance field (Sheena, 2017). The local conversations that are happening at many levels - between me and my peers and mentors, between the community writ large and the various institutions that support our work - have been aiming at a grassroots movement of change that prioritizes an ethics of care within research and creation processes to rewrite the normalized standards of injurious power dynamics.⁵

⁴ A “trauma debt” here refers to a sense of owing incurred through dance training or professional experiences in dance. It is a feeling of tension between having learned incredible things through training and teachers, and the visceral response of questioning or rejecting the same. As Diego said on the matter: “I don’t want to do ballet anymore, but like, whenever I see [a particular teacher] I stand up straighter, my palms sweat, and I go through my CV in my head.” Trauma debts can also refer to the accumulated unaddressed emotional and physical pain experienced through dancing. A chronic injury and the fear of job loss (and resulting loss of identity) are further examples.

⁵ We labour toward what adrienne marie brown (2019) might call a politics of pleasure.

A term that emerges with great ease in these conversations and their linked practices is “agency”. Oftentimes I hear it uttered in an impassioned critique, demanding that we need to “recenter the dancer’s agency!” I like the ring of this; after all, I am the dancer whose agency is at stake. And with my agency at stake, it feels worthwhile to examine what exactly “agency” is. Better yet, as a dancer whose practice digs deep into the sensational zone of somatic attention, I want to know what agency feels like while in the thick of dancing. Better *still*, there is already an established dance-based methodology that centers the power, knowledge, and skill of the dancer in the moment of doing: scores.

Throughout the conversations with my peer/participants, scores not only functioned as a structure for movement, but as a structure that could account for care. In my previous experience of miscommunication on the importance and details of the subscore, the quality and values that shaped the relationships between choreographer and dancer, dancer and dancer, dancer and studio, and dancer and self were not considered. Or if they were, the subscore of an ethics of care was based in a disregard for the specific care the dancers and choreographers needed within the scope of the project and from day to day. My peer/participants have experienced similar dynamics with choreographers where their needs, their well-being even, were sidelined and avoided in service of “the work.”⁶

An ethics of care is making explicit that everyone’s needs and desires in the studio at the time are welcome, valid, and important to the work. This can look like a check-in at the start (“how is everyone today?”), a check-out (“is there anything anyone needs before we finish for the day?”), a pause (“how does this [task] sound to everyone?”), and an embodied quality of empathetic listening to the shifting dynamics in the (Zoom) room. It also looks like explicitly stating that “no” is always an option when a proposition is made. In the case of in-person activities, I know this care to be expressed through touch, hugs, honest greetings, and the electric saturation of a room of people

⁶ “The work” is a bit of a mystery to folks I’ve talked to outside of the dance world. “The work” could refer to the particular project I am working on, the qualities or concepts I am working on within the project, the community-based efforts to enact and embody a political stance of pleasure or care or equity, or the networking efforts to connect with presenters, funders, and other artists. “The work” is a contextual, catch-all term used to hold the many types of labour dance artists do. “Working on the work” is a phrase used to indicate that I am engaged – emotionally, physically, somatically, politically, relationally, etc. – with the multitudinous implications of doing dance.

getting sweaty and vulnerable together. I also know it to be expressed as long conversations before, at the start, in the middle, at the end, and after rehearsals. The responsibility here is one of authority and, in a sense, authorship. The one who leads others in doing scores, or the one who makes the scores for others to do, has the distinct and subtle power to shape the quality of the experience. The responsibility also sits with the practitioner to buy-in and trust the score of care, as well as to articulate their own needs, boundaries, and desires. Throughout my fieldwork, I wanted to reassure my peer/participants that my position of relative authority included the patience and care to hear what they needed to say.

This ethics of care is also about honouring and respecting experiences and feelings. Arthur W. Frank (1991), in writing about embodied communication and the power of telling one's stories writes: "The further narrative gets from the body of the teller, and the further the teller is from feeling at home in her or his [sic] body, the more dangerous that narrative becomes. Specifically, the more it becomes a language of appropriation" (89). So too in the dance space, an ethics of care strives to ensure people feel heard, witnessed, and affirmed in their presence and contributions. This ethics of care also addresses the materiality of the body in its variable aches, pains, and oddities. Being in the field of dance together, there is a somatic solidarity formed where advice on injuries is discussed, networks of bodyworkers are shared and recommended, and bodywork itself is carefully administered peer to peer. "This 'caring' function contributes to the legitimacy of the [project] which has the interests of all at heart." (Martin Hewitt, 1991, 245) An ethics of care is about fostering a working environment that invites difference and adaptation to be core principles that support the vulnerability and hard work of dancers.

Additionally, this ethics of care could be considered a sub-subscore where an informal policy or community agreement of behaviour and conduct is also allowed to be pushed, challenged, resisted, reshaped, and renegotiated. Such pushings and challenges are in the vein of reconfiguring the traumatic experiences my peer/participants and I have endured so that dancing can be a site of pleasure and positive connection, a site of flourishing rather than a fraught field of exploitative values that alienate us from our embodied labour and agentic power. Explicitly opening a sub-subscore of how we treat each other in the studio can offer another avenue for practicing agency within and beyond the dance space. The difference between a score that

structures movement, and a score that structures conduct is one of knowledge-type. The former deals with the meaning and relating that emerges out of movement, and the latter asks for words and conversation. Nonetheless, they are of equal weight and consequence in a dance. In both cases, "no" is always an option and this is important to state when the enduring culture of assent tends toward exploitation.

CONSIDER AN EPISTEMOLOGY OF THE UNKNOWN

There is still some information that you, the reader, require to find ease with the subscore of what this thesis and this research is experimenting with. I want to return to the idea of knowledge: the weird moment in the studio as it fills my body toward the theoretical impulse. What is the flicker of a sensation as it begins to accumulate and form into something almost graspable? What is the language of this moment (and why value language here at all)? While something does not come out of nothing - I cannot start dancing unless the conditions, the structure and resources are there - something can come out of something I do not know. This *thing* of something is the magic of dancing, and this *thing* does not have a noematic sense to it. There is no ideal meaning to dancing. The meaning shifts, the intention and interpretation changes over time as it refracts through and intersects with new and other ideas and voices. To pin improvisation down temporarily obscures the potentiality for dancing to open meaning up, to exorcise and dissect the possibilities of what a movement is doing. As I dance, I am actively throwing myself into the unknown. I am willfully saying that all scores are open to interpretation and play; I make myself vulnerable to your interpretation. Scores of identity, of self, of spatial and temporal understandings are all at stake and I open myself to all that I do not yet know about these things. Just as confrontation can be an epistemological concept (Andrade, 2017), where the confrontation of knowledge can be a generative act, so too can the unknown be a worthy epistemological concept that opens towards other configurations and evaluations of what knowledge is. I honour the movement of knowledge in an experiential way, and I allow an “I don’t flipping know!” to be part of how I think about and work with dance. The flicker of knowing/not knowing is something I come to call *the flux* later on in this text.

The movement of knowledge as it grazes against, accumulates around or on, and passes through the variably unknown is an idea I see reflected in Sherry Ortner’s work on “practice theory”. Ortner has a deep and thoughtful lineage of ideas in movement that honours practice as an explanatory concept that engages with the doubled state of knowing/not knowing. Practice theory is another container – or perhaps score – for thinking about structure/agency as well as power’s role in shaping bodies and behavior. Ortner works on a chronological register to think about how an individual practices structure, and how such practices shape structure in potentially unknown ways

(2006). Theories and articulations between human action and “the system” have been explored by different schools of thought over time and Ortner (1984) compares these differing analyses of the relationship between practice and structure in the canon of anthropology.

Invoking practice theory is to invoke a playful collision between my dance practice and my scholarly practice where the anthropological drive to see cultural encounters as “a series of processes, or movements in flux” (Schneider & Wright, 2010, 1) and fieldwork as a “fleeting experience” (20) meets the same rationale in the experience of dancing. In the scope of this thesis, neither fieldwork nor dancing are “fleeting” in the sense of momentary and impermanent; rather, I challenge the view of such experiences by looking at the enduring and lasting knowledge they generate. Dance is the “the acute moment of its conditions, appearing as if with warning but no prior diagnosis... Dance occurs through forces applied to the body that yields to them, only to generate powers of their own” (Martin, 1998, 1). Anthropological inquiry is analogous; I want to see what sort of agentic powers are generated in situations, like dance, where agency might feel limited or absent. I really believe Ortner (2006) when she writes: “history makes people, but people make history” (2). So too do I believe that dance as discourse and practice makes people, just as people make dance. My inclination toward the use of scores, as an invitation that asks us to enter into not-knowing, grounds my scholarly practice of asking “what else?” What does the abundance of the unknown offer us?

Ortner impresses me with her agility of bringing the concepts and various conceptualizations of power, structure, and change into conversation with each other without demanding these concepts be entombed in a single, enduring definition. Ortner’s body of work formally exemplifies how concepts and explanations are always kinesthetic, emphasizing the gentle artificiality that pauses the necessary flexing and wrestling in processes of knowledge creation. What I mean by this is that Ortner (2006) is not afraid of literally “updating” her working definitions of terms that come to hold great weight in a field (or for a person’s own world-making). Unpacking the history of a term like “practice”, as well as its parallel and differing uses at the same time, brings attention to the intentional arresting, or catching, or seizing, or suspension that needs to happen in order for this term to become accessible for use elsewhere. Ideas and theories need

to be caught in their own movement, as Ben Spatz (2015) would say, “towards relative reliabilities with which we can meaningfully engage across time and space” (232).

Through the continuance of Ortner’s work, we see that she is keen on the “for now” approach to operationalizing a term or discourse – let us use [this working definition] of [this term] *for now*, we may find a better one soon or later. “Theory in Anthropology since the sixties” (1984), “Updating Practice Theory” in her book *Anthropology and Social Theory: Culture, Power, and the Acting Subject* (2006), and “Dark Anthropology and its Others: Theory since the eighties” (2016); these three works of Ortner’s, when placed next to each other, affirm the interest in methodologies and theories that make room for movement – their own and the movements of those who are entangled with them. Her persistent return to practice theory over time offers thinkers like me the encouragement needed to see research activities and thesis-writing as archival steps, cataloguing the layers and developments of ideas and desires that are continuously thrown into the present and future. This is important for me to remember as I often feel pinched by the continued pressures to iterate that “the body is not the other of discursive language” (Magnat, 2016).

DISTANT DANCING: SOME METHODS

For 11 weeks between October 2020 and January 2021 Alex, Diego, Sarah, Vanessa, Erika, Lexi and I met over Zoom. I asked these six to be part of my research because I have been making dance with or near them for the better part of eight years. The seven of us share what feels like a playful and serious commitment to the field of dance. We maintain a simultaneous distance and proximity to the field where we know, as Erika said, that “we’re just dancing, and dance is just, you know, bending and stretching.” But we also take on the big tasks of what dance implicates. As Sarah said: “I am dancing for my ancestors and to decolonize my body.” The seven of us see dance to be a practice of excess, a practice that includes the potentiality for exceeding its own structural constraints and generating newness that is unaccounted for in such structures.

We met once a week - sometimes in pairs, sometimes as a whole group. The meetings lasted for two hours with breaks as needed. I gently led the meetings, asking questions that focused on my peer/participants’ use of scores in their dance practice and worked to make room for curiosities that drifted away from the specificity of scores. Outside of the Zoom-time, we used scores we made throughout the process as conceptual, practice-based playgrounds. Doing these scores developed a shared vocabulary that facilitated a way to communicate the furiously intimate and often inarticulable experience of improvising alone. The disconnect made palpable by the impossibility of feeling one another was made lively by the ease with which we came into sync through our asynchronous dancing. We came together under the assumption that we would simply talk about dance. In the digital space, syncing up hinged on a “yes, and” sensibility that moved to support and add to what others were saying, feeling, expressing. We learned that even with the focus of a score, the excess baggage and ideas are near endless and that “simply talking about dance” is far from simple when we begin to bring our lineages, histories, and embodied vocabularies of movement and practice into conversation.

We began our explorations with “agency” and the felt but hard-to-articulate experience of making a choice while dancing. We asked each other: how do we choose what to do next while in the throes of dancing? How do we project a sense of composition onto an improvisation that, by definition, pitches us into the unknown? How do we parse through the accumulated and variably inscribed tools and techniques we

have gained through training and experience? How do our other (non-dance) practices come to inform and be informed by our improvisational skills? What use is “dance knowledge” beyond the confines of our dance worlds? What role does habit have in choice-making? What conversations do we need to have outside of the dance to hold the vulnerability that comes with our danced improvisations? What is the role of attention and awareness in dance and improvisation? And, perhaps most importantly: What does choosing “no” look and feel like in a dance space, and how do we take care of ourselves and one another through our dancing while knowing the violent potentiality of the field of dance?

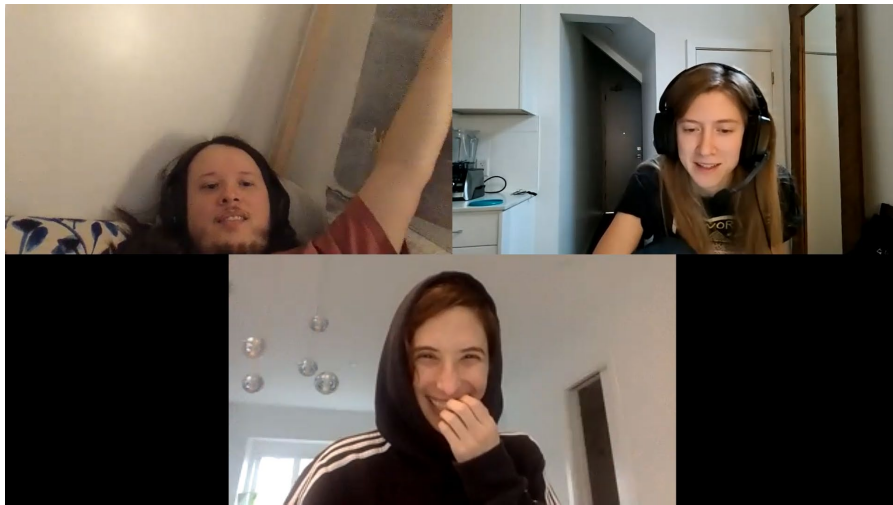


Figure 1: Zoom recording screen capture

Alex (top left), me (top right), Vanessa (bottom)

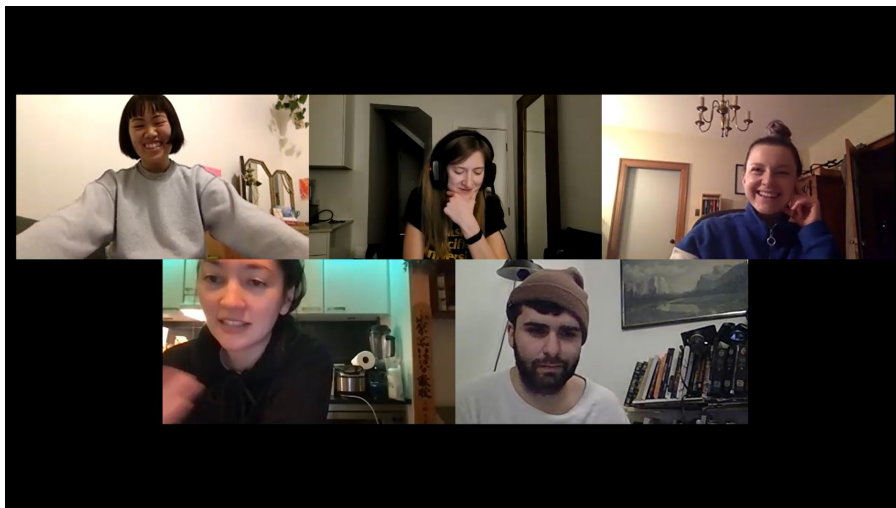


Figure 2: Zoom recording screen capture

Sarah (top left), me (top middle), Lexi (top right), Erika (bottom left), Diego (bottom right).

These questions – all derived out of the initial inquiry about agency – generated a large vocabulary that we continued to return to as essential markers for types of sensations and experiences.⁷ While “choice” or “habit” are not necessarily sensations in and of themselves, terms like “bandwidth,” “desire,” and “persistence” emerged as terms to differentiate various elements that contributed to the sensation of making an improvised choice. Bandwidth refers to, as Diego said, “the amount of stuff I can keep in my awareness,” and as Erika said, “it’s the limit of my attention and how much I can actually be aware of while I’m dancing.” Desire deals with the deep “need to do something that I don’t necessarily question or act on but know is there guiding my choices” as Vanessa said. Persistence is just that, the willful application of attention to “keep doing what I’m doing because I think that there’s something there to discover,” as Sarah said. These are only a few of the ways these terms held by the container of agency and choice were explored; we often came back to these terms in later meetings to redefine what we meant, or expand the definitions through new and other experiences.

PRACTICES OF KNOWING I DON’T KNOW

At the same time as our meetings were happening, I was spending 3 to 4 days a week in the studio alone. I would work on the groups’ shared scores, but I primarily spent the time in my own practice of witnessing myself think-bodily from the inside, following habit, impulse and desire. I used this solo studio time to explore various tangents and concepts touched upon in the group conversations (like “newness”, “crisis”, and “future,” which coincidentally maps onto “desire”), and to do the transduction work of bringing theories of agency, power, subjectivation, structure, and attention into my body. This process of “bringing theory into my body” is messy, asking for a lot of trust in the way I take in information and transform it into knowledge. Specifically, I needed to trust the ways information becomes accessible to a register of embodied knowledge. There is no special work required to take “theory” and make it “bodily”; theories are already made bodily by the bodies they were written or thought by and it is a matter of questioning how these ideas were (or could be) moving within my practice.

⁷ Refer back to page 3 for the list of words we came to use in our explorations of movement becoming theory.

A preferred method for this “bringing in” was to talk to myself. Self-talk. Before I started dancing, I would sit and let myself speak freely, I would imagine I had an audience (and sometimes I had the audience of my recording camera) and explain or explore an idea or concept that has emerged within the field of my research-relevant curiosities. Talking about concepts and ideas engaged an analytical quality of thinking and doing, pushing me to work on articulating the sensations, knowledge, and theories that I was working with. Through speaking I could access the connection-making part of my thinking and rev up the trust in my previous learnings that have allowed me to recall and integrate these ideas. After some speaking, I would then take the floor, improvise until my attention grew too fatigued to continue, and I would return again to a free, associative state of speaking. Typically, in the post-dance portion of self-talk I would work to connect what I was doing in the dance to what I had spoken of before the dance. Below shows two instances of self-talk.



Figure 3: self-talk screen capture 1

My body is the novelty in a space I’ve grown accustomed to. In getting to know the studio over weeks and months of consistent solo-practice, the space and its shapes, smells, noises, and features becomes familiar. My variable moods, energy levels, and curiosities (my internal impulses) hold more interest than the predictability of the space. Such predictability also allows me to feel inward. Familiarity of the space takes on a function like jargon; a single word or descriptor can hold an entire history. I know this studio very, very well and this environmental jargon acts a conceptual highway to new ideas and sensations. As Lexi noted, “dancers use jargon all the time.” Jargon is an important tool for dancers to be on the same page when making a dance work; we all need to know what a “valdez” is, and we need to know what it means (or feels like, or

even looks like) to be porous. Knowing these terms and qualities can keep us safe. Habit is like a form of embodied jargon whereby I can rely on gestures, movement phrases, or moves that might then open up new routes of movement.



Figure 4: self-talk screen capture 2

Are forms and experiences of somatic “attention” limited to cultural definitions of such? Can somatic practices “neutralize” one’s socialized, encultured body as they sometimes claim? Nita Little, in a talk given during the Embodiment Conference (2020), said “the boundaries of our cultural definitions and understandings of attention [are] so highly limiting in terms of what’s possible for our relations and as physical beings.” Definitions of terms and qualities that we learn can define and name what is felt before we take the time to explore other possibilities for names or sensations; terms for sensations and experiences that we learn through our cultural and social environs can, in a sense, limit the scope of such sensations. I agree. However, I am *not* on board with Little’s easy slip into the assumption that we can simply shed these cultural definitions through spending time with and in somatic attention or somatic practices. There is no “neutral” body for me, only the encultured body that accumulates gestures and habits over time. I can gather many definitions of one feeling or sensation, and these can expand the field of what can then be felt and articulated, but there is no getting out of the definitions and concepts. There is no “pure” sensation to feel that is not attributable to the context my body and my language have been shaped by.

SELF-TALK, RE-CHUNKING, AND MORE SCALED SCORES

The self-talk was a process of disintegration and integration, or what I came to call re-chunking, where pieces of my embodied understanding of a situation would come undone through dancing, and then be reconfigured, recontextualized through talking about the dancing. I could reconfigure ideas and meanings as they weighed on my body and in my movement, as it all related to the theory I was engaging with, finding new connections between the abstraction of my moving body and the literality of the terms and concepts intended to make sense of my world. Even the terms “abstract” and “literal” came to be reconfigured through my dancing as my body took on a materiality more concrete and accessible than terms and concepts. I was also able, through this talk-dance-talk score, to sense into the potentiality that marks the edges of agency made available in dancing. Sometimes I would be working on accumulating ideas and deepening my understanding of these terms by returning to them every day for a week or two.

There were a few solid findings from my studio time. One was how temporality and attention flex in strange ways when I am dancing alone. In a group improvisation – something that was frequent for me pre-pandemic – I could improvise for upwards of 20 minutes without feeling fatigued or bored. Even if I felt bored with my own choices in a group-setting, there were always possibilities available such as the simple presence of my dancing partners. Alone, and weighted with the uncertainty of when I would ever dance in a studio with others again, I was unable to hold onto an idea in my body for more than a few minutes. I worked my way up, over the course of months, to hold an idea or task for 20 minutes while alone. But the energy was never the same as when with others – I would, alone, choose to stay in stillness, or choose to accept my dropping (discarding) of an idea as part of the improvisation. I had to learn new tactics to validate my choice-making and make sense of it within the partial self-awareness of my own doing. Something else that emerged in my studio time was the slow noticing of the layers of memories that began to fill the empty space between me and the walls. 45W, the studio I am a member of, is a 900 square foot space. That is a lot of room for one body to inhabit and move in for 12 hours a week. By coming to the studio regularly, I could become friends (and enemies) with the floor and the cracks in the wall. The

density that grew, but never hardened, within the studio space was both unintentional and unavoidable. I have a blurry memory now of specific events, but there are moments where clarity strikes as I find myself in a certain corner and I can warp the distance between a then and a now to discover new articulations as they have since settled in my understanding.

To enter into an exploratory space like improvisation nearly every day was challenging and oftentimes uncomfortable. It felt repetitious and exasperating to be alone as I cannibalized my own practice. The studio space itself is layered with the traces of tears and joy and frustration and confusion; there needs to be trust in an improvisation, but doubt would seep in as I became my only embodied sounding-board. I could play with these traces, within the possibility of upsetting the stable memories and ideas being built into the space. I could remake the space itself and move through the expectations of stable meaning. I also had to rely on the guidance of scores and my intuition as necessary elements that gave me energy in a situation and context that felt dire, confusing, and scary.⁸ I had to hold myself in the vulnerability of improvisation and I had to affirm my own choices – building a structure of self-care within my practice without any bodily punctuation of others' experiences or interpretations opened the unfamiliar questions of “am I doing this right?” The issue of correctness came to be uncharacteristically vital for my practice.

Self-talk was also essential for the broader methodological considerations I integrated into the group conversations. Namely, check-ins. Alone in the studio, self-talk was a time for me to check-in with myself; see where I was at, notice what was on my mind and in my body beyond the research, and to catch my desires and interests around how to structure my studio time and dancing. The self-talk was a time to feel out the intuitive score emerging from my current disposition. Building an environment for myself to play in with authenticity and integrity required a lot of self-care and self-support that I was unaccustomed to.⁹

⁸ I was scared specifically that I wasn't making any sense in what I was doing or pursuing in the studio. The confusion was in the ground-hog day-esque feeling of meaningless repetition – returning over and over and over to the studio... what was the point? Was anything even happening? Was the promise to return, and the commitment to show up enough?

⁹ Why is self-care and self-support something I'm unaccustomed to in a dance space? Perhaps because I learned that suffering is a sign of working hard, that denying my own needs is a sign of commitment to the form and the work at hand. I like to think I can self-validate, but without the

There can be a lot of intensity and vulnerability in the act of improvisation. In the rawness of making real-time choices, one can lay themselves bare to the choices and interpretations of others. To paraphrase something Sarah aptly said, the vulnerability experienced in dancing has often been manipulated as a choreographic trope for shock value and the coercion of audience empathy.¹⁰ Understanding these stakes, I wanted to cultivate a virtual environment for my peer/participants that foregrounded the sort of care and support I was finding through my self-talk in the studio. Building a framework for the potential to feel these really intense things, while technically addressed in the “ethics approval” portion of the fieldwork, was the keystone for opening our group conversations to include the more tender and difficult aspects of dance practice that deal with power, subordination and subjugation, exploitation, and objectification.

Checking-in with everyone was the first task in our methodological score of thinking and talking about agency together; the check-in was a way to note our current moods, communicate needs and energy levels, and offer up any immediate pressing concerns, questions, or interests of what to talk about. This was not only an offering of “how are you?” but also a “we’ve just experienced some new provincial lock-down measures that have cancelled some of your projects - how are you coping?” Care of this sort was important even if it took an hour of our two-hour meeting because it allowed us to be present with each other and meet one another where we needed to be met.

Olivia Millard (2016) describes the ways that improvisation can be both a support and in need of supporting practices to put “the performer in a situation where they are attentive; they are focussed on the unfolding of their performance in the present” (8). Using scores was both the content of the research and, as Alex put it, the structural support.

para-validation that happens socially in the lobby at dance shows, or the running into peers in the lobby of a studio, my trust in myself as a dancer who makes relevant improvisation choices was newly confined to *just* my studio time. There is an undeniable seed of self-doubt that was sown into me through my training where I learned to work hard in order to evade the potential for a public scolding. I reckon with this still.

¹⁰ This follows on the heels of “trauma porn” that here refers to the exploiting of the lived experiences of dancers toward an end of shock-value or a coerced empathy in the audience.

VULNERABILITY: I HAVE ALL MY BAGGAGE WITH ME AND IT'S NEATLY PACKED

There is a euphemism that haunts us as dance artists: “leave your baggage at the door.” It is uttered, often by the person at the front of the room, the teacher or the choreographer, to signify the other-space of dance; what happens in the dance space is not to be affected by what happens beyond the studio walls, for good or ill. As Vanessa said, “there’s this weird mentality of like ‘leave your baggage at the door’ and that was something that was instilled in a lot of us. And I think that it’s so harmful. But that’s what I was taught.” This phrase can be uttered in ways explicitly meant to devalue and dismiss the potency of everyday life, to devalue and dismiss the thoughts, desires, and emotions that may distract from the work at hand, and it can be used to depersonalize the dancers, the people, who are dancing. Its utterance, however, has a life. It takes on a rather perverse orientation, suggesting that who one is outside of the dance space is irrelevant to what is expected to occur within the time and space of dancing. This phrase has some unsavoury undertones of objectification which is not a bad thing in itself. Giorgio Agamben in *The Use of Bodies* (2015) notes that there is a separation of self when one needs to exert care – there is the object to be cared for, and there is a caretaker. And in the instance of self-care, we need to see ourselves as both object and subject. Objectification is not inherently bad, but it can be used toward exploitative and cruel ends that can alienate a dancer, for example, from their own experience and power.

The discomfort this euphemism generates, and the harm Vanessa is pointing at, has its roots in the hard-to-shed formative years of training. We were taught that leaving our baggage at the door was an ideal mode of presence and professionalism. This means that the ability to wrestle intense emotional responses or realities out of the visual field is paramount to the success of the creative and kinesthetic moment. In other words: do not show how you feel; nothing other than this dance, this choreography, the role of ‘dancer’ matters right now. If you broke up with your lover, if you dumped coffee on your pants, if you are struggling in any myriad of ways a person can struggle, that gets left at the door. What is at stake for you should you show yourself, should your baggage have accidentally slipped into the room as you slipped into your dance togs, varies. You and your emotions may be dismissed, placated, ridiculed, laughed at, scolded, or anything in

between. At risk of being singled out in a space that can often privilege homogeneity, it is safest to cleave the baggage, splice and repress that hot thought.

Over time and through its repetition, the phrase became and remains for many of us the primary ethos of professionalism and artistic presence within the dance milieu. This is weighty for three reasons that cannot be entirely disentangled. First, it shows a very direct and embodied relation of authority within dance practice. For “leave your baggage at the door” to exist as a common and instantly recognizable phrase, there must be an embodied relational authority; a someone who utters the phrase in a teaching tone. We could attribute this to a spoke-and-wheel pedagogy where the figure of authority administers information and values of right and wrong, good and bad, to the pupils (Freire, 1970). We could also attribute this to the somatically rich and complicated zone of power that influences the embodied sensibility of pupils in a hierarchy of knowledge and discipline in education (Foucault, 1970). Either way, the phrase – materialized verbally or in the imaginative conjuring of its force – puts an emphasis on the ability to influence and impose upon another’s interoceptive experience of feeling. In other words, dancers are told how to feel—you should be happy, honoured, excited to be dancing —and sometimes we oblige.

Second, “leave your baggage at the door” is not exactly honest or kind. It is not a caring thing to say. How else to put that? To be told that parts of you are not welcome in a space can be a slippery slope to other exclusions. For our purposes here, it guides the interpreter, the dancer, into an impoverished creative space. Vanessa again speaks to this:

If you think about methodologies, or thought processes of training... I think about that language of ‘leave your baggage at the door’. Like, your emotional baggage. Is that useful? Is that productive? Does that help anyone? Is it possible? Does that create a rich creative environment? No.

Cleaving yourself towards an idealized embodiment of professionalism that ultimately depersonalizes the dance work prevents something like creativity, playfulness, and honesty from happening. This is deeply, deeply ironic given the emphasis often put on the kinesthetic quality of vulnerability. The space of the dance studio and the experience of dancing can feel special, verging on sacred, but dancing is not exempt from the realities of life outside the studio. “Leave your baggage at the door” is a unique structural consideration to bound and determine what sorts of behaviours – along

emotional, intellectual, and embodied resonances – are permissible and preferred. My baggage might be in excess of the dance work at hand, and the exclusion of my baggage might be the predominant structure of professional dance etiquette, but such exclusion pushes out the possibility to enrich an experience. The vulnerability that dance asks for remains at odds with this structure of exclusion and halts my ability to bring in other contexts, other temporal registers of memory or sensation or self. Agency, as a site of meaning-making through choice-making, is constrained.

The third reason that “leave your baggage at the door” is weighty and contentious is this quality of vulnerability. As people who work with improvisation, we understand that by offering an improvisation score, “you’re asking somebody to go through something. Which will be like, maybe at times exciting, but maybe at other times like really vulnerable and maybe really personal” (Alex). It bears repeating: scores can act as the structural safety net for supporting vulnerability, *and* offering an improvisation score implies a willingness to open to the unknown. The score itself has to be caring *and* supported by a subscore that values vulnerability and care. For me, this sometimes looks like expressing my boundaries explicitly (“I don’t want to do this score”), or it might look like subverting the very structure of the score (not embodying a certain state or quality because I know the emotional arc, I would experience in such a state could not be supported by the people present or the context). This can also look like after-care, or as Diego put it, “just talking about what I just did to someone who cares.” With a score, because it is framed by interpretation, you can bring vulnerability in intentionally. Diego noted that “you have the freedom to bring it in if you want to... but I can’t be forced to bring my presence.” Dancing and improvising, be it supported by a score or not, hinges on care – for oneself and for others – and on the affordances made available by the context or score to bring one’s vulnerable strengths and agility. Vulnerability remains the primary orientation in the intimacy of dancing.

Sarah summarized this well: “Like, we have to work really hard at being at our most vulnerable when we dance. I don’t think it’s even really said that way, but there’s an understanding that that’s the best thing to do. And that that authenticity becomes the thing to be rigorous about.” Vulnerability is something to take care of; dance is a field that works with people and relationships, so vulnerability cannot be taken as something that is easily packed up, discarded, or exploited. And maybe, just maybe, if the score or the space or the one leading the score cannot adequately hold the baggage of another’s

vulnerability then it needs to be kept out of the room. The key here for us seven was to reconcile three things (1) our “baggage” gives us the vulnerable edge desired in our work, (2) the over-baked idea that our “baggage” was not welcome in the room, and (3) the reality that our “baggage” is always entering the room with us. For Diego, the complexity of such baggage can be handled with care: “There's a way to package your baggage, to bring it into that room, that specific room, which is different than, like, flooding the room with it and stopping anything else from going on. That's such a skill to learn. I really like packaging it so that it's safe for other people to also be in the room with me.”

Vulnerability is both the desired outcome and the reality of improvisation; vulnerability can then be understood as the excess of dance practice, of dancing, that is somehow accounted for in the sense of novelty and newness that an improvisation generates. Vulnerability, in the case of “leave your baggage at the door” identifies the mess of the self as being “too much” for the context of dancing. And yet, the dance itself is initiated by the authenticity of being vulnerable, being witnessed by peers, colleagues, audiences. Vulnerability is the invisible labour of a dance that can be taken for granted or taken advantage of – in the most extreme cases it can be abused. But the compulsion, or perhaps tender inspiration to dance, begins with the vulnerability that ultimately gets left out of the archive. Vulnerability cannot be accounted for in the score or in the choreography, despite its essential role; to step into an improvisation is to open toward the vulnerability of the unknown, of potentially encountering something not before known or felt.

Stepping into the unknown, touching what is, or might be there, vulnerability in dancing is to open my baggage – sometimes a slow titration, other times a massive rip. I am here, imperfect and sensitive, opening myself to offered propositions, and going into them honestly, authentically, with integrity and curiosity, full of my moodiness, habits, preferences, instincts, desires, and impulses. I make my open and wounded self available to desires and interpretations.¹¹ Maybe, under the right circumstances, my

¹¹ Adriana Cavarero in *Inclinations: A Critique of Rectitude* (2016) reminds us of the etymology of the word “vulnerability” coming from the latin “vulnus” or “wound” (this also has some connections to vulva, but that’s another thesis).

messiest of baggage can be cared for in a score. To make choices, we need to have our vulnerability held by the structure of the score and the one facilitating the score.

YES AND NO

What initially brought me to the topic of agency was a feeling of “no”.

When I improvise, I follow my body’s “yesses”. These “yesses” are a feeling of pleasure; I want my dancing to feel good and I am disinterested in denying enjoyment or playfulness to my joints, muscles, skin, and senses of tactility, velocity, balance, and effort. Even in the instances of more structured composition or processes of creating a dance work, my aesthetic and sensational desires must trigger a “yes” for me to make and take that choice. The “yes” is thick, complicated, and heavy with a tense history of training, relationship, and identity – which we will explore more thoroughly later on – but the “yes” must be there.¹²

Similarly, in my academic textual reading practice, I follow the “yes”. I want to read texts that feel good; the “yes” I feel in my throat and chest when I catch the craft and brilliance of a good theory is undeniable. This pleasure draws me in, and propels me into new ideas, new scholars, new fields of methodology and meaning-making. My academic lineage is a lineage of “yes” and these “yesses” delivered me to the field of power and agency. I really get off on a text that strives to make a nuanced argument or observation about the implications of the layered and lived processes of power, control, meaning, and relationship.

When Sherry Ortner (2006) writes: “The world is under no compulsion to conform to your cultural conceptions” (10). YES. Or when Sarah Ahmed (2013) writes: “social forms are effects of repetition.” (11). YES. Or Meghan Quinlan (2017), speaking right into my technique: “important to this definition [of choreography] is the acknowledgment of training, technique, rehearsal, performance, and reception as intrinsic parts of choreography, not only to reveal labour and agency but also to examine discipline and resistance to it” (33). YES. Then there’s Paul Rabinow (1986): “conversation is only possible within contexts shaped and constrained by historical, cultural, and political relations and the only partially discursive social practices that constitute them” (239).

¹² Or at least there needs to be a glimmer of a “yes” that might need more information, another taste, some contemplation and inquiry, before embodying a big “YES”. An “mmhm” or a “sure, but...” or even an “uh-huh, so what?” might lead to a solid “Yes” about something else later on; what matters is that a sense of “yes” is there and that the “yes” can become a “no” if I need it to. Sometimes the “yes” lives alongside the “no” as in: “yes, but I think there’s more to it.”

And to cap off this partial list of yes-highlights, Foucault (1982): “Reason is so boring! We’d have to play the boring part of either the rationalist or the irrationalist” (210). Yes, yes, yes.

There have also been a lot of “no’s” in the process of reading and thinking about power, especially when these theories speak to embodied experience. I am, like you, a bit of an expert about my embodied experience, and my ongoing experiences of having power and control exerted on my bodiliness in both academic and dancerly systems reliably asks me to double back into my sensed understanding of my world. Too often have I been in spaces, academic or artistic, where the bodily wisdom of feeling-sensing-gesturing-expressing is taken as lesser and less reliable than the written, the cited, the published, and the lectured. There is quite a body of literature that continues to grow to reassert the value of embodied knowledge as it relates to text and language (Magnat, 2010; Samudra, 2008; Todd 1937; Scarry, 1985; Howes & Pink, 2010). To follow my felt “yes” and “no” when researching also feels like a radical act of pushing against a hegemonic, hierarchical structuring of the senses and knowledge.

I experienced a big, BIG, “yes” with kinesthesia – the sense of movement – as a curiously omitted sense within the sensorium of the anthropology of the senses. I follow Deidre Sklar (2008) here, who sees that kinesthesia has been subsumed under the sense-category of touch, resulting in “omitting kinesthesia from the sensorium... [leaving us] with no sensory locus for building an epistemology of movement and no locus for addressing the cultural or symbolic dimensions of kinetic sensation” (97). Sklar invokes “vitality affects”, the “complex qualities of kinetic energies inherent in all embodied activity”, to face this challenge (93). Captured by dynamic, kinetic terms such as surging, fading, fleeting, exploding, vitality affects account for the dynamic factors that “encode cultural dispositions” (96) to the same extent as spatial and sensational configurations.

I am inspired by vitality affects (big yes!) as a way to register the potentiality of agency to surge, fade, turn away, and burst within a semi-structured practice. However, the layers of practice as they unfold in this text and in relationship have become a dance in their own right; I fold vitality affects and Sklar’s brilliant critiques into my intentioned dancing that is filled with trust in the “yeses”. As a group, we found our own vitality affects within the vocabulary that came to develop between us over time. Vitality affects, as Sklar offers, do not explicitly show up here. Instead, vitality affects arrive in the

background work of thinking and doing, in a position of support in the further development of new metaphors and descriptions to make the internal logic of a moment of fieldwork legible to others. As a researcher who also has a dance practice, I use my body to measure and make sense of my world by attending to the “kind of detailed sensations that carry meaning” (Sklar, 2000, 71). Sklar writes: “there is no other way to approach the felt dimensions of movement experience than through the researcher’s own body” (ibid). I follow in Sklar’s footsteps, interested in following the theoretical impulse that arises out of the weird moment in the studio; I follow the “yes” to see where a gesture might unfold in text.

When I followed my “yes” into the realm of “agency” I hit a hard “no”. It was a “no” that told me there was so much more to agency than the rational assumptions of consciously aware choice-making. In the instances where agentic experiences were understood as limited by one’s own knowledge of the context or situation – even when accounting for the temporal and historic moment – the privileging of reason and consciousness remained centered. A text on agency that produced in me both “yes” and “no” feelings – for reasons more thoroughly explored in the next section – was Mustafa Emirbayer and Ann Mische’s text “What is Agency?” (1998) For Emirbayer and Mische, agency is

a temporally embedded process of social engagement, informed by the past (in its ‘iterational’ or habitual aspect) but also oriented toward the future (as a ‘projective’ capacity to imagine alternative possibilities) and toward the present (as a ‘practical-evaluative’ capacity to contextualize past habits and future project within the contingencies of the moment).” (962)

While I feel a big “yes” in relation to the accounting for the dynamic interplay between past, present, and future, their definition continues to privilege an objective and reasoned positionality. It is a quiet privileging, one that slips in the omission of “intention” while implying it all the while. Emirbayer and Mische continue:

Viewed internally, agency entails different ways of experiencing the world, although, even here, just as consciousness is always consciousness *of* something, so too is agency always agency toward something, by means of which actors enter into relationship surrounding persons, places, meanings, and events. (973, emphasis original)

How does this fit with a schema of knowledge and experience that makes room for the brilliance (as in disclosing) of kinesthetic choice-making that is real-time, complicated, and most accessible through embodied practice and play? Is “agency” only for those with enough self-awareness, consciousness, and near omnipotent understanding of causes, effects, and a precise measurement of past, present, and future? I wondered if I was intentionally misreading “agency” as understood by Emirbayer and Mische. But there was more:

Even the semiobscure zone of habitual taken-for-granted activity requires a selective focusing of attention to single out the elements of response required to sustain a particular form of interaction... Having directed attention, actors must identify typical patterns of experience and predict their recurrence in the future; to do this they routinely construct simplified models by means of which they characterize recurrent aspects of persons, relationships, contexts, or events. (979)

To be generous: yes, I *am* building models and patterns to chunk the meaning of events and situations to then make a choice. However, this process is quick, and these models and patterns can change by force, by accident, by forgetting, by way of being in a mood. Even the terms “identify”, and “direct attention” as used above place a sense of intentional and conscious effort into a zone that is hard to grasp or pick out of a whole series of experiences. Through Emirbayer and Mische, who are keen on questioning the relationship between structure and agency, I kept wondering if agency is a practice of “mind”. Here was my embodied “no” that wanted to align with Deleuze’s (1983) organization of “mind”: always in service of and attempting to keep up with a curious, insatiable, sensate body. To feel agency is to feel the minute transitional spaces of action and feeling (and processing these feelings) and to trust those feelings even if the word “trust” never surfaces. Agency is the “taking hold” (Manning & Massumi, 2014, 24) of attention, patience, and presence, grounded in an accumulated cluster of understanding and trusting. The agency felt and practiced through improvised dancing makes room to re-work patterns or models of understanding and meaning on a sensing, feeling, moving register without insistence that agentic action must be caught and archived in perpetuity.

WHAT IS AGENCY?

Emirbayer and Mische's text "What is Agency" (1998) informed a lot of my explorations into the idea of embodied agency because of their commitment to parsing agency temporally, and because of their remaining commitment to an intentional quality to agency that I found troubling. I was curious if their text would hold up in the context of movement as well as in the theories of agency and choice that were emerging out of my use of scores. There is one specific "yes" that comes from their attention to past, present, and future as simultaneous dimensions of agency.

Past, present, future. Emirbayer and Mische recode them as "iteration", "practical-evaluative", and "projectivity". I, along with my peer/participants, further recode these terms as habit, impulse, and desire. This temporal consideration of agency is the foundational material for agentic action that deals with choice-making and decision-taking. Agency, as something practiced in improvised dancing, is the capacity to spread oneself through time.

ITERATION//HABIT//PAST

"Iteration", as defined by Emirbayer and Mische (1998), refers to the "selective reactivation by actors of past patterns of thought and action, as routinely incorporated in practical activity, thereby giving stability and order to social universes and helping to sustain identities, interactions, and institutions over time" (971). This involves the active schematization of experiences and extends from the mental categories we make – which Erin Manning (2007) would call "chunking" – to the embodied practices that come to constitute social organization. Iteration is the ability to chunk previous experiences into memories and habits that can then be quickly operationalized.

Iteration, when taken into my body, became understood as habit or the accumulated and well-known sensations, patterns, and efforts of movement that could then be either drawn on with some amount of intentionality, or allowed to emerge as intuitively relevant. Habit is like the toolbox of movement that I can trust to always be ready at hand when I begin improvising. "Some amount of intentionality" is the best way to describe the half-conscious intention to do a movement in improvisation. I have my preferred modalities of improvisation and movement (as will be luxuriated over below), but I do not have any sort of mental process that says: "oh yes, I am going to now

choose to do that spinning fold where my leading leg tucks behind and under me to then take me to the floor.” The process of selecting the habitual movements or qualities that have sedimented in my body is a result of having found ease or ability in these sets of movements. Because I know, or sense to know, a particular organization of limbs, I can then release a degree of intentional control and allow my limbs and spine to bend, fold, press, pull into potentially new zones of movement. I can trust movement-as-thinking. Habit is a zone of trusting my body’s capacity and brilliance to express or do the score. Habit is also the set of values that I have learned through training and professional experience as well as through the refinement of my own practice as it articulates with other practices (like academia or sewing or being a partner and a sister). Habit is wrapped up in the continued legacy of the discourses and techniques that had a role in shaping my body. The technical values learned in my formative years – such as taking time in my movement so that the audience can register what I am doing – are ready at hand for me and when I embody them, I uphold the institutions they were formed by and simultaneously enter into the possibility of rewriting them. These habits, these learned values, are not static.

An example of habit could be this spinning leg movement: I begin in a lunge, right leg forward. I transfer my full weight into my right leg so that my left leg behind me can then trace into the backspace, remaining elongated, and connecting energetically to the top of my skull through the tension of my spiralling spine. As my leading left leg then begins to turn my body, I push my weight further into my right toes, releasing my heel from the ground, aligning my skull with my right leg and gently tucking my chin down to then signal to my left leg to begin bending. As my neck and left leg bend, I pull my left hip back to make room for my left toes to slide along the floor and under my pelvis as I use my right leg to descend slowly. My left leg passes under my pelvis, I transfer some weight back onto my left foot that is now sliding forward so that I can descend fully to the ground. This is a bit of a technical description for a 2 second movement, but it is a movement that I notice arising in my more virtuosic dancing as a graceful way to change levels. I know that I learned this trajectory of threading my leg under me while turning through my dance training. It became “habit” in the canonical sense through its repetition in dance classes. This movement exemplifies two essential movement values I learned in dance school: agility (as in grace and coordination) and strength. This is a movement

that communicates my ability to be coordinated and it requires a lot of leg strength and balance.

Two things emerge here. First, if I am improvising and I sense that I am not currently strong enough to do this move, then I will likely avoid it completely, or I will contract the movement to a smaller scale that may not take me fully to the ground. Second, if I do the move and I trip up or my supporting leg gives out, then I will either abandon the movement and feel a slice of shame (“Agh! Am I even a dancer?!?!?”), or I will use the tripping and giving-out as openings to new possibilities for movement. Habit, as a form of iteration, is an important basis for riffing into new possibilities, as well as referencing certain sets of cultural values – like grace, agility, and strength. Habit is not only about my own choice-making within my practice, but in drawing on practice, I implicate myself within a community of embodied practice.

Habit, as my participant/peers understand it, can be a defense or support mechanism that helps us repeat and find consistency or continuity over time: “certain types of habits are built to keep us safe or to help us do something that we need to repeat” (Erika). Even if “habit” is oftentimes spoken of in dance spaces (and other popular discourses) as things to “break”, or as annoying things that hold us back or “shut down possibilities” (Vanessa), habits can also keep others safe because “I know what I am doing, and what I can do” (Alex). In this vein, habits can also be a modality of celebrating our bodily history: “I want to celebrate the fact that I did a modern dance degree – sometimes, not all the time, it doesn't happen often – but I know how to do certain things and I have the privilege to do certain things with my body” (Erika). In this sense, habit is the celebration of a lineage and belonging, and there is delight to be found there.

Embodied habits are also “what make us unique” (Vanessa). They are the idiosyncratic expressions of our entire subjectivity, they are “something that’s intrinsic in terms of the vocabulary that’s produced by my system” (ibid). In a community of knowledge and practice, a habit “does the same thing as jargon, but on a bodily level. Perhaps it’s like chunking or like heuristics. It decreases the mental load of each moment. Which is maybe the work that we want to do... to experience new stuff” (Lexi). Or, if not to experience new stuff, then habits are also the object for reflection that might provide new avenues away from damaging language and a lineage needing to be

reckoned with: “how can we move away from that damaging language that's so linked to a colonial history? Or move away from my habits that are a product of whiteness?” (Sarah) Habit is not just the trained movement vocabulary ready at hand, but it is also the lexicon of values, histories of oppression and privilege, and shared codes of sensation, all aimed at the present and future. So, let us move into the present, to as Emirbayer and Mische call it, the “Practical-evaluative”

PRACTICAL-EVALUATIVE//IMPULSE//PRESENT

The “practical-evaluative” dimension of agency is the “capacity of actors to make practical and normative judgements along alternative possible trajectories of action in response to the emerging demands, dilemmas, and ambiguities of presently evolving situations” (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, 971). It is a process of speedy contextualization, or “situationally based judgement” where an agent responds to the “demands and contingencies of the present” (994). The demands and contingencies of the present create a situation for action to unfold with both immediate and long-term consequences that are instantaneously weighed and considered. The present is a very, very full moment.

When I am in the state of moving, in the zone of improvisation, I am flooded by impulses in relation and in response to things both around and in me. These impulses are connected to my embodied history of moves, technique, relationships, and sensations as echoes, but impulses are also connected to my mood, energy levels, and curiosities, as well as various textures, temperatures, colours, and sounds in my immediate environment. To notice an impulse is the first step. Next comes the action, or how I handle the impulse. With impulse comes trust, but also a surrender that plays with what it means to be “in control.” When I am improvising, I can acknowledge a shift in the context of control from my everyday life to the zone of dancing whereby gestures can become larger, the functionality of movement can become abstracted, and I can play with coordination and rhythm. The shift in control is a shift in somatic register where, in the studio, I become open to listening to and responding to impulses. These impulses, and the varying qualities of control I exert over them, are at the root of improvisation.

Emirbayer and Mische write that the practical-evaluative mode of agency strengthens “the ability to exercise agency in a mediating fashion, enabling [actors] to

pursue projects in ways that may challenge or transform the situational contexts of action” (994) and “entails deep involvement and participation in an ongoing community of discourse” (995). I feel a “yes” here, especially when paired with impulse as the sensation of the present moment. Being immersed in the present moment of dancing, I face a situation, or a sort of ambiguous or unsettled problem. I then apply a scheme, a typification, or maybe a set of values (gleaned from past experiences) that seeks to respond to the nuance of the situation. I weigh the possible choices in terms of how best to respond to the stimulus or the situation (which has a lot to do with throwing myself into the future, into the next moment, or into a sense of how I might want to be remembered if I am being witnessed by an audience). Then there is a sense of resolve: I decide how and in what direction to proceed knowing that there may be multiple and flexible ends in sight. The decision is broad but narrowed enough to make the decisive cut in movement. I make the move. I aim and I act. The choice to act inevitably lands me back in a situation with new ambiguities with potentially higher or lower stakes, again flooded by impulses shaping the possible choices.

Take a low stakes example of having tangled myself up on the floor. Spine twisted and curved, left cheek and right palm against the floor, left arm reaching back and right leg reaching forward. Left leg tucked tight against my hip with no momentum. Being here, and taking a breath, I might notice the cool stickiness of the floor giving both my cheek and palm traction. I might notice the light reflecting on the wall on the periphery of my vision. I might notice the potential power in my tucked and coiled left leg. I might notice my fatigue or my ambivalence in the moment. I might notice that I am in a familiar position where I could gracefully extricate myself into a more neutral position. Or I might not be in the moment at all, instead thinking about ice cream/the email I did not send/a sticky and embarrassing memory. First, I am “noticing the feature” and then I deal “with noticing how I choose to work with that feature in my practice” (Doughty, 2019, 3). I weigh the consequences of taking one or other choices offered by what I have noticed, I hazily think two or three moments into the future and contextualize these possibilities in relation to what I have just done before. A sense of composition, the larger arch of the dance, presses against the value of certain impulses.

When I am doing a score, it is unlikely that I have been given a precise direction for how to choose between the elements I have noticed. I trust the subscore and I trust my embodied desire for a particular sensation to guide my decisive cut. The present is

filled with potentiality for what to do next, but it is not infinite; I am constrained by a score or by values, and my actions relate to these. The present is also filled with the potential to do something different than what might be most obvious, or to challenge these surrounding expectations.

Presence, being with impulse, is fast. It can be *really* fast. The faster I go, the less time I have to sense through the possibilities. I may not have the time to be clever when I am moving quickly, but sometimes I am. The impulse to do something that turns out to be novel, new, different, challenging, and bizarre might be instantaneous. Time matters here.

Impulse and being present in the moment are not necessarily about discrete, parse-able choices. Impulse is not always linear, dominoing through time, one choice after another in quick and rapid succession. Sometimes, as Erika put it, impulse is “finding some interesting things that don’t necessarily need to be placed next to one another. Sometimes I would find a pattern, or a rhythm, and a way or a quality would emerge.” Or as Alex said: “follow an impulse. And let some sort of transformation happen.” An impulse can initiate a singular gesture that then cascades into a longer phrase or sequence of movement (maybe three or four minutes long!) without returning to the instance of totally surveying the situation and making a precise choice that weighs the presented information. Following one impulse can subsume other impulses as they arise in the near future. The present stretches out as I commit to one impulse.

Transformation is an important aspect of the impulses sensed in the present as they offer the opportunity to do something new. To shift, to make a decision to take the moment somewhere in particular. “If you follow an impulse and you don’t necessarily know what it’s going to turn out to be – you haven’t done it before – it’s likely in the realm of newness. But still, there was some sort of decision somewhere in your system that facilitated it [the newness]” (Vanessa). The trust of the transformation and the extended moment of choice that emerges onto, into new sensorial or kinesthetic terrain is an edge of impulse that can be exciting and bland.... I cannot know where exactly I am going to land with the choice and its movement.

But – and there always seems to be a “but” – the anticipated outcome or consequence of acting on an impulse might be approximately known, or approximately

decided in the present choice. My impulses are oriented toward something, and so too are the ways I act upon these impulses.

It's all impulse control, right? This is all we're doing. I start dancing, and I've set up trajectories for my impulses. They're no longer free-free impulses. I mean, I don't think there's so such thing as a free-free impulse. Like, an impulse is always a repetition of a certain point. I'm setting up a kind of playing field with certain trajectories available. And then it's not that impulses can't go outside of that, but, you know, they're going to feel incorrect or they're going to feel new. Something feels very different if they go outside those boundaries. But, there is something about dancing that allows impulses to come to pass without having to give them the proper name. (Diego)

While Diego shares the language of "trajectory" with the practical-evaluative dimension of agency, impulse as an embodied experience in improvisation challenges this dimension. I do not mean that impulse renders the practical-evaluative dimension as irrelevant or as incorrect; I mean that impulse is something that challenges the ability to write about the present and the lightning-quick capacity to evaluate the moment in which a choice is called for. The embodied quality of presence, being in the present moment and with present impulses, is remarkably full; presence constantly straddles the past and the future while also somehow expanding the present moment to be much larger than it might be in a different context. Impulses can be slow and enduring, offering room to reflect and evaluate in the present moment; yet, the feeling of an impulse is slippery, escaping the grip of reflection as soon as an unchosen impulse is discarded. As Erika said, "there are probably impulses or urges that I cut off before they can be enacted." It is not only about the ability to articulate the impulse, or the dumpsters filled with cut off impulses, but the impulsive present deepens the question of choice. How do I know that a choice needs to be made? Is there a difference between choice-making and just plain "doing"? As Vanessa said,

if you follow an impulse and you don't necessarily know what it's going to turn out to be, you haven't done it before, it's totally in the realm of newness. But the choice might not have really happened in that moment. There was some sort of decision somewhere in your system that facilitated it. But, I'm not one of those artists who, when I do something, it turns out how I think it's going to look. It's like 'oh wow, that didn't come across at all' so I also have to deal with imagined-reality versus the reality-reality that I'm often confronted with.

An extended register of impulse is opened through improvisation and dancing. The choice is no longer centered or yoked to mind, to evaluation and reflection, but to a sensation “somewhere in your system.” Acknowledging and acting upon an impulse need not be a pressurized moment of effortful choice making; an impulse can be followed with ease and trust that movement will happen toward something. While the present moment can be attuned to with the evaluative quality that Emirbayer and Mische speak to, being present with one’s impulses can also be the open quality of “listening to gut impulse,” as Erika noted. Acting on such impulses throws us into the future, into new predicaments.

PROJECTIVITY//DESIRE//FUTURE

For Emirbayer and Mische “projectivity”, or the projective dimension of agency, mediates the iterational and practical-evaluative dimensions of agency. It is here that actors “distance themselves from the schemas, habits, and traditions that constrain social identities and institutions” (984). An actor “projects themselves into their own possibilities of being” (986) of which they are thrown into and becoming within. Projectivity is the “imaginative generation by actors of possible future trajectories of action, in which received structures of thought and action may be creatively reconfigured in relation to actors’ hopes, fear, and desires for the future” (971). The imagined future is an important influence for a choice made in the present.

The future is also meaningful to address in terms of what was discussed much earlier about conscious and unconscious knowledge. Above, I had drawn on Bourdieu and Spatz to say that choice-making relies upon techniques and values I consciously learned that have since become unconscious supports to how I engage with the score and subscore. Choice-making as an action that deals with “possible future trajectories” (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998, 971) continues the question of conscious knowledge: how aware of these future trajectories does one have to be in order to make a choice while dealing with the immediacy of improvisation?

Bourdieu (1980) writes that “in the social fields, which are the products of long, slow processes of autonomization, and are therefore, so to speak, games ‘in themselves’ and not ‘for themselves’, one does not embark on the game by a conscious act” and that an actor’s “unawareness of the unthought presuppositions that the game

produces and endlessly reproduces, thereby reproducing the conditions of its own perpetuation” (67). The reproduction of conditions and structures is a temporal vector of the future. However, for Emirbayer and Mische, the actor’s awareness of the “forestructure of action,” or the pre-existing conditions and structures of actions (a score), exist alongside an actor’s willingness to “invest effort in the formulation of projects because... they care about what will happen to them in the future” (987). It is not an inevitable or predetermined outcome of action to reproduce structural conditions and constraints. Rather, being invested in projects means that future-oriented actions are considered with some amount of conscious intention. There is an approximate outcome preferred. The outcome of such actions might appear to reproduce its score, but this reproduction might simply be an instance of excess generated by the actor’s choices. Even if a choice is consciously made, the potentiality for newness and the unexpected is not interrupted.

Putting Bourdieu and Emirbayer and Mische next to one another emphasizes that the future, the investment in projects, can be taken a step further when addressed through movement. Bourdieu sees an actor’s actions making structural change at a glacial pace (Biehl, Good, & Kleinman, 2007); novelty will not do much in the big picture, and reproduction of structure is the only possible outcome. But for Emirbayer and Mische, the reflective capacity of an agent in the choice-making process is going to both repeat past routines and habits, as well as invent “new possibilities for thought and action” (984). They account for the newness that a choice can engender for the actor themselves. Where both Bourdieu and Emirbayer and Mische fall short is that, in the case of improvising, I might not be thinking about or intentionally investing in one singular, definable structure or project. I am potentially aiming toward goals of many projects at once with my choices; one of my goals may be to directly challenge the structure or score, but it may be that by aiming at doing something else I inadvertently challenge the conditions and structure of the score. When I improvise, the score and subscore will activate my body to be subjectivated by the bounds of the scores. I am simultaneously activated to push the edges, boundaries, and possibilities for interpreting the score by virtue of my investment into or around the ideas, values, and qualities that the score already cannot account for.

Projectivity, when moved through, gets mapped onto a sensation of desire. Desire in improvisation is something a dancer “leans into” (Lexi), “navigates towards”

(Vanessa), and “follows” (Alex). Desire is something a little bit more focused than impulse where desire can “arrive fully formed, as something I really need to do or make happen” (Erika). A desire can be somatically initiated – as in the desire to feel a particular sensation – but for my peer/participants desire is uniquely tied to a broader sense of dance as a technology of self and community. The desire to make a particular choice is informed by, in Emirbayer and Mische’s terms, future projects. As a group, my peer/participants and I often conflated impulse and desire seeing them as braided and reliant upon one another in the moment of dancing. But, desire, as something we *want*, want to feel, want to experience, want to express or make happen, was continuously linked back to an extended scope of the improvisation situation that included ideology, history, politics, and hope for the future of our field. In a playful but serious tone, Diego pointed to one example:

There's a desire for more than just a place to express our narcissistic tendencies... Like, because we have so much ballet training that is based in this realm of control, and it's like the older generation trained us in a mode that they knew (which was like ballet, control, narcissism), we have embodied that. We're trying to unlearn it. But the [dance] work that we make is still very much informed by [values of control] and we end up hiring people who are similarly informed by that. Even if we aren't doing it directly, what we're doing merely becomes a gentle derivative of that form of control, right? Which I think is a form of growth and progress away from such violence, but it's, at least for me and my little tender, delicate soul, I need to see to the fact that it's not in our generation, that we're going to get rid of that narcissistic obsession. And maybe it's never gone, maybe that's too big of a dream.

Even if the desire to banish “narcissistic tendencies” in dance is “too big” of a dream, it is a project that guides choices along many facets of an improvisation. In the desire that Diego outlines (a desire that I and my peer/participants share with him), the score itself might be developed or edited to ensure that values of exploration or care are prioritized over the canonical preference for control. Or this long-term desire might inform his spontaneous improvised choices that draw him, as he said, “towards sensations of non-control, or just something totally other like slipping, or pleasure, or the feeling of my forehead against the floor.” Desire, as a looking-to-the-future from the present, includes seeing a project or goal alongside the sedimented technique and bodily knowledge of dancing.

In aiming my choices toward flexible future outcomes, I am already working in the present with both the past and the future. The ideas of habit, impulse, and desire are braided together as concepts, sensations, and memories that make them accessible registers of experience. As Lexi said:

Impulse is like, exactly in between habit and desire. So, it's a combination of what I know, and what patterns are strengthened in my neurological web of knowing how to do things and how to feel things. And where I think I want to go, which is inextricably bound to what I already know. So impulse is like the moment of acting between those two things which are also bound for something. They're all here, right now. I think I just need to tell myself that I'm only working in one, and then I can sort of separate them even if they aren't at all separated in my dancing.

Similarly, Alex said:

You're talking about habit, impulse, and desire, and I feel like they are a bit of a braid of interwoven things because, you know, you could describe the habit as something you do impulsively. And impulse can come from your desire, and just as much so. Yeah, maybe it's kind of a triangulation of the way you think you're doing what you think is improvising.

These two examples of how habit, impulse, and desire are braided and interconnected is valuable for thinking about how language and concepts shape the experience of dancing. As Lexi said above, they will all be present in her dancing, but it is a matter of deciding to focus on one or another. These conceptual chunks or terms are swathes of sensation that shift and overlap; they are not discrete, but we can approach them as a somatic or kinesthetic score that makes sense in our bodies. When I brought up each of the terms in our group discussions, we were able to describe habit, impulse, and desire as specific states or qualities that inform our choice-making. However, these terms are still open to interpretation, still open to the difference of improvisational experience. When we try to tack one term down another term must pop up to support it, and we have to further refine what we mean by one to get at another. Emirbayer and Mische are clear that their three dimensions of agency are also interconnected and mutually mediating. When we recode their terms into more dancerly terms, the interconnectedness is not lost but we are also engaging in the porousness of these terms and the way that dancing comes to challenge the language we use to describe the dance. Dancing not only exceeds the terms we use, but it also reconfigures the actual meaning of these terms.

RE-CHUNKING THE FLUX

The flux is the inarticulable space between right here, right now, and the words used to chunk its meaning so that it becomes communicable and sharable. The flux is the stuff, the raw material of presence and reality. The flux is the field of experience.

To chunk the flux is an agentic action. To chunk is to “take hold” (Manning & Massumi, 2014, 24) of attention, patience, and presence. Chunking happens as a process of something (like a moment, a space, a room, an object) becoming determinate, becoming *something* recognizable, sort of knowable, and therefore a reliable instance that opens toward familiar action or interaction. “As it becomes determinate, an object separates out from the dynamic form, an affordance opens, and the tendency for describing makes itself felt, tuning to language... the event [comes] toward expression in language from the field of memory rather than from the field of immediacy” (Manning & Massumi, 2014, 16). Chunking is shorthand for habitually and fluidly reconstituting something as Something. Chunking is the availability of not needing to start at the beginning of a scene and its material. I see the floor as the floor and I know I walk on it, put my bag on it, sit on it from time to time. I see the door and I need not register its many features that constitute its dooriness in order to recognize it as a door, open it, and pass through; the door becomes describable in its chunked presence without my really seeing it. Chunking is the quick smoothing between experience and recall. I almost do not need to be here, in this moment, for me to be here. I can traverse all sorts of to do lists and piles of baggage, and still make my hot chocolate.

When dancing, I start to question these chunks. The chunks become newly available to me. The floor begins to shift into another surface that I can become curious about. The magic, the brilliance and lovely liveliness of improvisation, is that I can re-chunk the flux.

It’s kind of like magic. When you just take a body, and they move in a specific way, and then it’s a **thing**. It’s abstract. It exists for however long it exists. But it’s literally manifesting something just from a single person. I think it’s so bananas if I start thinking in that way. (Erika, emphasis added)

“A thing”. What is this “thing”? Surely dance, the fleetingness and slipperiness of dance is not a proper “thing”, an object with edges that you can hold, toss around, put on your dresser. What is this “thing”? The event of dancing or a dance? The discourse of

dance? An embodied moment that will be somatically archived into the dancer's body?
An image that is held by the witness or an audience member?

When Erika said this, the other four of us in the meeting nodded knowingly. Big, big smiles across all our faces.

Yes.

"THAT'S IT. *That* is IT." I exclaimed.

We met in the inadequacy of language. Each part of Erika's statement means nothing on its own. "Magic", to move "in a specific way", "thing": none of this points to anything precise. None of it. And yet, we knew what she spoke of. It is, as Erika quickly noted, "bananas to think in this way." So, what is it that we shared when we nodded in exceptional agreement? We shared the fact that the "thing" of dance cannot be held, and if it is, it is only held by the infinite container of "thing". We shared the moment in which language fails. We could tune-in, connect, agree, because we cannot get at it with precise language. Not because it's not get-at-able, but because we maintain a respect for the unapproachable. We understood she's speaking in metaphor, we were sharing the lack of ability to speak to the exact moment that movement coalesces into something impactful, beautiful, wonderful, transformative. We got at it with feeling; we knew of its existence, its power, and its pleasure.

We must give a name to something unnameable, that something that exists in excess of what has so far been named. "Thing."

MOVING THINGS

Erika is saying that we can be in the dance and FEEL something happening, and we can also be on the outside of a dance and notice when it becomes something. Flux. Sinking in. BEING IN IT. It is this intensity of attention, the depth of sinking into the moment. Being in the ZONE. Being there. It is not really about flow state, or a sort of odd perception. No, it is about re-tuning the whole body to be attentive and take way more of the world as FACT, TRUE, POSSIBLE, MAGIC, WEIRD.

To be tuning our bodies in magical ways, to really be there, do we need structure? Well, we at least need to understand that the thing of dance is not knowable

until you are in it, perceiving it. This is why it is a thing. A thing “asserts itself within a field of matter” (Bernstein, 2009, 69). The thing of dance is not just gesture, it is motion, texture, weight, velocity, emotionality, interpretation. The interpretation of the dance (and the interpretation that something is, in fact, dance) continues to make it a thing because it will never be the same as it makes itself noticeable to attention. We will go to watch another dance, another time, (or the same dance, the next night) and it becomes a new thing. The dance is not a Thing until we’re in it, doing it. Even then, the Thingness of it evaporates in the next and next and next gesture. It becomes a thing, every motion passes from Thingness to thingness in an instant because the thing of dance is the just having passed, the evolution of the form into memory where it is thingified into a composition of emotion, feeling, quality, sensation, affect. “A thing demands that people confront it on its own terms” (ibid), the thing of dance is that attention flexes to include and follow the sense of “what if?”

The dance passes from Thing to thingness (without even being a Thing, possessable or saleable or describable in its entirety) by the way the whole moment (blurrily bracketed off) is caught. Perceptibly. With perception. That is interpretation. Interpretation makes it go from Thing to thing. We give the dance away to the possibilities of interpretation, that is then imprinted into the availability of sharing the utterance of “thing” as something shared, known, understood, important, and totally fucking felt. The thing of dance is sometimes *something* to dance with, *something* that “invites a person to dance” (Bernstein, 2009, 70).

THEORY OF A CRACK

There is a crack in the studio space I have been renting for over a year now. A crack in the hardwood floor. It might be more of a gap between boards than a crack within one; I have never taken the time to actually look at it. What I do know is that it is in the south-east quadrant of the studio, closer to center than edge, and long. It might be about a meter long. I discovered it one day quite by accident.

Rolling, sliding, spinning, gliding, curling, pushing against and on the floor is normal practice for me. Some days in the studio I spend more time upside down than right side up. “Right side up” means something very twisty, roly, slidy, when I’m in there. “Right side up” does not necessarily mean standing on my feet, vertical and erect; these

days horizontality has felt right. It might also be worth noting that I like to take naps on the studio floor, that naps are an important part of my dance practice and an important way of relating to the floor. But the crack. Back to the crack.

I was rolling, sliding, spinning, gliding, along the floor, warming up, getting into myself, shedding and collecting what I was feeling then and there. I pressed my right foot into the floor, extending my left leg backward using the top of my foot to map my relationship to the floor. Engaging my bent left leg, I could straighten my right leg while continuing the descending trajectory to the floor. I intended to either pause in an in between moment for a breath with my body hovering, poised on top of my spread feet, or I felt I might continue the course to place my butt onto my heel. This organization of my legs in relation to speed and the descent to the floor is a “move” of sorts that shows up often in my dancing; I really know this thing. These were the two possible leg positions I anticipated moving through:



Figure 5: leg positions

As my left foot was tracing, pushing, sliding backward, my toenail discovered the crack. A noisy crack of my own was generated. Half the nail, gone. Socks, quickly made bloody.

My body reacted as expected. Every iota of performativity or virtuosity evaporated, my pelvis immediately dropped to the floor, I swung my left leg around in front of me so my hands could execute the instinctive need to squeeze-not-squeeze the injury with my hands, and I made a scowl-grimace, teeth bared. Band-Aids and tape were unearthed from my bag, I tore off the loose nail and wrapped what needed to be wrapped. Changed my socks. Got back onto the dance floor. For the rest of the day, I avoided any moves that brought the tops of my feet to slide along the floor to take care of the dull pain.

Fast-forward a few weeks (or was it a few months?) and I find myself back in the same zone of the studio; south-east quadrant, more center than edge, and I begin doing

a similar “move” as before. Legs far apart, center dynamically shifting between the two anchored points. This time both legs are straight, and I see that the velocity in this moment is going to take my chest to the floor by sliding my right leg out and away from my center. But the crack. I sense this crack to be near. I think I hesitate, track what part of my foot is tracking the floor. My attention to the quality of surface and texture is amplified. I am taking care of how my fleshy surface slides across the surface of the floor. My pinky toe catches the crack (or did the crack catch my pinky toe?), and flops over the crack. The flop buckles my leg, and my knee saves me by banging – hard – on the floor. A purple souvenir remained on my patella for a few weeks.

Damned floor.

The floor crack is much more than the narrative of how I met it and came to map the studio space as containing an injurious spot. It is true that layered into my familiarity of the studio are memories of somewhat graphic pain and the duration of recovery and healing – the nuisance of an injured toe takes time to disappear from foregrounded attention. But the marking of these floor-crack-events can also provide an entry into the dancerly knowledge I have relied upon and developed as I explored the constraints of choice and the resonances of thinking in movement. The floor crack brings me back to the unsteady landscape of the flux that also holds the unsteady self.

Floors I generally know to be something that are smooth. In dance spaces there is typically a vinyl flooring laid on top called marley. Marley is laid out in long strips that are usually 5 or 6 feet wide, and the gaps between strips are taped together. The tape is usually the only inconsistency in an otherwise slick and uniform floor. Hardwood dance floors are also typically constructed and maintained in such a way that ensures a similar smoothness. While marley flooring can show its wear, it can also be replaced easily. Hardwood flooring holds onto its impacts, marks, grooves, and cracks. A dance floor is *supposed* to be smooth and uniform. I can go into a studio and assume some level of safety in this smoothness. My nails and my skin trusts this. But when a crack arrives mid-dance, well, this upsets that assumption. Yet, somehow, because I was in the zone of dancing, in the improvisatory mode, the cracking of my toenail against the floor crack offered me a new perspective on that particular floor.

Improvising allows me to tap into the spaces of dynamic exploration, I can slough off layers of assumptions and calcified meaning to find something good, pleasurable, interesting, affirming. I can take the world as a field of experience. Improvising dislodges and sheds the strictures of cultural, social, and discursive logic without rejecting them completely. With scores and structure and agency all in mind, I can bend and twist the rules to maybe feel something new. I might throw that feeling or idea out, see it as garbage, but I still pushed the structure and saw my position within said structure. Within improvisation, I can appreciate the whole expanse of unknowability. I can hold potentiality without necessarily needing it to be something in particular.

A RANGE OF KNOWLEDGE IS LIKE A RANGE OF MOTION

Ben Spatz (2015) writes:

practice itself is not equivalent to knowledge, because it is neither repeatable nor transmissible. A live event cannot constitute a research outcome because it is bounded in time and space. We must therefore have a way of naming the transmissible knowledge that a live event or practice may discover, explore, demonstrate, clarify, reveal, illustrate, or incarnate. Technique, as knowledge, can be a research outcome of practice. (232)

Spatz's desire here is for embodied research or practice-based research to be framed and aimed in such a way that facilitates the accumulation of knowledge over time, rendering embodied knowledge capable of being shared across space.¹³ In an academic context, Spatz hopes for embodied practice to become available to the rigours of peer-review and the exponential discoveries made possible by such rigours. The square that Spatz circles is the difficulty of sharing, articulating, and communicating the content of an embodied practice; Spatz is working against the assumptions that language and embodied experience are irreconcilable and in a hierarchical relationship of value (Magnat, 2016). Within the schema of academic value (or legitimacy) Spatz is pushing against, embodied knowledge and practice is at the bottom. To ensure that the experience of dance practice and the document of a thesis, for example, are weighted equally in terms of the knowledge they produce and contribute to a given field, Spatz looks to the "transmissible knowledge" in each. The transmissible knowledge of embodied practice is both technique and methodology: "practice can itself be a research methodology, leading to the discovery of new knowledge in the form of new technique" (Spatz, 2015, 233). This means clear communication of what is being done, and how it is done.

Prioritizing the transmissible knowledge of technique and methodology is not only for the good of the field itself, but also opens the field to more complex interdisciplinary engagement. Making dance-knowledge more available to dance practitioners is a worthy place to start (I surely want to know what dancing people are practicing all over the

¹³ Spatz's argument unfolds out of his quick dismissal of filming as a form for the documentation of dance or embodied practice. Filming is, in a word, inadequate.

world), but what if dance-knowledge was made more legible to the fields of math or history? It is then critical that embodied practitioners can “articulate what they are doing beyond the confines of their own fields” (Spatz, 2015, 238). To enable this analogous collaboration or knowledge-exchange “we need to shift emphasis away from idiosyncrasies – like ability and talent – and towards relative reliabilities with which we can meaningfully engage across time and space - and, more importantly, the transmissible techniques these reliabilities afford” (Spatz, 2015, 232). As a dance practitioner who is also entangled with anthropology, relaying my methodological and technical scores is a way to honour and continue developing the knowledge my peer-participants and I co-generated and played with over our 11 weeks together.

While I am on board with orienting the outcomes of practice towards the relatively reliable aspects it affords – methodology and technique – I am not willing to let go of “talent” or “ability” completely because of their associations with what I above called “flair” and “personality” which are ultimately associated to the space of agency and excess (that rely upon the powers of subjectivity). Beyond its terminology and the issue of vernacular, agency acts as an important ingredient to the power-dynamics that weigh the significance of different forms of knowledge. For this reason, Spatz calls for

a more complex account of agency: one that does not assume that traditional technique is always coercive, or that transgressive technique is necessarily empowering or freeing, but instead pays closer attention to the specific and contextual relationship between practitioner and practice... We cannot then assume any particular causal link between consciousness and agency. Instead, we must expand our idea of agency so that it extends beyond the conscious mind. This does not mean that all technique involves agency. The point is rather that we cannot determine the relationship between technique and agency, in any given case, by discovering the contents of a practitioner’s conscious mind. Deeply trained, sedimented, automatic technique may nevertheless be a manifestation of profound agency. (54-55)

The call for more complexity makes me say “yes”. My peer-participants and I acknowledge that there were many aspects of our dance training that were coercive, and our continuance into the professional register of the field has not removed this coercion from our experiences of dance and dancing. Our inclination to center an ethics of care and pleasure (as well as consent) into our practices becomes transgressive without necessarily freeing us from the murky waters of exploitative norms. To look at agency within dance practice (as we seven know it) is to look at the challenging space of

simultaneous transgression and reification that holds the possibility to enact agency at many levels. On the scale of doing an improvisation, the score might tell me that I need to be in constant motion and I might transgress this instruction by staying still, allowing my rhythmic breathing to be my interpretation of constant motion. At the same time as I am in stillness, being with the constancy of my respiration, the way that I find stillness might have an air of performative tension; a poised spine, a sense of readiness and of being seen that reifies the values of performer and audience being separate. Or perhaps my physical stance and posture reifies the echo of ballet training I thought I had exorcized. Choosing visible stillness is a transgression to the score, but it can also be seen as a transgression to the balletic posture I employ in the stillness as I begin to emphasize the breathing, allowing it to change my position and expression. All of this might happen without the present awareness that it is happening; the urge to transgress the underlying techniques in my body and the improvisation score itself do not need to be conscious for it to be experienced as agency.

Continuing with Spatz's call for a more complex account of agency, differentiating agency from consciousness speaks to the necessity to disentangle the hierarchies of value placed on different forms of knowledge. By avoiding the misrecognition of agency as the expression of the conscious mind, the social importance of "agency" can be more fully integrated with embodied practice, and the knowledge that is therein produced can gain authority in the institutional realms that continue to privilege the disembodied theorist. Spatz's project of recognizing the "detailed and effortful labour" (4) in the practice of technique is to reconfigure "agency". Therefore, agency, when rendered as a practice of excess within the structure of a score, opens up the space for nuanced experiences of meeting powerful discourses and relationships. It reaffirms the power already present in one's body and in one's trust of embodied presence. The way I am approaching agency here is distinct from Spatz who makes clear that "just as we avoid reducing technique to language, we should avoid romanticizing embodiment or performance as transcendent excess" (60). Reconfiguring agency for me is about questioning the zone of excess as dancing spills out of its techniques into the flurry of attention and sensation.

PARENTHETICAL REFLEXIVITY

This is what I am currently stuck on within my own practice: I am in the range of my physical, athletic prime and I want to dance with the virtuosity and athletic prowess that I learned through dance training and continue to enjoy as an audience member.¹⁴ I want to do deep lunges, throw myself at the ground, test my limits, and push myself. Hard. I want to practice and learn new complex patterns of movement and take full advantage of my range of mobility and strength. And yet, in engaging with this sort of virtuosity, I inevitably retraumatize myself by returning to the very site of coercion and exploitation that sometimes shaped my training experiences. Additionally, contemporary dance has *deep* connections with the embodied values found in ballet (Foster, 1986). Sensing the residue of ballet technique and ballet's history in my body – and all its sexist, ableist, racist, heteronormative, colonial detritus that still harms bodies (Sheena, 2017) – makes entering into a virtuosic mode of dancing a politically and interpersonally delicate task.

How to reconcile this?

¹⁴ I want to clarify that being 26 years old is one kind of “physical prime” that offers a particular form of virtuosity. My joints don't really hurt, and I still heal from injuries quickly – this is a privilege. Should I continue dancing, and I intend to, I will find new “primes” and expressions of virtuosity at 36, 46, 56, and beyond. Vancouver has an incredible dance community that connects me with an intergenerational range of dance artists who have continued dancing well into their 70's (and beyond). There are typically transitions out of performing and into creating or choreographing, but even then, a virtuosity in directing other dancers and making dance works is not to be dismissed. I had a conversation with a friend in January 2021 (it was an argument) who said they preferred watching young bodies dancing and performing and that I'm getting a bit “long in the tooth” for dancing now that I creep up towards 30. I was, in a word, upset. On the inside of my experience and this community, it feels like I'm only now coming into a performative virtuosity that emerges through life-experience, the refinement of aesthetic interests, and the privilege of having a (mostly) able body. The notion that I am “aging-out” at 26 is hilarious to me because a value I gratefully share with many of my peers is that virtuosity can be separated from canonically youthful athleticism and aesthetics. Of all the dance artists I know who are called “senior” dance artists, they are by no means unathletic or uninteresting to watch. Like I said, I'm 26, and I am already quite tired of facing comments like this that speak to a broad dismissal of older bodies as well as a more nuanced understanding of the knowledge that accumulates in professionally moving bodies. Put bluntly, when I hear that someone prefers seeing younger bodies performing, I am reminded of the blunt sexualization and objectification of womxn's bodies (MY body) in dance that unproductively confines (and oppresses) the expressive and experiential value of embodiment entirely. That my livelihood can be pinned to my youthful beauty, sexual value, or capacity for explosive movement is disconcerting. Virtuosity and the notion of “being in my prime” becomes an issue of sexism, ablist, and agism. A whole thesis could exist here – and I guess that this thesis is partly inspired by my annoyance at said dismissal – but for now, only strong feelings and the intent to keep dancing.

Or if not reconcile, how to proceed with this schism?

I proceed with pleasure. With the insistence that following pleasure, and the resounding “yeses” in my practice, will teach me that my identity as a dancer is not at stake if I do not engage in a canonical form of virtuosity. Pleasure in being athletic can manifest as catharsis or the simple affirmation of my expressive range and capacities. Further, dancing with this schism always already present means that there is no way but through. I dance to process all this and contend with the possibility that I might offer incremental change to the normative modes of violence through the very modalities that first harmed me.

CONCERN IS NICE TO HAVE

By prioritizing pleasure and an ethics of care there is the possibility to challenge these norms and remake the values that shape our dancing, even when we engage in a refined virtuosity. Our group’s Zoom meetings often became a space for processing difficult encounters and situations we had lived through, while sharing the tactics we are utilizing within our practices. Vanessa spoke of the instance of receiving criticism from the person at the front of the room (the teacher, or the choreographer) and how this criticism might be the only feedback a dancer gets to affirm that they are doing anything at all.

We nodded in agreement.

Yes.

To be told you are doing the dancing wrong might be the only form of interaction you get in formative moments and years. This adds to what Vanessa also called the “masochistic tendencies” in dance practice; the harsh criticism leaks into harsh inner reflection and judgement and gets absorbed into one’s movement choices in ways that can manifest in pain and injury (acute or chronic). In measurable ways, we each relayed instances of returning to dancing too soon after an injury because of the guilt, or disconnect we felt from having to stop dancing for a period of time. Diego followed up from within his own evolving practice:

I’ve realized that I need to cause myself more physical harm. I need more physical pain to feel like I can shift these things [the moods and ideas that

I'm dancing with] ... Maybe it's that I'm so used to having this level of body-discomfort or pain with me, yeah, how close is that connection between chronic pain and being a dancer? Like I walked into a fucking piercing place [on my week off] to get my face pierced anywhere because I just needed someone to stick some fucking sharp thing through my face.¹⁵

How to subvert the baseline need for pain? How to subvert the value inscribed in a dancing body that one needs to be on the edge of injury and suffering to feel like one is dancing at all? If pain becomes, as Alex said, the indicator for “good enough”, how can we harness the sensitivity (or desensitization) to pain towards new ends? For Vanessa, she redefines pain. She recodes what pain *is* in her body.

So, there's something about, a) I think everybody has a different notion of what pain is in their body. But b) it's a source of feedback... For me, when I was listening to that feedback, it changed its context in my system.¹⁶ And not that pain is necessarily a bad thing either. I think it's like an indicator and a sensation. It's just a sensation... So, this pain or piercing or pushing, they're all forms of compression in some way, whether it's your muscles, squeezing in blood. Like something else has been compressed. It's as if our body is kind of looking for these micro/macro compressions constantly.

Recoding pain as a sensation that can be satisfied through compression or tactility, and bringing one's focused awareness to these things, can reconfigure the value system of injury and pain found within the dance milieu. To recode an entire pedagogical and performative ideology within one's own body indicates the subversive and generative possibilities that come through a movement practice. “Recoding” might be a practice in its own right, but recoding is here seen as the product of improvisation and attending to the layers that emerge into attention through the act of dancing. By improvising – which includes noticing one's need for pain and discomfort, and a recognition that such inclinations toward pain are harmful because the limits of recognizing them as “bad” have been blurred – one can actively build new definitions and terms of affirmation. I do not have to be in pain to be convinced that I am really truly dancing, I can rather attend to compression and tactility. With some agentic prowess, I

¹⁵ In case you found yourself slightly invested here, Diego did not get anything pierced and instead read some Heidegger.

¹⁶ Vanessa often uses the term “system” in places where “body” might also be used. In using the term “system” Vanessa comes to capture the dynamic relationships of both physiological systems (like the circulatory or nervous systems) and the social systems these come to respond to and interact with.

can reconfigure foundational, sensational narratives of what it is to be a dancer through the task of improvisation. Stoking nascent perceptions of possibility is exciting for the prospect of growth and change in one's practice. For me, recoding ideas and sensations that feel immovable and reductive of my embodied capacity is what frames the doing of scores as a generous and intimate practice. The reflexive possibilities to double back on myself in improvisation is an instance of movement becoming theoretical and dance practice itself being an embodied knowledge-generating and world-building practice of being in conversation and community with others across time and space.

RE-CHUNKING AS SHARING

Transmitting methodology is a matter of explaining what it is that happened over the course of fieldwork. So let us touch on the canon immediately; the strange becomes the familiar.

Participant observation is already analogous to dancing. With participant observation, we ask ourselves: how can I engage in something AND watch myself, my interlocutors, and all other forms of occurrences while doing it. The score and subscore of "participant observation" marks the practice as anthropological and as a canonical signifier of academic validity. In dancing, I learned how to do and watch myself do quite quickly. It could be considered a survival mechanism – I needed to figure out how to monitor and augment my own dancing on the inside or else I risked being scolded and criticized in front of my peers. But the ability to do and watch myself do is also the technique employed to follow up with a curiosity; if I can track myself as I do, then I can return to the sensation, the movement, the mood, and I can explore it and question it. The doubled vision of doing and watching is a technique of researching one's own body and practice – I watch myself do, I notice what is going on inside and around me so that I can gain awareness and understanding of my habits or notice when an illuminating or novel move emerges from my dancing. This doing and watching oneself do is the exact mechanism that makes talking about one's own dancing possible. My peer/participants are incredibly adept at this, as we saw above with pain transforming into compression.

In asking about everyone's modalities of improvising – or as Alex put it: "what do you think you're doing when you're improvising?" – we have to go back into an archived

memory of this do-watch-do to parse all the kinesthetic data we've picked up and sifted through to then articulate an answer.¹⁷

What do we think we are doing when we are improvising? What is informing your choice-making?

We each offered improvisation modalities that we are engaging in our practices. It is really exciting to me to notice the overlapping values and interests that arise in our modalities, and it is most exciting to sense how we can all be using different terms and ideas to sympathetically engage with improvisation.

For Vanessa a key modality is pleasure. Or going after what she thinks might "feel good in some way." This could be compressions, or tension, or glitching through quick compression. Pleasure for Vanessa is also found in the big picture of composition or using compositional tools to follow desire – and not necessarily "desire" as it might be linked to positive sensations: "there's also a desire to disrupt the desire, to feel uncomfortable." "Feeling good" can mean the aesthetic alignment or intuitive sense of correctness in a compositional choice:

Let's say I'm engaging in a multi-person score, and we're all in it together, and I see someone taking the space in a very frenetic way. I will probably choose not to match that frenetic state. But I would maybe anchor the space somehow with some sort of holding-the-space for them so that they – if I'm not necessarily involved in that particular activity that they're doing – that they have space and room to do it, and that I'm somehow part of the overall experience in the room. But I am also making sure that I'm holding space for the activity they're engaging in... I would think of repetition also as a function of composing within an improv in terms of transformation. Like repetition leading to transformation or replication of an activity.

Composition in improvisation becomes the ability to respond to environment, space, timing, movement qualities, personal preference or interest, and whomever else might be in the space (the person *and* their choices), all at once. And to let the present

¹⁷ The "how" here is the hard part to articulate, all we can say is that we came to it through repetition and the return to something that was pleasurable in some way. As Diego said: "It's going to an impulse that's always a repetition of a certain point at a certain level." I also wonder about the importance of "accuracy" in the recall of kinesthetic memory. For now, I am inclined to cite Erika: "make a bold statement in pencil. Just to feel how it sounds once you make the idea real instead of hiding in its unsaid-ness." Say the idea or memory with the trust and knowledge that it can be revised and refined later. Memory can be fickle, but trusting sensation has to be taken seriously.

ideas or constraints then transform in the real-time relation to one another. Attending to pleasure in the present tense, to be present with the elements ready at hand in this moment, and *this* moment, and *this* moment, is one way to think about doing improvisation. To listen and respond to what is all right here, right now.

For Lexi what came to mind as a modality of improvisation is to reference things learned and known: “remembering different things people have asked me to do or shared with me and then maybe finding moments of riffing, or discovery, that are not precisely blueprints of something that somebody else has offered, but feels something more my own.” This referencing and riffing on memory is a process of slow accumulation, accumulating new constraints and structures that can be broken, blended with other tasks, and bent to new ends than the ones initially offered. Attending to the past, the memory of what was once experienced in one context, and bringing it into a new context (or even a new state of self) is another way to think about improvising.

Diego describes his preferred modality of improvisation as a return to sensation.

Returning to sensation is actually about games of free-play, and the free-play creates its own type of coherency each time you go into it. I'm playing a set of games right now, which are going to have to do with repetition. They're going to have to do with body mapping, internal body mapping. And then it's going to have to do with time limits. I'm creating coherence between these. I don't really want to call them concepts, but we can hold them as concepts. Those concepts are all sensational and they're all shapes that returning to sensation takes.

These concepts of time-limits and body mapping along with the process of finding coherency between the two is a melded process of past, present, and future.¹⁸ Past understandings or experiences of dancing within a time-limit, alongside the process of body mapping, is generating an intuitive logic *in the moment*. All of this moves towards an overarching logic or coherency that can be seen after the fact as holding the entirety of the improvisation. This capacity to hold past, present, and future in one's body is one way to think about improvisation.

¹⁸ Body mapping here refers to the process of tracking one's internal landscape of mood, sensation, impulse, as well as quality, density, tension, proprioception, velocity, and sequencing. Body mapping is the noticing of what one is doing while doing.

For Erika, “first choice, best choice.” An assurance that the first choice – be it stillness or gesture – needs no judgement or qualifiers. It is what it is. This modality is one of pleasure, of reworking the insecurities or doubts that this choice might not be “correct”, and it is a modality of “tuning into, as best you can, the present moment. And the next one and the next one.” To go into improvisation with the sturdy trust of “first choice, best choice” is a way for Erika to track her attention, to notice how long she can stay with a moment. It is a test of attention: how long can I be here, and in what way am I being here?

And then when [attention is] not there, when it's mushy, I'm trying to let that also be a processing thing. A little bit therapeutic. To let other things, other learnings, processes happen even if my brain is a little bit detached. That feels like a different modality as well. I try to keep them, or I try to be aware of each... And finding joy. And not doing things that make my body feel bad (but those are basic modalities).

Attending to all these things – pleasure, attention, the mushy lack of attention when the body starts noodling but the trust that something is still happening remains – is a feature of improvisation that gets to the heart of its magic. The generalization that we are not good at multitasking is broken a little bit by the capacity for an improvisation, the improviser, to hold ALL this. The multiplicity, the mobility, the shifting and adaptive capacity for dancing to hold so much... this is the weird magic of a dancing body.

Alex echoes Erika's offered modality of trust and speaks from the position of someone who makes scores for dancers: “I've been attracted to the ideas in dance improvisation, which come from looking inwards as opposed to looking from outwards onto the body, and maybe that's partly my own opinion on how I like to trust the instincts of a dancer.” Improvisation can begin from an outward place, from the stance of a desired aesthetic, but the theme that emerges here with us is the preference for the dance to begin inside, and in the vulnerable spaces between bodies and the direct power of taking a choice in relationship to others. The violence of a choice (the resulting exclusion of other possibilities) is transformed through the trust for dancers to take care, to make their own decisions as they see fit or as aligned with their sensibilities.

For Sarah, a modality of improvisation is “to take care”. Taking and giving care to the precious moment of dancing that is also fraught with layers of hurt and lived violence. But taking care is likewise about the zone of improvisation that centers play

and exploration in a realm of rules and parameters easily addressed, augmented, confronted, stretched, and attuned to one's present needs.

I tune into some mode of thinking that I, I don't know. It just feels somehow different. When I'm improvising, it feels different than when I'm just moving through life, being a person... It's a lot about taking care of myself. And finding joy.

Joy and pleasure, while having different resonances across our varied approaches to temporality and presence, remain so essential to each of our descriptions of our improvisation modalities.

As for my modalities? I think about fatigue and exhaustion, exhausting an idea or my physicality. I am curious about the very real limitations of my body such as the depth and duration of a lunge or inverted position that engages my shoulders (these limits and ranges change as a result of mood, where I am at in my cycle, chronic and acute injuries, and my base energy levels of the day). I work with timing and rhythm – what is the music of my bones, the intrinsic tempo of wrapping, sliding, and curling my body around the room? I also think about tension as a way to interrupt my own flow. I like to find a sense of sequencing between and within appendages and my spine, but I also like to work with a soft and quick rerouting of my trajectories. These are all physical elements I employ to find “the feeling;” the moment that I get delicate, full-bodied goosebumps and my eyes start rolling back into my head without losing any clarity in seeing the space. “The feeling” that makes me feel both out of reality and deeply, deeply set within this reality that has all its rules and pressures and regulations and obligations. “The feeling” is about just figuring out why I dance, how I dance, and how I want to dance next. It is like an ecstatic YES. And there is more: I work within a modality of shame and shame-avoidance. I make choices based on the projected assumptions of what is correct for a given situation, slipping into a spiral of questioning if I am a “real” dancer. And more still! The accident. Sometimes I will begin noodling, or just moving without intention or guidance, I will see what arises, and in a moment where I literally trip or move with what might be seen as relative clumsiness, I try to follow this accident. I follow the accident as something to be interested in that has disrupted my flow. The accident is also a way I can bring attention to an opening into new ideas or possibilities for what to do next.

It is quite beautiful. For so much to be packed into a small group of artists' improvisation practices. And for our purposes here, I can condense it into the registers of

past/present/future as well as “pleasure” and “care.” But we must remember that these modalities will shift, perhaps next year, or perhaps the next time we enter into a moment of sanctioned improvisation. The techniques we are employing at any given moment of improvising are multiple; they are also communicable, and we can pass them on, share them with each other, and pose questions about these techniques. We can live in the immediate evolution of our own bodies and practices.

CONCLUSION

In a paper-writing score, now would be the time for a recap of what I have written in this thesis. Similarly, after an improvisation comes an invitation for reflection: what stuck out, what was noticed, what do I want to keep exploring? What happened and what did I feel? Reflection refines practice.

The task of this thesis was to look at how dancing, as a kinesthetic experience of choice-making, is also a way of dealing with agency and its discourse. This text was an experiment driven by a desire to get better at writing about and describing how my dance practice is a theoretical container for thinking anthropologically. It has also been an exercise of complementarity: exploring how my anthropological training and curiosities can enrich my practice and support the theoretical impulse in movement. The text itself is something I am proud of. The primary limitation of a pandemic was serious, but the limitations of language built into the research itself was fascinating to navigate. I would like to have spent more time with the discourse of agency as it spills out into other fields and disciplines so that embodied agency might become more of a refined concept for my future work. The substantiality of the term agency has quite a history to reckon with, and I would like to continue doing this. Emirbayer and Mische posed a strong structure of agency to toy with, offering a temporal bridge of past, present, and future to be felt in movement as habit, impulse, and desire. Nonetheless, the connecting work I did to bring kinesthetic experiences into this particular theory of agency feels insufficient and would have been strengthened had I connected agency and subjectivity more directly.

Additionally, I would have liked to spend more time writing and inquiring into the metaphors I use to bring dance practice into language. Playing with the structure of this text as it refers back to a canon of academic thinking has not been sufficiently explored here. But, as a first attempt at doing this work, I am excited by what I did find in this passionate labour to write about something I have always wrestled with. Learning how to braid instances of improvisational wonder and weirdness with the practices and words of others allowed me to sense into the “yeses” and “no’s” that I feel in both dancing and writing/reading. Working to refine my explanatory abilities as I write about the experience of dancing was fruitful for me (and I hope it will prove fruitful for others). Spending time in the in-between space of weird moments becoming a theoretical impulse put me on a

steep learning curve to trust and listen to my body in the moments of sensing into something I get caught on. This thesis has felt clumsy as I wiggle and dance at my computer, noticing how something like the ethical standards I practice in dance (an ethics of care) has similarly been applied to my research ethics. Similarly, by squeezing writing out of the tough somatic places in memory, I leaned into the potentiality of improvisation as it allows me to rechunk the set of values I hold in both dance and academic spaces. That is to say, I can now see a lot more room to maneuver my experiments in canonically structured spaces of knowledge-generation.

I am also proud of having completed my first serious fieldwork period, especially with the distinct limitation of doing so within a pandemic. Throughout the fieldwork, every time I met with my peer/participants I wished for a different situation; I wished that we could meet in the studio to sweat and come into reflection and presence together. I coped with this through the pleasure of facilitating meaningful conversations and by digging deeper into my own practice. The time alone in the studio became more significant than I had anticipated (or wanted) because my body was the only body available to me. Nonetheless, the solo studio time was an important site for my research as I considered the new methodological possibilities for what I had initially planned as being relatively typical “participant observation.” My impossible desire to sit in the live presence of my peers meant that I had to confront doing fieldwork in a context that my education had not prepared me for. I had to show up for myself in the studio, in practice, and put myself to work without the familiar community supports (or energy of alive-togetherness) I had typically relied upon in creative projects. It was just me, 900 square feet of empty studio space, the changing weather, my peers’ words, and my questions. It was oftentimes, in a word, isolating. Yet, being able to hold a space during tense and confusing times for people that I care deeply about was an honour; having a reason to consistently connect with artists whose practices inspire me was an absolute gift. My peer/participants reliably showed up with honesty and vulnerability, and for me this is the value of my master’s project. Yes, I feel as if I have honed my ability to write about dance practice. And yes, my understanding of agency and embodied practice has been refined in the process of communicating and thinking through sensed experiences. But this thesis feels more like a love note to my dance community far and wide.

The question of embodied agency (what does agency feel like in improvisation, how is agency practiced in dance?) is a thread I will continue to pursue. Returning to

Emirbayer and Mische (1998), a question they pose for possible future research on the topic of agency feels especially interesting to pursue in relation to dance practice: “How do changes in agentic orientations allow actors to exercise different forms of mediation over their contexts of action?” (1008) Specifically, I am interested in how agency could be thought as intersectional and in multiplicity, asking what is the reach of embodied values prioritized in dance spaces beyond said spaces¹⁹. Considering the political shifts happening in the international and local dance scenes that are challenging the ideologies and values of hegemonic dance institutions and values, exploring the kinesthetic implications of a dancer’s agency is poignant. As a young(er) dancer, I feel the shifts in power and the increase of accountability being asked of local institutions; continuing with this thread of agency, excess, and subjectivation is relevant as my peers and I continue our grassroots efforts of making dance equitable, ethical, and caring. How dancers continue to organize in and out of the studio, exert their agency, and enact their desires, through both the act of dancing and the adjacent socio-political practices, is going to be an important part of this shift I am feeling in the field.

These present shifts in the field of dance remain at the center of this thesis and show up in the words and practices of my peer/participants that I have shared here. It has been hard to write about these words and practices of others, and to have feelings about them that I then share publicly. Being a member of the community I did my research in (and about), I was mindful of my desire to avoid doing “parachute anthropology” where an anthropologist parachutes into a community, collects/extracts data, and flees the scene to write their text and gain cultural or social capital from the unequal exchange (Pedelty, 2004; Hannerz, 2004). In having lasting relationships that exceed the bounds of my role as researcher, an ethics of care was not only something relevant to the content of our dancerly conversations but also essential in how I handled the intimacies of being a researcher who has a professional stake in the field. Adaptation, responsiveness, and spontaneity were extremely valuable qualities to embody through this research. Framed by a score with more gravity than I have ever

¹⁹ Embodied values. I consider “embodied values” to hinge on the primacy of movement and the experiential. I also include the ethics of care that I have explored here to be part of these embodied values that honour and respect the physically and emotionally demanding expectations of dancing. The moods, the injuries, the relationships, the politics, and the dynamic qualities or textures of all these are constituting elements to the embodied values in dance spaces.

experienced – physical distancing – centering care as both concept and structure kept my research on-task and filled with appreciation for my peer/participants.

On the inside of doing the score of thesis-writing, I have also dealt with care in the sense of being kind and caring toward myself while frustrated and confused. By the time I came to the editing stages of this text, my embodied interests had somewhat moved on from the questions I was asking. The speed of bodily thinking hit the interesting hiccup of text where I was faced with the quickness of my body reaching toward, for example, impulse as quirkiness rather than as the expression of presence I explore above. I had to write about “impulse” in a formulation of presence and attention that was no longer foregrounded in my practice. Working back through embodied memory and using recordings and journal entries as prompts only generated more ideas that were incongruous (or irrelevant) to the task at hand. Writing about past intensities and preoccupations was at odds with my preference to honour the inherent pacing of sensation and thought. Dancing can be slow for me, too, taking months of consistent practice to even notice a theoretical impulse. But perhaps the unsympathetic tempos are a product of never having done this before. This thesis is, again, an artifact of a time, a very specific point in time that holds what I was thinking with in my body. I appreciate having this document as such an artifact, and as I prepare to begin a doctoral degree, I am wondering how to reconcile these different tempos of understanding. How to manage the slowness of writing clearly and thoughtfully alongside the immersive and brisk pace of dancing that continues beyond its text? Maybe I need to play with eschewing temporal assumptions of both.

This difference in tempo is similar to the questions of knowledge I addressed above, specifically around the role of the unknown and the antagonistic relationship language and embodiment can have in research spaces. When my body knows something, how do I write about it, and why is it that the mind/body divide continues to show up in these transitional frictions? The ability for me to return to an archive of knowledge and cite previous thinkers and practitioners is vital to this transition and a citation becomes a way to access ideas over space and time. Spatz (2015) understands that for embodied practice to be taken seriously in academia, the knowledge generated from embodied practices (technique and methodology) must be made available to the “long-established protocols of peer review and citation” (235). A citation is then a technology of memory, a way to return to something and potentially go beyond it. Yet,

the politics of citation cannot be left behind because “in addition to publication, citation is taken as an assumed proxy for measuring impact, relevance, and importance, with implications not only for hiring, promotion, tenure, and other aspects of performance evaluation, but also for how certain voices are represented and included over others in intellectual conversations” (Mott and Cockayne, 955). This applies to *types* of knowledge cited. In my efforts to make dance practice and danced sensations legible – literally legible – in this thesis I have needed to draw on other material. The straightforwardness of citing a peer/participant or the bluntness of pulling out Bourdieu quotes makes citation an important practice for the drive toward exploring the theoretical impulse of movement. But such citations are violent, it is a bludgeoning act that requires the embodied experiences be translated into citable media. The urgency I feel to prioritize kinesthesia in discourses of the body and the senses asks me to fit my dancerly knowledge into a form that maybe it does not have to be in. This might sound a bit like I am wishing my thesis is not a thesis. I simply take seriously the power of text, knowledge, and knowledge generated in academic settings; I see this thesis to be an important text that might expand the citable media on something that is itself hard to cite.

In my dance community, I have seen the citational drive be expressed in simple and straightforward ways. For example, a teacher or peer, in offering an idea might say: “I learned this from [so and so] who learned it from [that other person] ...” It is a nice way to recognize our lineages, to honour them and see how we need one another to grow our practices. But the citational lineage I have for my dancing is distinct from a citational lineage of “agency” or “chunking”. Can I say who, or what technique taught me to hold my arm out to my side? Do I cite balletic residue, Graham technique, my own idiosyncrasies? I think it is important to continue thinking about embodied citations as they play a role in how techniques, aesthetics, and kinesthetic values are transmitted across time and space. Just as academics can form “citation cartels (informal agreements between authors to continually cite one another’s work)” (Mott and Cockayne, 955), dance aesthetics can become cliquy making some embodied values more visible than others. When I listen to my “yeses” and “no’s”, when I notice something weird in the studio become a theoretical impulse, when I notice that vulnerability is complicated and challenging, and when I work with an ethics of care that challenges particular hegemonic expectations of how we spend our time, words, and

sweat, I want to be aware of what I come to cite in my body because this awareness lends itself to making new choices beyond the structures of my formation.

The methodological implications of using dance to think through agency and its challenges have landed me here, thinking about knowledge, and with some new words at hand to describe how improvisation tunes me into the potential of a moment. Scores, as a methodology to connect agency and dance practice, is a useful container to think about subjectivation and its excess in terms of how embodied knowledge flows between bodies, in practice, and into other realms of interaction, obedience, and subversion. Grappling with scores to poke at the discourse of agency requires more work. The potentiality for improvisation to rechunk and reconfigure my habits (citational or otherwise), and the weird moments of improvisation I surrender to, are reliable points of return toward beginning more inquiry into what agency might feel like.

References

- Agamben, G. (2015). *The use of bodies: Homo sacer IV*. (A. Kotsko, Trans.). Stanford University Press.
- Ahmed, S. (2013). *The cultural politics of emotion*. Routledge.
- Albright, A. C. (2003). Dwelling in possibility. In A.C. Albright & D. Gere (Eds.), *Taken by surprise: a dance improvisation reader*. essay, Wesleyan University Press. 257–266
- Andrade, X. (2017). Ethnography, 'pataphysics, copying. In A. Schneider (Ed.), *Alternative art and anthropology: global encounters*. essay, Bloomsbury Academic an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc. 189-208
- Banes, S. (2002). *Democracy's body: Judson dance theater, 1962-1964*. Duke University Press.
- Bernstein, R. 2009. Dances with things: Material culture and the performance of race. *Social Text* 27(4), 67-94.
- Biehl J., Good, B., & Kleinman, A. (2007). *Subjectivity: Ethnographic investigations*. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1990). *The logic of practice*. Stanford University Press.
- brown, a.m. (2019). *pleasure activism*. AK Press.
- Burrows, J. (2010). *A choreographer's handbook*. Routledge.
- Butler, Judith. (1997). *The psychic life of power: Theories in subjection*. Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press.
- Cavarero, A. (2016). *Inclinations: A critique of rectitude*. (A. Minervini & A. Sitze, Trans.). Stanford University Press.
- Cohen, B. B. (2018). *Basic neurocellular patterns: Exploring developmental movement*. Burchfield Rose Publishers.
- Deleuze, G. (1983). *Nietzsche & philosophy*. (H. Tomlinson, Trans.). The Athlone Press.
- Derrida, J. (1988). *Limited inc*. (S. Weber, Trans.). Northwestern University Press.
- Doughty, S. (2019). I notice that I'm noticing... In V. L. Midgelow (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Improvisation in Dance*. essay, Oxford University Press.
- Dummit, J. (2018). Notes towards critical ethnographic scores: Anthropology and improvisation training in a breached world. In G. A. Bakke & M. Peterson (Eds.), *Between matter and method: Encounters in anthropology and art*. London: Bloomsbury. 52-70
- Foster, S. L. (1986). *Reading dancing: Bodies and subjects in contemporary American dance*. University of California Press.
- Foster, S. L. (2003). Choreographies of protest. *Theatre Journal*, 55(3), 395-412.
- Foster, S. L. (2003). Taken by surprise. In D. Gere & A.C. Albright (Eds.), *Taken by surprise: A dance improvisation reader*. essay, Wesleyan University Press. 3–12
- Foucault, M. (1975). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. (A. Sheridan, Trans.). Penguin Books.
- Foucault, M. (1982). The subject and power. *Critical Inquiry*, 8(4). 777-795.
- Frank, A. W. (1991). For a sociology of the body: An analytical review. In M. Featherstone, M. Hepworth, & B. S. Turner (Eds.), *The body: Social process and cultural theory*. essay, SAGE. 3–12
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. The Seabury Press.
- Gell, Alfred. (1998). *Art and agency: An anthropological theory*. Oxford University Press.

- Gere, David. (2003). "Introduction." In D. Gere & A.C. Albright (Eds.), *Taken by surprise: A dance improvisation reader*. essay, Wesleyan University Press. xiii-xxi
- Hannerz, Ulf. (2004). *Foreign news: Exploring the world of foreign correspondents*, University of Chicago Press.
- Hewitt, M. (1991). Bio-politics and social policy: Foucault's account of welfare, M. Hepworth, & B. S. Turner (Eds.), *The body: Social process and cultural theory*. essay, SAGE. xiii-xxi
- Howes, D. & Pink., S. (2010). The future of sensory anthropology/The anthropology of the senses, *Social Anthropology* 18(3). 331–40.
- Howes, D., & Classen, C. (2014). *Ways of sensing: Understanding the senses in society*. Routledge.
- Lemert, C. C. (2018). *Social theory: The multicultural, global, and classic readings*. Langara College.
- Little, N. (2020, October). Relational intelligence: Being in touch. *Dance & Creativity*, The Embodiment Conference.
- Magnat, V. (2016). Decolonizing performance research. *Etudes Anglaises*, 69(2). 135–148.
- Manning, E. (2007), *Politics of touch: Sense, movement, sovereignty*. Minnesota Press.
- Manning, E., & Massumi, B. (2014). *Thought in the act: Passages in the ecology of experience*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Millard, O. (2016, March 2). *What's the score? Using scores in dance improvisation*. Ausdance. <https://ausdance.org.au/articles/details/whats-the-score-using-scores-in-dance-improvisation>.
- Ness, Sally Ann. (2011) Foucault's turn from phenomenology: Implications for dance studies. *Dance Research Journal*.
- Noland, C. (2009). *Agency and embodiment: Performing gestures/Producing culture*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- O'Connor, K. (2019). Scores as practice: Scoring as method. *Revista Corpo- grafías: Estudios críticos de y desde los cuerpos*, 6(6), 108-121
- Ortner, S. B. (1984). Theory in anthropology since the sixties. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 26(1). 126-166.
- Ortner, S. B. (2006). *Anthropology and social theory culture, power, and the acting subject*. Duke University Press.
- Ortner, S. B. (2016). Dark anthropology and its others: Theory since the eighties. *HAU Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, 6(1). 47–73
- Pedelty, M. (2004). *Parachute anthropology?* *Anthropological Quarterly* 77(2). 339-348
- Quinlan, M. (2017). "Gaga as metatechnique: Negotiating choreography, improvisation, and technique in a neoliberal dance market." *Dance Research Journal*. 49(2). 26–43
- Rabinow, P. (1986). Representations are social facts: Modernity and post-modernity in anthropology. In, *Writing Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press. 234-261
- Samudra, J. K. (2008). Memory in our body: Thick participation and the translation of kinesthetic experience. *American Ethnologist*, 35(4). 665–681.
- Scarry, E. (1985). *The body in pain: the making and unmaking of the world*. Oxford University Press.
- Schneider, A., & Wright, C. (2010). *Between art and anthropology: contemporary ethnographic practice*. Bloomsbury.

- Sheena, T. (2017, August 18). *Some thoughts on capital-D Dance*. Movement Research. <https://movementresearch.org/publications/critical-correspondence/some-thoughts-on-capital-d-dance>.
- Sklar, D. (2000). Reprise: On dance ethnography. *Dance Research Journal*, 32(1), 70-77
- Sklar, D. (2008). Remembering kinesthesia: An inquiry into embodied cultural knowledge. In C. Noland & S.A. Ness (Eds.) *Migrations of gesture*. University of Minnesota Press. 85-112
- Spatz, B. (2015). *What a body can do: Technique as knowledge, practice as research*. London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
- Spatz, B. (2019). Notes for decolonizing embodiment. *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, 33(2), 9–22
- Todd, M.E. (1937). *The thinking body*. Dance Horizons/Princeton Book Company.

Appendix

SCORES USED DURING FIELDWORK

These are the scores I propose to play with. All working on different registers of imagination, physical demand and functionality, and attention.

1. Move for 7 minutes as if your body does not belong to you. Transition in to begin moving in response to the lines and architecture of your space. (moving inside to outside)
2. Find a/your primary relationship to gravity. Shift your relationship to gravity. Continue to re-organize your gravitational orientation and follow the psychosomatic images and feelings (felt mentality) that emerge (or not) in the process. Track how relating to gravity may bring a sense of vulnerability, a sense of strength, a sense of care.....
3. Move with some good-feeling music. Move against some good feeling music.
4. Begin moving in the most simple way. Increase complexity of movement slowly but steadily until the complexity overwhelms you. Follow the overwhelm, swallow it into sudden stillness.
5. Observe your environment, or a chosen environment, for 10 minutes. Respond in movement as needed.
6. Push/Pull/Reach/Yield
7. Reach for the void from underneath. Press the edges of your desires up against the realities of your world. Create heat at these friction points. Discover what conjoins and separates your commitment to these truths. Discover how you fill and recede. Discover each trace you re-inscribe.