

# Western Improvised Dance: Practices, Pedagogies, and Language

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# **Western Improvised Dance: Practices, Pedagogies, and Language**

**Nalina Wait**

A thesis in fulfilment of the requirements of a  
Doctor of Philosophy



**UNSW**  
AUSTRALIA

School of Arts and Media  
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November 2019

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Improvisation as a mode of performance has gained momentum in twenty-first century Western theatre dance. It offers dance-artists and choreographers methodologies for exploring idiosyncratic movement that accentuates the unique gestural qualities of individual dancers, and ways of composing ensemble pieces as self-organising systems. Improvisational practices have become highly sophisticated, but associated improvisation theory is challenged not only by the ephemerality of the subject, but also by the fact that the corporeal knowledges of improvisation resist language, codification, and the hierarchical nature of traditional dance pedagogy. In contrast to imitative processes, through which dancers learn to replicate codified techniques, improvisers access different states of *embodied consciousness* (Foster) in order to *tune* (Nelson) their *body-mind* instrument so that they might extend their creative engagement with movement tasks. This process creates space for the dancer's *somatic intelligence* (Goodall) to direct decisions as to how the dance will unfold in real time. Improvisers also seek to diversify the range of movement qualities, tones, and textures through practices such as somatics, which the associated theory suggests is often at odds with the goal-oriented focus of traditional training within the institution. This thesis seeks to elucidate specific aspects of a dance practice that resist formalisation in order to consider the epistemology of improvisational expertise and accompanying compositional practices. I argue that the theorisation of improvised composition must reframe the idea of composition from one based on formal logic to one based on the fluctuating intensities of *affects* (Spinoza). This research uses somatic theory (Todd, Dempster, Godard), theories of embodied cognition (Noë, Stapleton), and affect theory (Spinoza, Massumi, Deleuze, Blackman) to unpack the major discoveries that have informed innovations in improvised compositional practice. In doing so, it elucidates the experience-experiments of improvisers using specific case studies: Eva Karczag (somatic-based dancer), Riley Watts and Nicole Peisl (former The Forsythe Company dancers), and my own practice (somatically informed) to articulate modes of practice that are elusive and multidimensional.

### Key terms

*Embodied consciousness, body-mind, improvisation, somatic practices, corporeal knowledges, ideokinesis, embodied cognition, body-schema, kinaesthesia, affect, prohibitive and emancipative self-surveillance, immanent evaluation, somatic intelligence, thinking-through-the-body, the body's mind, Dewey, Spinoza*

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## *Improvised Composition: Practices, Pedagogies, and Language*

This thesis is submitted to the School of Arts and Media at the University of New South Wales in fulfilment of the requirements of a PhD in Philosophy (Dance) November 2019

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## Chapter One

### *Western Improvised Dance: Practices, Pedagogies, and Language*

#### 1.1 Introduction

Since the second half of the twentieth century, improvisation has grown in popularity as a performance modality within Western contemporary dance, and with this, associated somatic methods of training. Traditional and somatic-based methods of dance pedagogy that were at odds with each other in the mid-twentieth century now co-exist in the academy, preparing the dancer for the multifaceted demands of the increasingly experimental labour of professional dance. From training to professional life, a contemporary dancer today must synthesise practices that are not only physically, but also philosophically, diverse and the synthesis of approaches can be a challenging process, particularly those who have only experienced traditional **imitative** methods of training.<sup>1</sup> Teaching the relatively **formless** compositional processes of improvisation at a pre-professional level is complex, particularly as times of austerity have eroded the investment in developing expertise in specialised corporeal knowledges of practice. Improvisation theory is also a burgeoning field that holds great potential for discussing rich aspects of performativity despite the challenges of documenting a practice that may elude language, problematise traditional pedagogical methods, and resist institutionalisation. This research contributes to improvisation theory by approaching practice from both a scientific and philosophical perspective in identifying key discipline-specific terminology, and building on it in order to support a detailed theorisation of practice.<sup>2</sup> In addition, mobilising theoretical concepts from **affect** theory facilitates dialogue within and between disciplines, and gives greater academic recognition to the specialised knowledges of improvisational practice.<sup>3</sup> The negotiation between theory and practice is substantiated by tracing the connection between the origins of Western improvisation practices and philosophy, examining a two-way

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<sup>1</sup> Melanie Bales and Rebecca Nettle-Fiol. *The Body Eclectic: Evolving Practices in Dance Training* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2008). A glossary of terms, bold in the text, provides succinct definitions for both for the expert reader and those new to the field.

<sup>2</sup> Several key terms of this thesis include: bifurcation of embodied consciousness (**thinking-through-the-body** and **the body's mind**), working with the medium of **affect** (both the affective charge of space-time and resonation of affects in **body-mind**), body-mind agency or (Spinoza's) spiritual automaton, **immanent evaluation**, **ethical actions** (touch, speech, movement), **alternative science of dance**, polarities supporting a field of tension, **emancipative** and **prohibitive self-surveillance**, and **anatomical truth**.

<sup>3</sup> Affect theory was developed by seventeenth-century philosopher Benedict de Spinoza and is read here via contemporary philosophers Brian Massumi, Gilles Deleuze, and Philip Rothfield.

exchange between philosophy and practice.<sup>4</sup> This thesis thus draws on a range of theorists relating to the central feature of each chapter from across philosophy, including a return to key historical debates in improvisational theory, to draw out and mobilise the details of practice from both a disciplinary and interdisciplinary perspective.<sup>5</sup>

In following the historical **lineages** of practice, and in returning to concepts (of Louppe, Jill Green, Foster, etc.) that were in circulation in the 1990s, this work offers an original narrative of improvised dance history centred on the epistemology of corporeal knowledges rather than a study of specific performances themselves. The application of theory outlined above is informed by primary research interviews with improvisation practitioners working in diverse contexts: Eva Karczag, former The Forsythe Company dancers Riley Watts and Nicole Peisl, and my own practice, to articulate and interrogate modes of practice that can be elusive and multidimensional.<sup>6</sup> First- and third-person accounts of practice are theorised in relation to existing dance and philosophical theory, mobilising (at times (auto-))ethnography as a method for identifying and articulating the complexity of the labour of performing improvisation in choreographic contexts. Tracing historical lineages is a way of tracking the **forces** (Michel Foucault) that have shaped diverse genealogies of practice and the axiology of associated corporeal knowledges. Importantly the bringing to light of a direct point of contact between philosophy (Dewey) and dance pedagogy (H'Doubler) is shown as central to the formation of improvisation and an alternative history of Western dance pedagogy. Accounting for important but elusive nuances of the specialised practices of key case studies helps to address the issues of the possible erasure of disciplinary practice within a contemporised culture of interdisciplinarity, by documenting the kinds of corporeal

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<sup>4</sup> Noting the important foundational link for Western improvisation, made by dance historian Janice Ross, between pioneering North American dance pedagogue Margaret H'Doubler and her mentor, the pragmatist philosopher John Dewey, which establishes the formative philosophical perspective of the practice. This includes tracing the history of practice through seminal somatic theorists of ideokinesis Mabel Todd and Lulu Sweigard.

<sup>5</sup> Key dance theorists referred to in this thesis are Laurence Louppe, Elizabeth Dempster, Susan Leigh Foster, Hubert Godard, and Jane Goodall.

<sup>6</sup> Key texts on Karczag used here are by Elizabeth Dempster, Sally Gardner, and Philipa Rothfield; theorization of Forsythe's methods follow scholars Ann Nugent, Stephen Spier (ed.), Ann Midgette, Freya Vass-Rhee, Annie Kloppenberg, Ann Nugent, Victoria Gray, Dana Caspersen, and William Forsythe; and the work of Watts and Peisl is considered in relation to theories of **embodied cognition** proposed by Alva Noë, Mog Stapleton, Antonio Damasio, and Luiz Pessoa.

knowledges that may otherwise be eroded by the facsimile of transmission in an institutional context.

## 1.2 What is improvisation in contemporary dance?

Improvised performance has a long history in theatre and social dance globally.<sup>7</sup>

Despite its inclusivity, in the twenty-first century improvisation in the West has become an extremely physically virtuosic and mentally rigorous artistic practice, as evidenced in the performance methods of artists such as Crystal Pite, Jennifer Monson, Rosalind Crisp, and Ros Warby. When discussing the history of twentieth-century Western practices of improvisation that originated in North America, it is essential to pay tribute to the profound effect that Africanist aesthetics has had on North American culture, particularly as it has impacted the lineages under investigation here. As a result of the African diaspora in North America, highly popular social dance styles, such as tap, jazz, lindy hop, dance hall, and breakdancing, have emerged during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, in which skill in improvisational methods is central.<sup>8</sup> The post-war influence of jazz musicianship is well documented by improvisational dance theorists such as Foster who, in *Dances That Describe Themselves*, foregrounds dance historian Brenda Dixon Gottschild's research into the appropriation of the Africanist aesthetics of *cool*:

The coolness, relaxation, looseness, and laid-back energy; the radical juxtaposition of ostensibly contrary elements; the irony and double entendre of verbal and

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<sup>7</sup> A global study of corporeal knowledges of dance improvisation is beyond the scope of this research. A useful model for the collection and dissemination of scores for improvisation and choreographic manuscripts is *Motion Bank* (2010–2013), an online platform developed by The Forsythe Company and score partners, in collaboration with guest artists Deborah Hay, Jonathan Burrows, Matteo Fargion, Bebe Miller, and Thomas Hauer. See <http://www.motionbank.org/> for further details. See also Melinda Buckwalter's useful glossary of artists working with improvisation in her book, *Composing While Dancing: An Improviser's Companion* (Madison, WI and London: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010).

<sup>8</sup> Addressing the global practices of improvisation, including the significant influence of the Africanist aesthetic in North America, is beyond the scope of this research. For more detail, see Jonathan David Jackson, "Improvisation is African American Vernacular Dancing," *Dance Research Journal* 33, no. 2 (2001): 40–53; Constance Valis Hill, *Tap Dancing America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010); and Marian Hannah Winter, "Juba and American Minstrelsy," in *Moving History/Dancing Cultures: A Dance History Reader*, eds. Ann Cooper Albright and Ann Dils (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2001), 250–55. Several West-African dance forms such as Yoruba, renamed Juba in the United States, are performed in a context for participatory group improvisation. See Margaret Thompson Drewal, "Improvisation as Participatory Performance," in *Taken by Surprise: A Dance Improvisation Reader*, eds. Ann Cooper Albright and David Gere (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2003), 118–32. Dance scholar Avanthi Meduri also explains how improvisation has long been an intrinsic element of classical Indian dance and music in Avanthi Meduri, "Multiple Pleasures: Improvisation in Bharatanatyam," in Cooper Albright and Gere, *Taken by Surprise*, xix, 141–51.

physical gesture; the dialogic relationship between performer and audience – all are integral elements in Africanist arts and lifestyle that are woven into the fabric of our society.<sup>9</sup>

The relaxed aesthetics of cool have undoubtedly also influenced a gravitation towards a relaxed muscle tonus, as well as polyrhythmic and polycentric movements that have been connected to the anti-establishment aesthetics of improvised performance practices in a Western theatre dance context. African aesthetics have had a huge impact on North American culture more generally, providing a context and foundation for the innovations in artistic practice described in the following.

Within the context of Western contemporary dance history the term *improvisation* was not commonly in use by *modern* choreographers such as Mary Wigman and Martha Graham who practiced improvisation in the studio only, considering it unsuitable for public performance.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, the improvisation practices studied here are linked historically to the well-documented innovative practices that gained momentum in the mid-twentieth-century experimental theatre dance of San Francisco and New York. Part of this lineage is the exploration of spontaneous composition as an extension of the concept of choreography, practiced by artist collectives such as the New York Chamber Dance Concert, Judson Dance Theater, the San Francisco Dancers' Workshop, and The Grand Union.<sup>11</sup> Pioneering experimental dance artists working collaboratively, such as

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<sup>9</sup> Susan Leigh Foster, *Dances That Describe Themselves: The Improvised Choreography of Richard Bull* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2002), 32. For more on the Africanist influence on North American dance see Brenda Dixon Gottschild, *Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance: Dance and Other Contexts* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1996), *The Black Dancing Body: A Geography from Coon to Cool* (New York, NY and London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), and "Stripping the Emperor: The Africanist Presence on American Concert Dance," in Cooper Albright and Dils, *Moving History/Dancing Cultures*, 332–41.

<sup>10</sup> Pioneering improviser Meredith Monk contextualises the devalued position of improvised performance in the mid-twentieth century by referring to celebrated modernist choreographic mentor, Bessie Schönberg: "You could never present an improvisation as a piece. *Never*. Not with Bessie." David Gere, "Introduction," in Cooper Albright and Gere, *Taken by Surprise*, xxi. See also Susan Manning's contribution to the debate around the use of *modern* or *postmodern* as terminology to describe eras in dance history. Susan Manning, "Modernist Dogma and Post-modern Rhetoric: A Response to Sally Banes' 'Terpsichore in Sneakers'," *Tulane Drama Review* 32, no. 4 (1988): 32–9; and Sally Banes and Susan Manning, "Terpsichore in Combat Boots," *Tulane Drama Review* 33, no. 1 (1989): 13–6.

<sup>11</sup> Some influential artists who mentored these groups are dance artist Anna Halprin whose practice is discussed in more detail later in this thesis, and composers Richard Bull and Robert Dunn. Dunn studied with Merce Cunningham's collaborator and life partner John Cage before leading a series of inspirational composition workshops, which were a catalyst for a series of performances by the Judson Dance Theater held in the Judson Church Memorial Hall in Greenwich Village, New York from 1962. Jazz musician Bull also offered composition classes from which Rainer's inclusive performance piece, *Continuous Project – Altered Daily* (1970), emerged. Her work then flowed into the improvisational group The Grand

Simone Forti, Steve Paxton (who developed Contact Improvisation with Nancy Stark Smith), Deborah Hay, Lisa Nelson, Barbara Dilley, Yvonne Rainer, Trisha Brown, Judith Dunn, Lucinda Childs, Monk, Fred Herko, and others, proposed *democratic* conditions for dance by initiating alternative frameworks for performance that challenged the role of the elite dancer by rejecting the codified dance vocabulary of the modernists.<sup>12</sup> While they had the technical skill and athleticism of professional dancers, they chose to disrupt the formalism of choreographic practice and de-centre the aesthetic and technical style of dance through the performance of quotidian gestures, and functional or unconventional movements. They also experimented with different aspects of performance, such as speaking or making music, collaborating with untrained performers, and exploring improvisation.<sup>13</sup>

### 1.3 The rise of improvisation

With the proliferation of choreographic methods in Western theatre dance in the past sixty years, the use of improvisation as a mode of performance has extended beyond avant-garde contexts into the realm of elite professionals. In addition to the pioneering work of less prominent practitioners, highly visible artists on the world stage, such as Forsythe, Pite, Ohad Naharin, Meg Stewart, and Akram Khan in collaboration with Sylvie Guillem, are also experimenting with diverse improvisational approaches to composition and embracing the qualities of the form.<sup>14</sup> This increasing interest may have as much to do with an appreciation of the aesthetic of improvised movement as it

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Union (1970–1976). For more detail on the use of improvisation in performance, in particular the musical structures employed in improvised dance by Richard Bull, see Foster, *Dances That Describe Themselves*. See also research on the Judson Dance Theater by Sally Banes, “Democracy’s Body: Judson Dance Theater and Its Legacy,” *Performing Arts Journal* 5, no. 2 (1981): 98–107; *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post-modern Dance* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1987); *Democracy’s Body: Judson Dance Theater, 1962–1964* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1980); Ramsay Burt, *Judson Dance Theater: Performative Traces* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006); and Ana Janevsky and Thomas Lax, *Judson Dance Theater: The Work Is Never Done* (New York, NY: Museum of Modern Art, 2018).

<sup>12</sup> The use of the term *democratic* here is in reference to dance theorist Sally Banes’ research on dance performances at the Judson Dance Theater in Banes, *Democracy’s Body*.

<sup>13</sup> This eclectic group of artists had a diverse array of interests, and certainly works such as Rainer’s *Trio A* (1966) could not be considered pedestrian or improvised. However, Rainer is often credited with having defined the values of this era in dance with the publication of her so-called “No Manifesto,” which is often cited as a declaration of a sentiment against the traditional tropes of theatre dance. She wrote, “No to spectacle. No to virtuosity. No to transformations and magic and make-believe. No to the glamour and transcendence of the star image. No to the heroic. No to the anti-heroic. No to trash imagery. No to involvement of performer or spectator. No to style. No to camp. No to seduction of spectator by the wiles of the performer. No to eccentricity. No to moving or being moved.” As originally published in the *Tulane Drama Review* 10, no. 2 (1965): 178.

<sup>14</sup> Some examples of works I’ve observed that contain sections in which the dancers improvise with tasks are Forsythe’s *The Loss of Small Detail* (1991), Pite’s *Dark Matters* (2010), Naharin’s *Last Work* (2015), Stuart’s *Auf den Tisch!* (2004–2011), and Khan’s *Sacred Monsters* (2006).

does with the political and ideological orientation of a practice that offers a way to transcend entrenched notions of dualism through dance. Furthermore, in the past thirty years in particular, a process of decentralisation has occurred in contemporary dance, both as an aesthetic choice and as a result of continually contracting financial circumstances, which now places dancers as creative agents acting in collaboration with a choreographer's global vision.<sup>15</sup> As primary generators of the **material**, dancers' idiosyncratic approaches to movement have engendered a plethora of vocabularies, making individual performers less replaceable than when they work with a codified technique. The repercussion of this is that dancers are now much more central to the works themselves as their individual input substantially contributes to the nature of the work, and this contribution often involves improvisational skills both in the creative process and in performance. This trend has led to a development of methods of movement generation that are not based on the codification of the movements themselves, but on specifying principles of movement for the purpose of crafting improvisation. These include *Improvisation Technologies* developed by Forsythe, and Naharin's *Gaga*.

The trend towards a decentralisation of the author of a work, coupled with a growing preference for a **post-control** aesthetic, has positioned improvisation as an important method of performance production.<sup>16</sup> As a result, there is a greater reliance on the compositionally creative labour of the dancer in the moment of performance. When working within a set choreographic context, dancers are commonly responsible for generating movement material that is then edited and refined by the choreographer/director. However, in an improvised performance, dancers may be working with movement principles, **scores**, or **tasks** to cultivate diverse and engaging material that is compositionally relevant to the work from inside the work, in real time. This highly challenging activity is now part of the skillset expected of emerging dance professionals. Yet there are limited opportunities to develop expertise in these approaches while negotiating competing demands within institutionalised contexts (private schools, degree programs, government-supported conservatoriums, etc.).

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<sup>15</sup> Jenny Roche discusses the choreographic labour of independent dancers in "Embodying Multiplicity: The Independent Contemporary Dancer's Moving Identity," *Research in Dance Education* 12, no. 2 (2011): 105–18.

<sup>16</sup> This thesis borrows dance theorist Annie Kloppenberg's term *post-control* to describe an improvised aesthetic in "Improvisation in Process: 'Post-control' Choreography," *Dance Chronicle* 33, no. 2 (2010): 180–207.



Furthermore, the refinement of real-time, improvised composition is primarily via **somatic** practices that can also challenge the hierarchical student–teacher power relation of traditional (or imitative) methods of dance pedagogy.

Throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries somatic practices have widely influenced the way Western theatre dance has been taught. They have been included in university dance syllabi since the 1980s due to the widespread acceptance that they positively affect performance quality by increasing a dancer’s capacity for **kinaesthesia**, clarity of movement, efficiency, integrated coordination, and developing a sense of presence.<sup>17</sup> The differences between improvised and imitative dance pedagogy (such as codified Western theatre dance techniques, e.g., ballet, jazz, Graham, Cunningham, and Lester Horton), are that improvisation approaches movement as a process of diversifying the range of *possibilities*, rather than a refinement towards a specific *ideal*. This approach can prove challenging for students who must work towards increasing their capacity for movement *qualities*, without knowing what the movement is beforehand, particularly if they have only experienced training that is focused on replicating the predetermined *forms* of codified techniques. Furthermore, the material that emerges when a dancer improvises is usually a direct reflection of their

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<sup>17</sup> For an examination of current trends in dance training, see Melanie Bales and Rebecca Nettle-Fiol, *The Body Eclectic: Evolving Practices in Dance Training* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2008). There is also extensive research on the integration of somatics and dance pedagogy. Some key examples include: Glenna Batson, “Somatic Studies and Dance,” *International Association for Dance Medicine and Science* (2009), accessed September 15, 2015, <https://www.iadms.org/?248>. Also, Glenna Batson, “Dancing Fully, Safely, and Expressively: The Role of the Body Therapies in Dance Training,” *Journal of Physical Education Recreation and Dance* 1 (1990): 28–31; Martha Eddy, “Somatic Practices and Dance: Global Influences,” *Dance Research Journal* 34, no. 2 (2002b): 46–62, “The Practical Application of Body-Mind Centering® (BMC) in Dance Pedagogy,” *Journal of Dance Education* 6, no. 3 (2006): 86–91, “A Brief History of Somatic Practices and Dance: Historical Development of the Field of Somatic Education and Its Relationship to Dance,” *Journal of Dance and Somatic Practices* 1, no. 1 (2009): 5–27, and *Mindful Movement: The Evolution of the Somatic Arts and Conscious Action* (Chicago, IL and Bristol: Intellect, 2016). See also Lauren Kearns, “Somatics in Action: How ‘I Feel Three-Dimensional and Real’ Improves Dance Education and Training,” *Journal of Dance Education* 10, no. 2 (2010): 35–40; Julie Brodie and Elin Lobel, “Integrating Fundamental Principles Underlying Somatic Practices into the Dance Technique Class,” *Journal of Dance Education* 4, no. 3 (2004): 80–7, and *Dance and Somatics: Mind-Body Principles of Teaching and Performance* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2012); Sylvie Fortin, Adriane Vieira, and Martyne Tremblay, “The Experience of Discourses in Dance and Somatics,” *Journal of Dance and Somatic Practice* 1, no. 1 (2009): 47–64; Becky Dyer, “Theories of Somatic Epistemology: An Inspiration for Somatic Approaches to Teaching Dance and Movement Education,” *Somatics* 16, no. 1 (2009): 24–39; Shona Erskine, “The Integration of Somatics as an Essential Component of Aesthetic Dance Education,” *Dance Dialogues: Conversations Across Cultures, Artforms and Practices* (2009): 1–11; and Henrietta Bannerman, “A Question of Somatics: The Search for a Common Framework for Twenty-First Century Contemporary Dance Pedagogy: Graham and Release-Based Techniques,” *Journal of Dance and Somatic Practices* 2, no. 1 (2010): 5–19. Many branches of Eastern philosophy have also influenced Western dance, and have a far longer history of *body-mind* practices. However, they are beyond the scope of the research discussed here.

most dominant practice, due to the biological function of **muscle memory**. Yet *innovating* dance vocabularies requires investigating unfamiliar movement possibilities, or **territories** beyond familiar pathways and qualities, thereby exploring movement as an inquiry.<sup>18</sup> The practice of **somatics** supports experimental improvisation because it is an effective method for relinquishing habitual movement patterns. However, it can be difficult for a student to shift gears between (process-oriented) somatic and (product-oriented) imitative, pedagogical methods that they must straddle within a goal-oriented institution.

This thesis investigates expertise in improvisation practices that are concerned primarily with dancing, rather than broader conceptual artistic concerns. It is important to mention this point in order to position the work studied here in relation to early twenty-first century **non-dance**, so-called due to contemporary artists' turn towards theory and conceptual processes in an effort to shed the stylistic tropes of dance that have been described as "exhausted."<sup>19</sup> The efforts of non-dance have at times been so embracing of interdisciplinarity that such work appeared to question whether the act of dancing is still relevant to the discipline. Therefore, expertise in the practice of dance seemed less relevant in such work than ideas drawn from contemporary performance more broadly. This thesis argues in favour of the innovative potential of dance practice developed through rigorous attention to the detail of corporeal knowledges, and aims to advocate for these knowledges by communicating them among a wider academic audience. Improvised dance performances can be constructed and refined through the use of movement-based tasks, so that while the exact material may be different each time it is performed, it can also remain recognisably cohesive in terms of movement vocabulary or approach and can be identifiable as a work, or works, of improvised composition.

#### 1.4 An overview of improvisation theory

The scope of current, qualitative, dance improvisation theory can be categorised according to four key impulses that are often in confluence. Firstly, there is a well-established tradition of *anecdotal* accounts of improvisation that elucidate the detail of

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<sup>18</sup> This thesis uses the term *innovation* rather than *new* or *original* in recognition of the fact that creative ideas are constantly being recycled, and are very rarely new or original, but can be innovative in the way they operate or emerge within a specific context.

<sup>19</sup> Dance theorist André Lepecki has described dance as exhausting itself in *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the Politics of Movement* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 2006).

the inner-workings of personal artistic practice, some of which are by practitioner-theorists.<sup>20</sup> Secondly, there are key texts that are used as *pedagogical* resources that compile a sample of improvisational methods for education purposes.<sup>21</sup> Thirdly, there are *critical* texts that interrogate how improvisation is mobilised as a critical or artistic practice, or discuss the broader philosophical or political concepts that can be thought or felt through improvisation.<sup>22</sup> Fourthly, there are *historical* narratives documenting influential practices and works by leading or seminal artists.<sup>23</sup> There are also edited collections that encompass a broad range of current literature aligned with those four impulses.<sup>24</sup> This thesis sits at the nexus of these impulses in that firstly, it maps both historical and current anecdotal accounts of practice; secondly, it critically unpacks the axiology of lineages of practice in relation to philosophical theories; and lastly, in so doing, seeks to add another dimension to pedagogy. Thus, the theoretical impulse of this thesis is simultaneously an historical, anecdotal, philosophical, and pedagogical account of the forces at play in improvisational practice.

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<sup>20</sup> Kent De Spain, *Landscapes of the Now: A Topology of Movement Improvisation* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014); Ruth Zaporah, *Action Theatre: The Improvisation of Presence* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 1995) and *Improvisation on the Edge* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2014); and Meg Stuart and Jeroen Peeters, eds., *Are We Here Yet?* (Dijon: Les Presses du Réel, 2011).

<sup>21</sup> Buckwalter, *Composing While Dancing*; Miranda Tufnell and Chris Crickmay, *Body, Space, Image: Notes Towards Improvisation and Performance* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993) and *A Widening Field: Journeys in Body and Imagination* (Southwold: Dance Books, 2015); Andrea Olsen and Caryn McHose, *The Place of Dance: A Somatic Guide to Dancing and Dance Making* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2014); Brigitta Herrmann and Manfred Fischbeck, *Group Motion in Practice: Collective Creation Through Dance Movement Improvisation* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2018); Justine Reeve, *Dance Improvisations: Warm-Ups, Games and Choreographic Tasks* (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 2011); and the early works of Lynne Anne Blom and L. Tarin Chaplin, *The Moment of Movement: Dance Improvisation* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1988); and Joyce Morgenroth, *Dance Improvisations* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1987).

<sup>22</sup> Rebecca Caines and Ajay Heble, eds., *The Improvisation Studies Reader: Spontaneous Acts* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 2015); George E. Lewis and Benjamin Piekut, eds., *Handbook of Critical Improvisation Studies: Vols. 1 & 2* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Elizabeth Hallam and Tim Ingold, eds., *Creativity and Cultural Improvisation* (Oxford: Berg, 2007); Danielle Goldman, *I Want to Be Ready: Improvised Dance as a Practice of Freedom* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2010); Gary Peters, *The Philosophy of Improvisation* (Chicago, IL and London: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Sondra Horton Fraleigh, *Dance and the Lived Body: A Descriptive Aesthetics* (Pittsburgh, PA and London: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1987) and *Back to the Dance Itself: Phenomenologies of the Body in Performance* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2018).

<sup>23</sup> Cynthia Novack, *Sharing the Dance: Contact Improvisation and American Culture* (Madison, WI and London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990); Daniel Nagrin, *Dance and the Specific Image: Improvisation* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1994); Barbara Dilley, *This Very Moment: Teaching, Thinking, Dancing* (Boulder, CO: Naropa University Press, 2015); Isabelle Ginot and Elizabeth Dempster's contributions to Erin Brannigan and Virginia Baxter, eds., *Bodies of Thought: Twelve Australian Choreographers* (Kent Town: Wakefield Press, 2014); Foster, *Dances That Describe Themselves*.

<sup>24</sup> Vida Midgelow, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Improvisation in Dance* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019); Cooper Albright and Gere, *Taken by Surprise*; Caines and Heble, *The Improvisation Studies Reader*. While this thesis does not address the practice of contact improvisation in any detail, it is important to note the wealth of pivotal contributions on improvisation recorded in *Contact Quarterly* since it began in 1978.

Improvisational theory is becoming increasingly specialised as practitioner theorists develop their work via a range of modes. While cognisant of the innovations of current improvisation theorists, this thesis returns to the seminal ideas at the genesis of Western improvisation to articulate specific foundational principles of practice so as to trace an image of what a potential philosophy of improvisation might look like. This research, therefore, intermittently applies a philosophical lens to render a new reading of improvisation theory, and as another means to articulate practice. The application of affect theory to describe improvisation is highly synergistic, however is currently underdeveloped.<sup>25</sup> In order to consider the application of this theory as a model for practice, several key themes must be tested and interrogated. This is not to suggest that affect theory (or philosophy), should be privileged over practice, but that it can be used as a tool to reflect practice back to itself in a way that validates its significance. By looking back to the foundational perspectives of pioneers, this thesis constructs an overview of the philosophical orientation of Western improvisation practices, and mobilises useful concepts and language for practice. Because of this, the range of literature that is referred to in this thesis is specific to the impulse of each chapter and so the literature relevant to each chapter will be discussed in more detail within the chapter itself.

Parallel to, and intertwined with, improvisation theory is the burgeoning field of somatic theory through which the philosophical and political research potential within of the **body-mind** nexus has gained recognition in the West.<sup>26</sup> Various journals have been established to accommodate the explosion of theoretical somatic research in recent decades. The first journals of somatics, initiated by Thomas Hannah in the 1970s, were *Somatics Magazine: Journal of the Mind-Body Arts and Sciences* and *The Somatics Society*. *Dance Research Journal* was established in 1974 for dance theory more

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<sup>25</sup> Currently very few texts combine improvisation theory and Affect: Derek P. McCormack, *Refrains for Moving Bodies: Experience and Experiment in Affective Spaces* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), Philipa Rothfield, "Embracing the Unknown, Ethics and Dance," In *Ethics and the Arts*, edited by Paul Macneill, 89–98 (Amsterdam: Springer, 2014), Paula Guzzanti, "I-Reflexes: The Affective Implications of Bodies in Dance Improvisation Performance," *PARTake: The Journal of Performance as Research* 1, no. 2 (2017): article 9. Affect theory is applied to improvisation theory in Chapter Four *Resonance of Affects and Immanent Evaluation* and Chapter Five *The Aesthetics of an Ethics of Being*.

<sup>26</sup> Hannah initially used the term *Somatics* with an uppercase S, as is the custom when delineating a field of knowledge, but since then the most common usage is with a lower-case s, the term that is used in this thesis to indicate both the practice and the theory of somatics.

generally, but also includes writing on somatics. Then, in 1985, a progressive Australian publication, *Writings on Dance*, edited by dance theorists Dempster and Gardner, emerged in response to the ever-growing interest in the field such as *Journal of Dance and Somatic Practices* (2009).<sup>27</sup> Such a growth in publications has cemented somatics as a current and growing topic in the broader field of dance research.<sup>28</sup>

In the twenty-first century, both the theory and practice of somatics have gathered momentum, particularly with individuals such as practitioner/teacher/researcher Rebecca Webber, performer/writer Gray, and choreographer/theorist Kloppenberg, who represent what has become a *soma-revolution* in dance theory. In turn, this work is important to the wave of what Webber calls “action research – [research that is] conducted by practitioners in the field and seeking to bring about change, [as] a form of reflective practice-as-research.”<sup>29</sup> Add to these important somatic practitioner-theorists, such as Isabelle Ginot, who are interested in the application of somatics in health-related fields.<sup>30</sup> Pragmatist philosopher Richard Shusterman has also created a field of research at the junction of somatics and aesthetics called *somaesthetics*.<sup>31</sup> With somaesthetics Shusterman aims to redirect “aesthetics back to the core issues of perception, consciousness, and feeling, which are embodied in the root meaning of *aesthetic*.”<sup>32</sup> To do this he advocates for “giving real body to thought through somatic style and behaviour,” by this he means embodying philosophy through “one’s manner of living,” maintaining a somatic practice as a philosopher and using that practice as a methodology for thought, “rather than being mere ‘grammarians’.”<sup>33</sup> He is careful to

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<sup>27</sup> Ideokinesis, in particular, has had an extensive impact on dance pedagogy, which has been extensively theorised by Elizabeth Dempster and others, in the Australian journal *Writings on Dance*.

<sup>28</sup> Dance theorist Martha Eddy’s broad overview of the field, written in 2009, is particularly useful to identify the scope of somatic practices as it introduces a broader collection of major forms, and their relationship to dance, than can be accounted for here. See Eddy, “Somatic Practices and Dance,” 5–27. Another useful, although more condensed, overview of somatics, written for a mainstream dance audience is Nancy Galeota-Wozny, “Somatics 101,” *Dance Magazine* July (2006).

<sup>29</sup> Rebecca Webber, “Integrating Semi-structured Somatic Practices and Contemporary Dance Technique Training,” *Journal of Dance and Somatic Practices* 1, no. 2 (2009): 241.

<sup>30</sup> Isabelle Ginot, “Écouter le Toucher” (Listen to the Touch), *Chimères* 3, no. 78 (2012): 87–100; and on body-schema, Isabelle Ginot, Julie Nioche, and Christine Roquet, “De l’Image à l’Imaginaire” (From the Image to the Imaginary), *Repères, Cahier de Danse* 1, no. 17 (2006): 3–8. See also a discussion of the inherent values of somatic practices, in terms of their slow or *sweet* nature, in Isabelle Ginot, “Douceurs Somatiques” (Somatic Sweets), *Repères, Cahier de Danse* 2, no. 32 (2013): 21–5.

<sup>31</sup> For more detail on somaesthetics see Richard Shusterman, *Thinking through the Body: Essays in Somaesthetics* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2012), *Body Consciousness: A Philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesthetics* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2008), and *Performing Live: Aesthetic Alternatives for the Ends of Art* (New York, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000).

<sup>32</sup> Shusterman, *Thinking through the Body*, 3.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 4/5.

make a distinction between somaesthetics and phenomenology by highlighting the understanding that somatic consciousness is always contingent on the prevailing culture, and is therefore different in different cultural contexts, rather than the source of a “primordial” knowledge. However, critics of his work, such as Ginot, point out the limitations of applying somatics as a diagnostic tool through which to read the somatic state of philosophers via their writing.<sup>34</sup> As an American pragmatist, Shusterman’s philosophy is deeply influenced by Dewey, and perhaps it is via Dewey’s relationship with somatic practitioner Frederick Matthias Alexander that he arrived at somatics. Yet, as will be shown, it is in the historical relationship to dance that somatics (and Dewey) has had its greatest impact, particularly via the practice of improvised performance.

### 1.5 Theorising forces through a lineage of practice

In her book, *Poetics of Contemporary Dance*, Louppe illustrates dance “as the subject’s total engagement with its action. It is the dramaturgy of being, the art of arts.”<sup>35</sup> She evokes an image of Western contemporary theatre dance as an “orphan art” with no birthplace, arguing that dance must instead find itself an origin in the history of the body-subject: in its articulation of knowledges and practices of the self.<sup>36</sup> Louppe locates this origin in a shift in the body-subject at the turn of the twentieth century, a shift that instigated what she calls the “contemporary dance project.”<sup>37</sup> She describes contemporary dance as a “project” because, compared with traditional, social, or cultural reasons for dancing, it has been concerned with the aesthetic reimagining of dance expressed primarily through an “individual artistic voice,” thereby bringing the artistic practice of making dance into step with the visual arts, music, and literature.<sup>38</sup> In her argument she makes it clear that the movements of a contemporary dance body should not be thought of as symptomatic of the times. Instead, this body must be considered as an agent “interpreting the world,” using dance “as an **instrument**

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<sup>34</sup> Isabelle Ginot, “From Shusterman’s Somaesthetics to a Radical Epistemology of Somatics,” *Dance Research Journal* 42, no. 1 (2010): 12–29.

<sup>35</sup> Laurence Louppe, *Poetics of Contemporary Dance*, trans. Sally Gardner (Southwold: Dance Books Ltd, 2010), 26.

<sup>36</sup> The *body-subject* Louppe refers to (*Poetics of Contemporary Dance*, 26) is understood in the sense proposed by Foucault as “the manner in which one ought to ‘conduct oneself’ – that is, the manner in which one ought to form oneself as an ethical subject acting in reference to the prescriptive elements that make up the code.” Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality, Volume 2*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York, NY: Random House, 1985), 26.

<sup>37</sup> Louppe, *Poetics of Contemporary Dance*, 9.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

revealing the contemporary consciousness.”<sup>39</sup> This thesis addresses the problem of articulating how the practices of the self inform the formless composition of improvised performance.

The practice of improvisation takes the notion of an individual artist’s voice further by enabling dancer agency within the composition of a dance performance. Therefore, attempts to comprehensively account for improvisation as a system able to be universalised may quickly seem reductive in the face of the radical diversity and richness of practices that are as unique as the artists practicing them. For Louppe, Foucault’s description of a body-subject engaged in “disciplinary regulation” is one that “work[s] more on ‘forces’ than on ‘signs’,” and she goes on to explain that “it is just these forces that are the unnamed material upon which the whole work of contemporary dance takes place.”<sup>40</sup> Therefore, this thesis aims to articulate **forces**, following Foucault, that have shaped the practices of body-subjects along key lineages, thereby illuminating the capabilities these practices produce and the unnamed influences shaping and motivating the ways in which improvisers relate to their practice of improvised performance.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, the principles of improvisational practice support the proliferation of individual experience rather than the systematised, singular, or idealised experience. They are therefore highly postmodern following Jean-François Lyotard’s definition, in that they reveal the wane of the ideal meta-narratives in the wake of a multiplicity of micro-narratives.<sup>42</sup>

Western improvisation theory has a relatively short history originating in the mid-twentieth century but has gained renewed momentum with the rise of postpositivist qualitative research with artist-theorists documenting the details of their work as their primary source of knowledge.<sup>43</sup> Rather than describing practice predominantly through

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid. This term is bold because it is included in the glossary.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>41</sup> The notion of *lineage* used here is necessarily reductive in that it cannot account for all of the intersecting influences on practice the artists studied here have encountered.

<sup>42</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, 1984), xxiv–v.

<sup>43</sup> Postpositivism is a methodology that critiques positivism by arguing that the values of the researcher can impact the results of their research, and therefore there are multiple perspectives to take in any study. It is commonly used in the social sciences, which, according to Jill Green and Susan W. Stinson, is highly useful in the study of dance as it moves beyond the limitations of scientific research to “new forms of research with different assumptions about reality and knowledge. ... such as phenomenological, hermeneutic, interpretive, feminist, qualitative, naturalistic, autobiographical, narrative, ethnographic,

an account of individual artists' choreographic works, of which there are many fine examples, this thesis makes an original contribution to the field by articulating the forces that have shaped particular lineages of practice and their associated corporeal knowledges via an emic approach to (at times (auto-))ethnography, including an axiology of improvisation practice. Tracing the axiological forces of the values and ethics passed on through a lineage of practice offers a narrative of improvised dance history centred on an epistemology of corporeal knowledges, rather than an account of the more visible performative outcomes of improvisation as an artform. Following an ethnographic methodology, specialist improvisational performers are interviewed as case studies, and their improvised performance practice is observed.<sup>44</sup> What is witnessed of these improvisers' corporeal knowledges is discussed in relation to their preceding lineages, in order to interrogate and contextualise their practices.<sup>45</sup> In addition, my own insights as a practicing artist are articulated as a case study in order to interrogate the detail of specific experiential aspects of practice.<sup>46</sup>

This research also attends to improvisation theory in an original way by comparing two lineages of practice that are not commonly associated, to consider what a productive dissolution of the historic binary between highly professional and alternative or “**undisciplined**” dance practices might produce.<sup>47</sup> The rationale for studying artists' practices as a lineage is that, rather than focus on the specifics of particular performances (where and when it happened, how they were staged, who was involved, etc.), this thesis addresses the artist's approach to the labour of practice itself and discusses the concepts or ideas that have informed this approach. This is important because the historical binary of professional and undisciplined practices established via these lineages is much less relevant on the twenty-first-century stage, yet remains

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postmodern and others.” Jill Green and Susan W. Stinson, “Postpositivist Research in Dance,” in *Researching Dance: Evolving Modes of Inquiry*, ed. Sondra Horton Fraleigh (Pittsburgh, PA and London: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1999), 92.

<sup>44</sup> The case studies will be introduced a little later.

<sup>45</sup> See Chapter Five *The Aesthetics of an Ethics of Being* and Chapter Six *Cultivating Movement Situations*.

<sup>46</sup> See Chapter Three *Embodied Consciousness* and Chapter Seven *Prohibitive and Emancipative Self-Surveillance*.

<sup>47</sup> The use of *undisciplined* here follows dance theorist Elizabeth Dempster in her description of the practice of somatics in tertiary education in “Undisciplined Subjects, Unregulated Practices: Dancing in the Academy,” *Dance Rebooted: Initializing the Grid* (Melbourne: Ausdance National, 2005), 1–11. Dempster's notion of “un”disciplining the body is discussed in more detail in Chapter Seven *Prohibitive and Emancipative Self-Surveillance*. This term is bold because it is included in the glossary. See also, Carol Brown and Alys Longley, eds. *Undisciplining Dance in Nine Movements and Eight Stumbles* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars, 2018).



challenging for the emerging dancer/improviser to negotiate practically and conceptually.<sup>48</sup> It is important to take care in the dissolution of practices that are conceptually divergent, as key aspects of undisciplined practices that are pivotal to a deeper understanding of the potential multiplicities of dance may be easily eroded in the dissolution process due to economic or historic forces.

A lineage of practice that is of particular interest to this thesis, one which is remarkably important to improvisation yet under-researched, is the (self-)**observational** method of pedagogy that began with pioneering dance pedagogue H'Doubler's academic approach in developing the first dance major in 1926 at University of Wisconsin.<sup>49</sup> H'Doubler's dance major is considered here as a dance-specific form of somatic practice because of the importance of anatomical information, the role of receptivity in the production of movement, and the rejection of imitative pedagogical methods. Chapter Two *Dewey and the Pre-history of Western Improvisation* discusses in detail how, as a keen sportswoman with no background in dance, H'Doubler was able to reconsider dance pedagogy through the lens of her undergraduate degree in biology and philosophy, and postgraduate study in aesthetics with Dewey.<sup>50</sup> This chapter makes an original contribution by bringing to light the direct link between philosophy and pioneering dance pedagogy and somatic practice, via H'Doubler's encounter with Dewey through a reading of their works. Philosophy was in turn impacted by practice via Dewey's close

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<sup>48</sup> The distinction of dancer/improviser is made here to identify the different skills required of the technically trained dancer and the skilled improviser.

<sup>49</sup> Margaret H'Doubler (1889–1982). A debt of gratitude is owed to the formative research by dance historian Janice Ross, *Moving Lessons: Margaret H'Doubler and the Beginning of Dance in American Education* (Madison, WI and London: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000). See also Mary Brennan, Thomas Hagood, and John Wilson, *Margaret H'Doubler: The Legacy of America's Dance Education Pioneer* (Youngstown, NY: Cambria Press, 2006); Ellen Moore, "A Recollection of Margaret H'Doubler's Class Procedure: An Environment for the Learning of Dance," *Dance Research Journal* 8, no. 1 (1976): 12–7; and Margaret H'Doubler's own theorisation, *Dance: A Creative Art Experience* (Madison, WI and London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1940) and *A Manual of Dancing: Suggestions and Bibliography for the Teacher of Dancing* (Madison, WI: Tracy and Kilgore/Printemps, 1921). Other theorists who address the impact of H'Doubler on subsequent Judson era dance artists include: Meredith Morse, *Soft Is Fast: Simone Forti in the 1960s and After* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2016); Sabine Breitwieser, ed., *Simone Forti: Thinking with the Body* (Salzburg: Hirmer and Museum der Moderne, 2014); and Anna Halprin and Rachel Kaplan, eds., *Moving Towards Life: Five Decades of Transformational Dance* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1995).

<sup>50</sup> American pragmatist philosopher John Dewey (1859–1952) was influential to education reform and had a longstanding friendship with F. M. Alexander. Dewey taught H'Doubler while she was a postgraduate student at Colombia University, and taught at Colombia Teachers College where ideokinesis pioneers Mabel Todd and Lulu Sweigard also studied. For more detail, see Michael Huxley, "F. Matthias Alexander and Mabel Elsworth Todd: Proximities, Practices and the Psycho-physical," *Journal of Dance & Somatic Practice* 3, nos. 1/2 (2011): 25–42.

relationship with Alexander, from whom Dewey received Alexander Technique lessons for thirty-five years.<sup>51</sup>

H'Doubler's experiential, rather than imitative, methods of dance pedagogy later informed her student Anna Halprin's improvisational performance work in the mid-1950s onwards in San Francisco.<sup>52</sup> She says:

You had to find new compositional forms as well as new movement. That's how the whole idea of task-oriented movement and my particular interest in Mabel Todd and her approach in her book *The Thinking Body* arose at the time. I was interested in going back to my roots with my original teacher, Margaret H'Doubler, where we really looked at movement from the point of view of anatomy and kinesiology.<sup>53</sup>

The experimental approach forged by Halprin shifted the professional focus of dance towards inclusivity and, among other innovations, investigated the creative potential of improvisation as a method of performance. Halprin also made a significant impression on North American dance of the Judson era, and therefore Western forms of improvisation, via her mentee Forti and students Rainer and Brown who took Halprin's workshop on her West Coast dancing deck before returning to the experimental New York milieu.<sup>54</sup> Therefore, while the influence of Zen via composer John Cage and

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<sup>51</sup> Several theorists, such as Martin Jay and Richard Shusterman, note the influence of somatic practitioner F. M. Alexander on Dewey and credit the Alexander Technique as having had an impact on the development of Dewey's philosophy. However, they do not note the direct connection between Dewey and dance education in the United States via his student H'Doubler. See Martin Jay, "Somaesthetics and Democracy: Dewey and Contemporary Body Art," *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 36, no. 4 (2002a): 55–69 and *The Education of John Dewey: A Biography* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2002b), 285–86. Pragmatist philosopher Shusterman's principle work builds on Dewey's aesthetics through his concept of Somaesthetics, which is explained in Shusterman, *Thinking Through the Body*. Alexander's influence on Dewey via his somatic lessons is chronicled in Martin, *Education of John Dewey*, 285–86.

<sup>52</sup> Anna Halprin (1920–) is a key figure in North American dance history. Her formative training as a child was with Isadora Duncan, and she later declined invitations to work with Martha Graham and Doris Humphrey because she fundamentally rejected the codification of dance as a result of her study with H'Doubler. There is considerable research on Halprin; those most pertinent to this thesis are: Halprin and Kaplan, *Moving Towards Life*; Janice Ross and Richard Schechner, *Anna Halprin: Experience as Dance* (Los Angeles, CA and London: University of California Press, 2007); Libby Worth and Helen Poynor, *Anna Halprin* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 2004); and Wendy Perron, "Anna Halprin (interview)," *Dance Magazine* 84, no. 9 (2010): 56–7.

<sup>53</sup> Halprin was influenced by the alternative scientific somatic methods of Todd's somatic practice via reading her seminal work *The Thinking Body: A Study of the Balancing Forces of Dynamic Man* (New York, NY: Princeton Book Company, 1937). Halprin and Kaplan, *Moving Towards Life*, 6.

<sup>54</sup> Morse, *Soft Is Fast*; Breitwieser, *Simone Forti*.

others is highly relevant to the development of improvised performance that began in the 1960s in New York, H'Doubler's experiential approach via Halprin, along with other key somatic practitioners, had a considerable impact on the development of Western practices of improvisation.<sup>55</sup>

After encountering Halprin's methods, Brown went on to produce a plethora of innovative work in New York with her company.<sup>56</sup> However, while this thesis touches on the well-documented work of Brown it does not address her specifically in order to focus on the practices of her former longstanding company member and improvising performer, Karczag.<sup>57</sup> Karczag has been studied by several prominent dance theorists because of the depth of her corporeal knowledges both in Western contemporary dance and somatic practices, and was once described as carrying the history of twentieth-century dance in her body.<sup>58</sup> Karczag's extensive immersion in somatic practices and

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<sup>55</sup> For further detail on the influence of Zen on improvisational artist practices, see Kay Larson, *Where the Heart Beats: John Cage, Zen Buddhism, and the Inner Life of Artists* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2012).

<sup>56</sup> In relation to this thesis it is important to note that Trisha Brown's (1936–2017) works were predominantly not improvised in performance but developed and choreographed through a rigorous improvisation practice. There is considerable literature on Brown, particularly in relation to her engagement with the visual arts. See Hendel Teicher, ed., *Trisha Brown: Dance and Art in Dialogue 1961–2001* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003); Philip Bither, Trisha Brown, and Peter Eleey, eds., *Trisha Brown: So That the Audience Does Not Know Whether I Have Stopped Dancing* (Minneapolis, MN: Walker Art Centre, 2008); and Susan Rosenberg, *Trisha Brown: Choreography as Visual Art* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2017).

<sup>57</sup> Arnhem-based, Hungarian-born improviser Eva Karczag danced professionally in Trisha Brown Company in New York, DanceWorks and Dance Exchange in Australia, and Strider in England. She is certified in the Alexander Technique and her practices of ideokinesis, T'ai Chi Ch'aun, Qi Gong, and yoga inform her improvisation performance. In June 2014 I travelled to Arnhem in the Netherlands to interview and dance with Karczag. My aim was to witness the corporeal knowledge of a practitioner whose approach to composing improvisation emerges directly from her practice of somatics, and to encounter the effect that these practices can have in the long term. Other notable life-long improvisers Paxton, Forti, Nelson, Hay, Stark Smith, Dilly, Halprin, and Ruth Zeporah, were interviewed by dance theorist Kent De Spain for his book, De Spain, *Landscapes of the Now*.

<sup>58</sup> The original quote was by Karczag who said, "Peter Halton once said in the 1990's you know you carry the history of twentieth-century dance in your body," accessed September 27, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OlwtHnWAlFs>. Some examples of theory written about Karczag include: Doran George, "Unpredictable Manoeuvres: Eva Karczag's Improvised Strategies for Thwarting Institutional Agendas," in Midgelow, *Oxford Handbook of Improvisation*, 223–42; Elizabeth Dempster, "Explorations within the New Dance Aesthetic: Eva Karczag Interview," *Writings on Dance: Exploring the New Dance Aesthetic* 14 (1995/1996): 39–52, and "Imagery, Ideokinesis and Choreography," *Writings on Dance: Ideokinesis and Dance Making* 1 (1985): 18–22; Aileen Crow and Paula Sager, "These Dances Rise Up: An Interview with Eva Karczag," *A Moving Journal* (2006): 7–12; Susie Fraser, "Eva Karczag: Life Doesn't Stop, It Just Changes Shape," *Writings on Dance: Of Bodies and Power* 3 (1988): 52–9; Les Gilbert, "Eva & Warren at Storey Hall: They Made It This Time," *Writings on Dance: Constellations of Things* 18/19 (1999): 52; Vida Midgelow, "Nomadism and Ethics in/as Improvised Movement Practices," *Critical Studies in Improvisation* 8, no. 1 (2012): 1–8; Philipa Rothfield, "Embracing the Unknown, Ethics and Dance," in *Ethics and the Arts*, ed. Paul Macneill (Amsterdam: Springer, 2014); Bethany Good, "Somatic Value System for Life and Its Integration into Dance Practices." Dance Master's Thesis, 2015, accessed March 14, 2016,

championing of the **release** aesthetic in dance, also described as **new dance**, provides a key case study for this thesis.<sup>59</sup> Within the new dance milieu, the corporeal knowledges developed in movement therapies have become particularly useful to improvisation practices.<sup>60</sup> The most relevant for this thesis are **Authentic Movement**, developed by Mary Starks Whitehouse; Bainbridge Cohen's Body Mind Centering®, which was developed in dialogue with Irmgard Bartenieff's Bartenieff Fundamentals™; and Joan Skinner's Skinner Releasing Technique™, which was strongly influenced by ideokinesis.<sup>61</sup> In North America, and later in the United Kingdom and Australia, these somatic systems were developed and combined with other corporeal knowledges of dance, resulting in the diversity of current practice.

## 1.6 Documenting corporeal knowledges

At the turn of the twentieth century the development of somatics and the corporeal knowledges of dance in the West, including H'Doubler's dance major, was a small part of a much broader fascination with corporeal research at the time. Coinciding with sudden changes in the urban environment due to industrialisation, there was an upsurge in the study of movement and sensorial experience.<sup>62</sup> At this time, pioneering somatic practitioners such as Alexander, Todd, and later Barbara Clark and Sweigard, engaged in a self-reflexive inquiry into embodied experience to gain further insight into the

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[http://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/dns\\_theses/3](http://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/dns_theses/3). Karczag's own writings include: "The Role of Somatics," in *Ballet, Why and How?*, eds. Derrick Brown and Martijn Vos (Arnhem: ArtEz Press, 2014), 148–50, "Moving the Moving," *Writings on Dance: Exploring the New Dance Aesthetic* 14 (1995/1996): 33–8, "As Yet Untitled," *Writings on Dance: Exploring the New Dance Aesthetic* 14 (1995/1996): 39, "Creating a Body: Promoting Independent Creative Thought" (2010), accessed May 7, 2013, <http://www.corpusweb.net/promoting-independent-creative-thought-4.html>, "Elusive and Intangible" (2011), accessed September 10, 2012, [www.resurgence.org/magazine/article3307-elusive-and-intangible.html](http://www.resurgence.org/magazine/article3307-elusive-and-intangible.html), "What We Use in Our Teaching and Why" (2014), accessed May 30, 2014, <http://www.corpusweb.net/research-what-we-use-in-our-teaching-and-why-9.html>, and "Listening ...," in Tufnell and Crickmay, *Body, Space, Image*, 48–49.

<sup>59</sup> Karczag's work is described in Chapter Five *The Aesthetics of an Ethics of Being*.

<sup>60</sup> Contact Improvisation, developed from the principles of Aikido by Steve Paxton (1939–), is also a very important practice to improvisation more generally. However, it is not specifically a movement therapy and is not discussed in this thesis but is addressed in detail in the journal *Contact Quarterly*.

<sup>61</sup> The unregulated practice of ideokinesis and Authentic Movement will be explored in greater detail in Chapters Three *Embodied Consciousness* and Seven *Prohibitive and Emancipative Self-Surveillance*.

<sup>62</sup> Philosopher Giorgio Agamben notes that daily interaction with new accelerative technologies such as cars, trains, and aeroplanes has a powerful impact on the experiential body, precipitating a wide-ranging kinaesthetic response which he describes as a "gestural crisis." Giorgio Agamben, *Means Without Ends: Notes on Politics*, trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2000). For further analysis of this gestural crisis and its relation to Western contemporary dance, see Erin Brannigan, *Dancefilm: Choreography and the Moving Image* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), 70.

nature of the relationship between the body and the mind.<sup>63</sup> These Australian and North American practitioners contributed to the broader field of movement research established by pioneering Europeans François Delsarte, Émile Jaques-Dalcroze, and Rudolf von Laban.<sup>64</sup> Delsarte and Dalcroze developed highly influential movement systems that became popular with dance-makers who were expanding the form beyond the codified lexicon of classical ballet. Unfortunately, Delsarte's pioneering gestural research suffered wide-scale misinterpretation as a result of its popularity.<sup>65</sup> Erosion of detail through the passing on of corporeal knowledge is an enduring problem for the documentation of movement systems, as demonstrated by the weak facsimiles of Delsarte's intention-based practice commonly reduced to mimetic, melodramatic posturing. His work was, however, a precursor to other movement pioneers who, throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, responded to the issue of documentation by developing their own systems of logic or sets of principles.

Pioneering movement theory in Western theatre dance is indebted to Laban, whose system Laban Movement Analysis (LMA) also categorised movement style through an analysis of the constituents of movement: weight, flow, effort, direction, space, and time.<sup>66</sup> Laban's mentee, Bartenieff, developed Bartenieff Fundamentals™, which

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<sup>63</sup> In the early twentieth century, Mabel Elsworth Todd (1880–1956) developed an approach to improving anatomical alignment using not only self-observation but also visualisation of imagery. Her approach would later be called ideokinesis, a composite of *ideo* (image) and *kinesis* (movement). Todd and her mentees Barbara Clark (1889–1982) and Dr Lulu Sweigard developed ideokinesis, which is discussed further in Chapter Seven. Australian actor, Frederick Matthias Alexander (1869–1955), developed the Alexander Technique®. Alexander, Todd, and Clarke were all motivated to overcome personal injury or illness through their research. As a student of Alexander's for several decades, Dewey advocates for somatic education in the introduction to Alexander's book, *The Use of the Self* (London: Orion Books, 1932). Israeli physicist and Judo practitioner Moshé Feldenkrais (1904–1984) was inspired by these pioneers when he later developed a highly influential somatic practice known as the Feldenkrais Method®. He was influenced by both Todd and Alexander and published several books on his methods, including Moshé Feldenkrais, *Awareness Through Movement: Easy to Do Health Exercises to Improve Your Posture, Vision, Imagination and Personal Awareness* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 1972) and *The Elusive Obvious* (Capitola, CA: Meta Publications, 1989). These practitioners are discussed further in Chapter Seven *Prohibitive and Emancipative Self-Surveillance*.

<sup>64</sup> Émile Jaques-Dalcroze (1865–1950) was a Swiss composer and music pedagogue who developed Eurythmics for teaching music and movement. Dalcroze developed three movement systems to teach music: Eurythmics, Solfege, and Improvisation. François Delsarte (1811–1871) was a French musician and teacher who developed a system of gestural analysis as a method of acting training. His work was highly influential to key figures in dance at the time: Isadora Duncan, Ruth St Dennis, Ted Shaw, Rudolf Laban, and F. M. Alexander. Rudolf von Laban (1879–1958) was a highly influential Hungarian choreographer and dance theorist.

<sup>65</sup> Brannigan, *Dancefilm*, 66.

<sup>66</sup> Laban pioneered modern dance in central Europe at the turn of the twentieth century. His most well-known theories are Labanotation, Laban Movement Analysis, and Choreutics; he also published several prominent texts. For more detail, see Rudolph Laban, *Laban's Principles of Dance and Movement Notation* (London: Macdonald and Evans, 1975) and *Effort* (London: Macdonald and Evans, 1967).

provided a method for the analysis of foundational movement co-ordinations based on anatomy for the purposes of movement therapy rather than performative aesthetics.<sup>67</sup> LMA and Bartenieff Fundamentals™ offer dance-makers a way to consider possible movement pathways and qualities via a system of organisation that does not require the codification of the pathways themselves. Choreographer Forsythe's *Improvisation Technologies*, a system for training dancers in The Forsythe Company in how to compose improvisation collectively as a self-organising system, built on Laban's movement analysis.<sup>68</sup> Using improvisation in performance helps Forsythe "to defeat choreography, to get back to what is primarily dancing."<sup>69</sup>

Karczag and Forsythe each developed excellent examples of highly sophisticated improvised performance practices, yet they occupy vastly disparate positions within the Western theatre dance ecology in terms of their spheres of influence, power, support, and reciprocal obligation to institutions. While they have each been the subject of extensive scholarly research due to their significant contribution to dance, never before have these artists been considered in relation to each other. As this study is concerned with the labour of improvisation, rather than performance outcomes *per se*, Forsythe's methods of improvisation are studied here via his former company members Watts and

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<sup>67</sup> Irmgard Bartenieff (1900–1981) was a German-born, North American-based movement theorist, educator, and therapist whose work informed Bainbridge Cohen's somatic practice, Body Mind Centering®. See Irmgard Bartenieff, *Body Movement: Coping with the Environment* (Philadelphia, PA: Gordon and Breach, 1980); Peggy Hackney, *Making Connections: Total Body Integration Through Bartenieff Fundamentals* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1998); Colleen Wahl, *Laban/Bartenieff Movement Studies: Contemporary Applications* (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 2019); and Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, *Sensing, Feeling, and Action: The Experimental Anatomy of Body-Mind Centering*, third edition (North Hampton, MA: Contact Editions, 2012).

<sup>68</sup> American-born William Forsythe (1949–) is a multi-award-winning choreographic artist who has been working in the field for over 45 years. He is an Honorary Fellow at the Laban Centre for Movement and Dance in London, holds an Honorary Doctorate from the Juilliard School in New York, and is currently professor of Dance and Artistic Advisor for the Choreographic Institute at the University of Southern California, Gloria Kaufman School of Dance. Forsythe began his professional career dancing with the Joffrey Ballet and later the Stuttgart Ballet where he was resident choreographer (1976–1983). He was also director of the Ballet Frankfurt (1984–2004), and The Forsythe Company (2005–2015). He creates large-scale architectural performance installations that he calls *Choreographic Objects*, and dance notation, education, and research resources, such as: William Forsythe, *Improvisation Technologies: A Tool for the Analytical Dance Eye*, CD-ROM (Berlin and Stuttgart: Hatje Cantz Publishers, 2012), *Synchronous Objects* (2009), accessed July 16, 2018, <https://synchronousobjects.osu.edu/>, for his score visualisation research on the collaborative platform *Motion Bank*, accessed July 16, 2018, <http://motionbank.org/>. Biography information accessed July 16, 2018, <https://www.dresdenfrankfurtdancecompany.com/en/about/associated-artists/william-forsythe/>.

<sup>69</sup> From an interview conducted by Nik Haffner on April 22, 1999 in Forsythe, *Improvisation Technologies*, 21.

Peisl.<sup>70</sup> Watts and Peisl are case studies for this thesis and have worked extensively in a milieu where improvisation is presented as an elite professional method that is highly acclaimed and comparatively well resourced. Watts argues that Forsythe's methods are concerned with making the engagement of the body-mind visible through his movement generation approach, which is discussed further in Chapter Six *Cultivating Movement Situations*.<sup>71</sup> Karczag, on the other hand, **undisciplines** the body-mind through somatic practices, as is explained in Chapter Five *The Aesthetics of an Ethics of Being*.

I use my own practice as a case study in this research to describe the states I work with when performing improvisation because the access I have to my own corporeal knowledges is primary somatic data.<sup>72</sup> I draw on my own embodied knowledges to illuminate what I understand from observation and through discussion of case studies to tease out the details of practice because, as a practitioner-theorist, these knowledges support me to articulate an uncommon level of technical detail. I have done this because ultimately each person's experience of their own improvisation practice is uniquely personal, and not only is practice personal it is also not a fixed entity. It changes daily, even moment to moment, so these descriptions are lucid enough to bear description within a continuum that is constantly changing and should be understood as experiences that are familiar in their reoccurrence. This research aims to capitalise on the commonalities that can be found between these accounts so as to articulate the details of sophisticated improvisation practices.

## 1.7 Asserting improvisational corporeal knowledges

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<sup>70</sup> Watts and Peisl, former The Forsythe Company members, were interviewed for this research. Watts is an official Forsythe Improvisation Teacher and is involved in research at the juncture of dance and neuroscience. For example, he co-developed a workshop at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign as part of the 2016 research project "Choreography of Platform-Invariant Motion Primitives." See Amy La Viers et al., "Choreographic and Somatic Approaches for the Development of Expressive Robotic Systems," *Arts* 7, no. 2 (2018): 1–21; and Elizabeth Waterhouse, Riley Watts, and Bettina E. Bläsing, "Doing Duo: A Case Study of Entrainment in William Forsythe's Choreography *Duo*," *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 8 (2014): 1–16. Peisl is a choreographer, freelance performer, teacher, and PhD candidate at the University of California, Davis. She has also studied therapeutic methods such as Somatic Experiencing with Paul Levine and is a certified craniosacral therapy practitioner (Milne Institute).

<sup>71</sup> This notion was relayed to me during a workshop I attended which was led by Watts in Sydney on October 20, 2012. Forsythe emphasises the necessity of "presence" in performance by saying, we go to dance to see people paying attention.

<sup>72</sup> My practice as a professional dancer and improvising performer has, for more than twenty-five years, been largely informed by somatic practices of release, Body-Mind Centering, and ideokinesis, as well as Contact Improvisation and tertiary training in contemporary (predominantly the Cunningham technique) and classical techniques.

There are several excellent texts on improvisation that aim to articulate how expert performers experience the aliveness and immediacy of their practice using evocative phrases such as balancing “on the edge” and commanding “presence.”<sup>73</sup> However, too often a novice practitioner of improvisation struggles to achieve these ideals because approaches to pedagogy, particularly at an institutional level, are challenged by the absence of language appropriate to the specific rigours of this kind of labour. Furthermore, because of its intangibility, openness, and the diversity of practices, improvisation can at times be perceived as a soft option or mistaken for an easy way to produce performance without rehearsal or expertise.<sup>74</sup> Since its origins, improvisation has been mobilised as a highly inclusive practice, yet it can also be, as dance theorist David Gere asserts, “by its very nature among the most rigorous of human endeavours.”<sup>75</sup> The sense that improvisation might simply be a free expression of whatever occurs to an improviser in response to a task or without pre-determined parameters, is to some extent true but it is only the tip of the iceberg. Without the cultivation of a practice, an improvised performance may unfold without realising the potential for aliveness, or be dependent on a special kind of elusive inspiration. To be more specific, without the cultivation of improvisational methods the material that arises spontaneously is often limited to a replication of the physical practices already embedded in muscle memory. Therefore, while the movement material *is improvised* in the sense that it hasn’t been pre-prepared, without a method to innovate or interrogate movement choices, familiar movement pathways consistently re-emerge. To counter this tendency, rigorous *undisciplining* work must be done to prepare the body-mind for innovating movement choices via processes that are discussed in Chapters Two, Three, and Seven. As this thesis will show, engaging with somatics facilitates not only an *undoing* of movement pathways stored in the muscle memory, but also prepares an improvising body-mind for the imaginative skills needed for improvised performance, along with philosophical perspectives that support the development of those skills.

Quite rightly, a fundamental position of improvised dance theory is the privileging of somatic, rather than imitative, approaches to pedagogy and practice. Somatics offers

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<sup>73</sup> Quotes in reference to Zaporah, *Improvisation on the Edge*, and Zaporah, *Action Theatre*; Cooper Albright and Gere, *Taken by Surprise*.

<sup>74</sup> David Gere notes the stigmatisation of the practice as “aimless, even talentless, noodling,” in Cooper Albright and Gere, *Taken by Surprise*, xv.

<sup>75</sup> Cooper Albright and Gere, *Taken by Surprise*, xiv.



important observation-based methods of becoming aware of, and potentially releasing, habitual movement patterns of a body-mind, thereby opening up a broader range of movement pathways, qualities, or choices.<sup>76</sup> As a practice, somatics supports a proliferation of individually creative movement possibilities rather than proposing a correct form against which a dancer might be ranked or judged. Therefore, the development of expertise or a capacity for virtuosity can be a contentious notion among somatic-based improvisational practitioners who seek to reject the hierarchical or competitive basis on which imitative dance training exists, in favour of validating the diversity of possible options across a movement spectrum.<sup>77</sup> By favouring the term *body-mind*, this thesis follows Martha Eddy in distinguishing between the practices she describes as either *mind-body* or *body-mind* by describing the latter as “the physical portal to a holistic paradigm of consciousness” and the former as those, such as meditation, which “direct the mind to notice the body, or otherwise influence the body especially to ‘quiet it.’ This is in contrast to somatic awareness ... [that] uses tools to find meaning from these sensations, contextualising them within a whole body perspective.”<sup>78</sup>

As stated earlier, somatic dance theory argues that the alternative or therapeutic basis from which somatics has emerged is philosophically incongruous with the hierarchical tradition of imitative methods of pedagogy. Yet emerging professionals in the twenty-first century must find a synthesis between these divergent practices that co-exist in both the theatre and the academy.<sup>79</sup> Therefore, a core issue this thesis seeks to address is

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<sup>76</sup> Just as psychology theorises that habitually subconscious thought patterns (or beliefs) are based on developmental experiences that become neural pathways in the brain, those neural pathways also direct the tone of the body’s tissues via the brain’s connection to the nervous system (capacity for muscle activation). Therefore, emotional experiences impact not only the development of neural pathways but are also expressed in the physical tonus of the body corresponding to the emotional response. For example, experiences of fear or shame can cause a closing of the chest for self-protection, which after a while becomes a subconscious habit. Just as meditation or mindfulness teaches the brain healthful responses to psychological triggers, the practice of somatics teaches the body-mind a healthful (more anatomically efficient) embodiment of movement patterns and pathways. With regard to improvisation, this also means a broader range of available movement choices.

<sup>77</sup> For more on competition in dance see Dempster, “Undisciplined Subjects”; Jill Green, “Somatic Authority and the Myth of the Ideal Body in Dance Education,” *Dance Research Journal* 31, no. 2 (1999): 80–100 and “Emancipatory Pedagogy?: Women’s Bodies and the Creative Process in Dance,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 21, no. 3 (2000): 124–40; and Nalina Wait and Erin Brannigan, “Non-competitive Body States: Corporeal Freedom and Innovation in Contemporary Dance,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Dance and Competition*, ed. Sherril Dodds (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018), 283–304.

<sup>78</sup> Eddy, *Mindful Movement*, 12.

<sup>79</sup> Some relevant examples of the discussion of the binary between somatic and imitative pedagogy in the academy include: Patricia Vertinsky, “From Physical Educators to Mothers of the Dance: Margaret

an articulation of the specialised corporeal knowledges of practice, to consider and support how the dissolution of a pedagogical binary might occur in practice. The development of language around the nuances of practice may assist a student to develop the necessary capacities for performing improvisation in a highly visible or professional context. This study is especially important in times of financial austerity (in the arts) as the erasure of expert corporeal knowledges is always immanent. Accounting for important lineages of practice is especially vital to a form where the passing on of corporeal knowledges between generations is contingent on body-to-body contact and a considerable investment of time and care.

While there is considerable literature on compositional *form* in dance, finding a language that best evokes the formless compositional practices of improvisation remains a considerable challenge.<sup>80</sup> The labour and challenges of developing improvisational expertise are negotiated invisibly and, commonly, the more deeply engaged a practitioner is within a rich and multidimensional practice, the more their multifaceted focus precludes the capacity to articulate the complexity of the praxis in language, as it is an entirely different project to dancing. As a result, improvisation theory continues to grapple with the lexical limitations and concrete permanence of language that seems to grasp uselessly at the ephemerality of improvisation, particularly the kinds of practices described in the following.<sup>81</sup> The gap between improvisation practice and theory may act as a membrane separating the *mute* practitioner whose work is often shrouded in mystery, and the dance theorist endeavouring to illuminate an elusive subject. Despite the challenges, however, there have been many highly useful texts written on improvisation practice whose authors have informed this thesis considerably, especially Miranda Tufnell and Chris Crickmay's *Body, Space, Image*:

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H'Doubler and Martha Hill," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 27, no. 7 (2010): 1113–32; and Jill Green, "Foucault and the Training of Docile Bodies in Dance Education," *Arts and Learning Research Journal* 19, no. 1 (2002/2003): 99–126, Green, "Emancipatory Pedagogy?," 124–40, and Green, "Somatic Authority," 80–100.

<sup>80</sup> For examples of seminal and current pedagogical compositional texts see Doris Humphrey, *The Art of Making Dances* (Trenton, NJ: Princeton Book Company, 1991); Lynne Anne Blom and L. Tarin Chaplin, *The Intimate Act*; Pamela Anderson Sofras, *Composition Basics: Capturing the Choreographer's Craft* (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 2006); and Jacqueline M. Smith Artard, *Dance Composition*, fourth edition (New York, NY: Routledge, 2000). Sandra Cerny Minton's methods are a highly practical way of utilising improvisation in the studio for choreographic purposes rather than the practice of performing improvisation, which is the topic of this thesis, although the two are linked. See Sandra Cerny Minton, *Choreography: A Basic Approach Using Improvisation* (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1986).

<sup>81</sup> Martha Eddy argues that "dance and 'somatics' remain on the fringes of academic inquiry, perhaps precisely because they are of the body and include elements that are ineffable." Eddy, "A Brief History," 10.

*Notes Towards Improvisation and Performance*, Kent De Spain's *Landscapes of the Now: A Topology of Movement Improvisation*, Forsythe's *Improvisation Technologies*, Susan Rethorst's *A Choreographic Mind: Autobodygraphical Writings*, Louppe's *Poetics of Contemporary Dance*, Melinda Buckwalter's *Composing While Dancing: An Improviser's Companion*, Foster's *Dances That Describe Themselves: The Improvised Choreography of Richard Bull*, Ann Cooper Albright and Gere's *Taken by Surprise: A Dance Improvisation Reader*, and the journals *Writings on Dance* and *Contact Quarterly*.<sup>82</sup>

As noted earlier, part of the reason that improvisation is so difficult to articulate is because the subjective experience of embodied consciousness is fundamentally incongruous with the traditional dualistic orthodoxy on consciousness. For example, Foster's "**hyperawareness**" is not experienced as a purely cognitive phenomenon, but includes the body's awareness.<sup>83</sup> Therefore, this research follows the two-way exchange between practice and theory by articulating the ways in which the mind is experienced as embodied that are common to artistic practice and supported by theory. For example, Watts is deeply engaged with a sensorimotor model for *embodied cognition*.<sup>84</sup> This involves a self-reflexive, or "metacognitive," inquiry into our perceptive capacities as dancers.<sup>85</sup> Karczag has extensively researched Western somatic practices and theory, and Eastern philosophy. Both of these branches on the tree of embodied mind theory produce different frames for attending to practice.

Western somatic theory is given prominence in this research because it has emerged from within the cultural context of Western dualism while also challenging it. In

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<sup>82</sup> Tufnell and Crickmay, *Body, Space, Image*; Kent De Spain, *Landscapes of the Now*; Forsythe, *Improvisation Technologies*; Susan Rethorst, *A Choreographic Mind: Autobodygraphical Writings* (Helsinki: Theatre Academy Helsinki, Kinesis 2, 2013); Louppe, *Poetics of Contemporary Dance*; Buckwalter, *Composing While Dancing*; Foster, *Dances That Describe Themselves*; and Cooper Albright and Gere, *Taken by Surprise*. Vida Midgelow's edited volume is also relevant to this thesis but was published too recently to have made a significant impact on it. See Midgelow, *Oxford Handbook of Improvisation*.

<sup>83</sup> Hyperawareness is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three *Embodied Consciousness*. Foster talks about a hyperawareness in relation to improvisation in "Taken by Surprise: Improvisation in Dance and Mind," in Cooper Albright and Gere, *Taken by Surprise*, 7, and Foster, *Dances That Describe Themselves*, 243.

<sup>84</sup> For an overview of the field of embodied cognition see Shapiro, *Embodied Cognition*. For the relationship between embodied cognition and choreography, see Jonathan Owen Clark and Taku Ando, "Geometry, Embodied Cognition and Choreographic Praxis," *International Journal of Performance Arts and Digital Media* 10, no. 2 (2014): 179–92.

<sup>85</sup> Watts emphasised the difference between *cognition* or thinking, and **metacognition** (thinking about thinking) during his improvisation workshop at STRUT in Perth, August 4–15, 2014.

contrast, many aspects of Eastern philosophy have had considerable influence on somatic practices and improvisational dance theory precisely because they never proposed the separation of mind and the body.<sup>86</sup> For example, a somatically aware state of *body-mind* integration is central to many Eastern religions, in particular different branches of Buddhism that aspire to enlightenment through meditation practices such as Zazen and Vipassanā.<sup>87</sup> Spinoza's *Ethics* shares aspects with Eastern philosophy, as he too considers "thought" and "extension" as derivatives of an ultimate, infinite substance.<sup>88</sup> However, in utilising these concepts it is important to highlight that there is potential for an improviser working with this method to become completely saturated, or immersed in affects in circulation, rather than cultivating a state of equanimity and detachment from them as suggested both by Eastern philosophy and Spinoza.<sup>89</sup>

Eastern practices of dance (especially classical forms) and martial arts also compose the circulation of affect, but quite specifically as a way of *harmonising* the physical/mental/energetic systems. In the West, it has really been through the practice of improvised dance that this sensitivity has been explored, cultivated, and *composed*, but not necessarily in ways that are specifically *healthful*, although increased health is the goal of somatic practices that commonly inform improvisation practices. The way for spiritual practitioners to advance their practice is clearly defined by centuries of religious doctrine, but for improvisers the way is deliberately unregulated and therefore much less certain, and subsequently theory in relation to the composition of improvisation is often rare and deliberately open-ended.<sup>90</sup> This point is made to indicate that while improvisation and spiritual practices have much in common they should not necessarily be conflated.

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<sup>86</sup> The extent of the influence that Eastern philosophy has had on somatics is extensive and beyond the scope of this research. Deborah Hay, an original member of the Judson Dance Theater, continues to explicitly use improvisation as a choreographic modality in ways that are modelled on Buddhist practices. For further detail, see Deborah Hay, *My Body, The Buddhist* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2000). John Cage was also influenced by Zen Buddhism and used the I Ching to determine compositions while experimenting with Cunningham.

<sup>87</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the nexus between somatic movement practices and spirituality, see Amanda Williamson, "Reflections and Theoretical Approaches to the Study of Spiritualities within the Field of Somatic Movement Dance Education," *Journal of Dance and Somatic Practices* 2, no. 1 (2010): 35–61.

<sup>88</sup> Spinoza explains, "The greatest virtue of the mind is to know God (by IVP28), or to understand things by the third kind of knowledge (by P25). Indeed, this virtue is the greater the more the mind knows of things by this kind of knowledge (by P24)." Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. Edwin Curley (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1996), 173.

<sup>89</sup> See Part IV, "Of Human Bondage" and Part V, "Of Human Freedom," in Spinoza, *Ethics*, 113–81.

<sup>90</sup> Some examples of improvisation theory that address compositional pedagogy include: Cerny Minton, *Choreography*; Tufnell and Crickmay, *Body, Space, Image*; and Forsythe, *Improvisation Technologies*.

This thesis therefore focuses on naming, describing, and identifying what is specific to states of conscious awareness in order to elucidate the process of how improvisation is composed. Importantly for dance pedagogy, these questions are asked not through cognitive science but through aesthetics, poetics, and language-making that emerge from a radically anti-Cartesian perspective. Investigating the operation of **somatic intelligence** and its effect on the composition of improvised dance through case studies and my own practice is an original contribution to knowledge and therefore requires re-imagining the models for language and other tools used to teach improvised compositional dance theory. Chapter Three *Embodied Consciousness* describes these states of conscious awareness from a practitioner perspective. Chapter Four *Resonance of Affects and Immanent Evaluation* and Chapter Five *The Aesthetics of an Ethics of Being*, further articulate these states using concepts proposed by affect theory. Chapter Five and Chapter Six *Cultivating Movement Situations* compare approaches to improvisation practice through diverse case studies, and apply the concepts developed in the thesis in different contexts to test their robustness. Working closely with the moving body-mind as a mental/physical/spiritual medium for making art does, however, require a degree of anatomical knowledge and, therefore, a scientific approach to inquiry is taken up at times. By taking an anatomical approach this thesis follows the methods of pioneering somatic practitioners, described here as the alternative scientists of contemporary dance, whose corporeal knowledges are discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two *Dewey and the Pre-history of Western Improvisation* and Chapter Seven *Prohibitive and Emancipative Self-Surveillance*.

A scientific perspective is also highly relevant to current notions of pedagogy, as practices of embodied cognition are becoming more important to neuroscientists, and illuminating studies of *flow states* and *mindfulness* are more commonly embraced by mainstream culture.<sup>91</sup> In this context, an articulation of the specific practices of improvisation that explain how a dancer might cultivate compositional expertise and demystify the process is timely and requires careful consideration. While theory cannot replace practice, it can make specific details of practice more accessible to a wider

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<sup>91</sup> Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi theorises *flow states* in *Optimal Experience: Psychological Studies of Flow in Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) and *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1996).

audience of professional performers and educators, including those working outside of dance. Offering non-dancers' insights into the way improvisers develop expertise within their discipline may increase accessibility and an appreciation for specialised corporeal knowledges of improvised dance. In this way, improvisation as a practice can be revealed as a precursor to many of the new mindfulness theories that are currently gaining traction in the fields of neuroscience and demonstrate how practice can lead the way in this sector of the humanities–science interface. Most importantly, as corporeal knowledges are disseminated through direct body-to-body presence, live, in real time, dance educators need to pay special attention to the development of pedagogical models that can circumvent the dualism inherent in language.

### 1.8 Dancing subject-object

Action research by practitioner-scholars in dance and somatic theory often follows phenomenological methodologies as a way to articulate corporeal knowledges. This is because phenomenology supports the active position of the practitioner as the source of knowledge rather than examining the ontology of practice from an external viewpoint, thereby substantiating practice as a primary source of knowledges. Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, in particular, is significant for dance studies as he emphasises the human body, or what he calls the body-subject, as the primary site of knowing the world, in contrast to identifying the Cartesian *cogito* of consciousness as the source of knowledge.<sup>92</sup> Through his philosophy Merleau-Ponty offers a descriptive methodology for examining the structure of consciousness through introspective observation of the self, understood as an **encounter** through senses, feelings, and perception. Similarly, somatic philosopher Thomas Hannah explains that first-person accounts of somatic research are considered factual within the field of somatics. Hannah explains that “first-person observation of the soma is immediately factual. Third person observation, in contrast, can become factual only by mediation through a set of principles.”<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–1961) was a phenomenological philosopher influenced by Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger. His main interest was the constitution of meaning in human experience and he wrote about perception, art, and politics. His most pivotal work is considered to be *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (New York, NY and London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958). For further detail about debates around somatics and dualism see Marie Bardet and Florencio Noceti, “With Descartes, Against Dualism,” *Journal of Dance and Somatic Practices* 4, no. 2 (2012): 195–209.

<sup>93</sup> Thomas Hanna, “What is Somatics?,” in *Bone Breath and Gesture: Practices of Embodiment* ed. Don Hanlon Johnson (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 1995), 342.

Dance theorist Sondra Horton Fraleigh points to a distinction in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology between body-subject and body-object, which he uses to describe the ways in which a person experiences themselves phenomenologically. She suggests that these terms provide a rationale for why phenomenology is such a relevant method in dance theory. She explains that for Merleau-Ponty, the term *body-subject* is used to describe the body-mind as unified in action and not self-reflective, in the "present centred moment ... as the unity of self and body in action."<sup>94</sup> In comparison, *body-object* refers to "a conscious, internal position taken towards the body as an object of attention."<sup>95</sup> In this sense, the body is the object of attention, not as a material object, but in terms of an observer forming an objective attitude towards their own body.<sup>96</sup> In improvised dance, these two ways of experiencing the self are entwined as the dancer moves between their subjective experience and observing their performance of compositional choices somewhat objectively. The integration of philosophy and practice is well described by Bernard, who proposes that ideokinesis is a **physiophilosophical** practice, "a philosophy of your body, of how you think about your body, of how you think about yourself."<sup>97</sup> It is the physiophilosophical nature of practice that determines its aesthetic sensibility, which is why it is so important to identify. It not only produces movement with a specific aesthetic, it produces dancers who admire that aesthetic by cultivating their sensibility through their dancing.

As Louppe and others have described, a persistent challenge for theorists looking to articulate the specifics of the corporeal knowledges of dance by rethinking language is that contemporary dance is a twentieth-century phenomenon that created an epistemological rupture.<sup>98</sup> Louppe posits:

This rupture ... makes the body, especially the moving body, at once the subject, the object, and the tool of its own knowledge out of which another perception,

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<sup>94</sup> Sondra Horton Fraleigh explains this distinction in relation to dance in Fraleigh, *Dance and the Lived Body*, 13.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> André Bernard, Ursula Stricker, and Wolfgang Steinmuller, *Ideokinesis: A Creative Approach to Human Movement and Body Alignment* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2006), 44.

<sup>98</sup> Erin Brannigan expands on the idea of Western theatre dance as a twentieth-century phenomenon in Erin Brannigan, "Moving Across Disciplines: Dance in the Twenty-First Century," *Platform Paper*, no. 25 (2010): 10–16.

another consciousness of the world and above all a new way of sensing and creating can be awakened.<sup>99</sup>

This “new way of sensing,” which is at the heart of improvisation practices requires experiential or pre-lingual knowledge that eludes formalised systems of writing. The choreographic object of study is not only the product but also the method of practice, further complicating the theoretical approach. As an object of study, improvisation practice provides models for experiential inquiry into embodiment as a body-subject, and must therefore, on some level, take a physiophilosophical position on the nature of conscious awareness.

As noted earlier, the body-mind integration practices at the heart of somatics have been pivotal to the corporeal knowledges of dance, and the notion of a unified body-mind is commonly accepted within practice-based research and research that is based on practice. For example, Fraleigh’s existential phenomenological account of descriptive aesthetics centralises the body’s role in perception by stating that “[the body] does not *have* a consciousness, it *is* a consciousness.”<sup>100</sup> Somatic practitioner Larry Dossey emphasises the importance of this fundamental understanding in the first edition of *Writings on Dance*:

Our concept of our brain as the centre of thought may be utterly spurious, a kind of chauvinistic cerebralism which will not bear the scrutiny of our new knowledge. Far better, perhaps, to regard the entire body as a brain – if by brain we mean the site of human thought.<sup>101</sup>

The practice of focusing conscious awareness on one’s own anatomy so as to integrate and therefore *embody* the materiality of the body-mind, is central to improvisation. In this practice, the *mind* is extended beyond the *brain* to encompass the nervous system via how consciously aware the practitioner is in their **sensorium**. The body-mind is receptive to information collected through the senses, but it is also possible to perceive

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<sup>99</sup> Louppe, *Poetics of Contemporary Dance*, xxii.

<sup>100</sup> Fraleigh, *Dance and the Lived Body*, 15. Italics in original. Also, note that Richard Shusterman’s creation of the term *somaesthetic* encapsulates his pragmatist effort to centralise the body’s sensory role in aesthetic appreciation of art following Dewey. See Shusterman, *Thinking Through the Body*.

<sup>101</sup> Larry Dossey, *Space, Time and Medicine*, quoted in Elizabeth Dempster, “Image-Based Movement Education,” *Writings on Dance: Ideokinesis and Dance Making*, 1 (1985): 13–7.



the residue of feelings *stored* in the corporeality in a two-directional system, particularly in the connection between the brain and the intestines, as recent research shows.<sup>102</sup>

These *feelings* that arise from a physiophilosophical position about how to physically *be* in the world, or memories of experiences, or in response to events, arise in the corporeality as an extension of neural pathways (brain) through their connection to the nervous system (body). It is through relaxing the body, and relaxing the vagus nerve in particular, that the qualitative sense of the **tone** of the nervous system, and therefore also of the muscular system, can soften. As will be shown, according to somatic theory, relaxation of the tonus of the body increases the capacity to sense through the sensorium, creating a more detailed awareness of what it means to be *embodied*.

Central to the methodology of this thesis is the collection of primary data from key case studies, in which the interview questions were primarily concerned with these artists' own embodied experience as dancers, rather than external observations of them as an art object. Therefore, it follows that, like much dance and somatic theory, aspects of this research are to some extent phenomenological in that they describe subjective-objective perception of the body-mind. However, while reports of artists' experiences are integral primary data, to describe the methodology of this research as phenomenological is to some extent inaccurate. This is because, for Merleau-Ponty, phenomenology is a "style of thinking" that "tries to give a direct description of our experience as it is, without taking account of its psychological origin and causal explanations which the scientist, the historian or the sociologist may be able to provide."<sup>103</sup> For Merleau-Ponty, an accurate description of experience must involve the suspension of what he describes as objective thought via a practice of transcendental-phenomenological reduction (TPR).<sup>104</sup> The aim of TPR is to suspend objective thought in order to "reveal experience as it is lived – that is, how things appear to the subject who experiences them."<sup>105</sup> By contrast,

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<sup>102</sup> See Emeran Mayer, Rob Knight, Sarkis Mazmanian, John Cryan, and Kirsten Tillisc, "Gut Microbes and the Brain: Paradigm Shift in Neuroscience," *The Journal of Neuroscience* 34, no. 46 (2014): 15490–6; and Timothy Dinan and John Cryan, "The Impact of Gut Microbiota on Brain and Behaviors: Implications for Psychiatry," *Current Opinion in Clinical Nutrition and Metabolic Care* 18, no. 6 (2015): 552–8.

<sup>103</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, vii.

<sup>104</sup> Merleau-Ponty's practice of transcendental-phenomenological reduction is described in more detail in Komarine Romdenh-Romluc, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Merleau-Ponty and Phenomenology of Perception* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 2011), 22–4.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

this research specifically engages with historical and scientific influences on practice and how these forces have shaped and increased the value of specific experiences.

There has been some critique of Merleau-Ponty's methodology from Foucault that is relevant for dance theory: that a phenomenological lens positions a subjective experience as universalising, originary, or without the context of cultural codes.<sup>106</sup>

Dance theorist Sally Anne Ness argues that Foucault's critique of the phenomenological "conception of the human subject" has had a considerable impact on the dance theory that uses it as a methodology.<sup>107</sup> The descriptions of specific practices in this thesis aim to provide a way into discussing the kind of axiology that has been passed along a lineage of practitioners, and extrapolate meaning from both the primary data of interviews *and* related theory. Importantly, as will be shown, combining first-person accounts and theory unpacks specific physiophilosophical interpretations of improvised performance.

### **1.9 Philosophical interiority via affect theory**

While this is not a philosophical project, as it is fundamentally based in practice, philosophy brings certain insights and concepts that are useful in the articulation of corporeal knowledges, specifically, because they describe in language what has already been rehearsed physiophilosophically in practice. Rather than return to phenomenology, another methodological approach that is positioned clearly in a non-dualist paradigm is one that engages predominantly with the circulation of sensations and feelings known as affect theory, which is a burgeoning interest among improvisation theorists.<sup>108</sup> Affect is defined by affect theorists Gregory Seigworth and Melissa Gregg as "the name we give to those forces – visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally other than conscious

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<sup>106</sup> Foucault says, "If there is one approach that I do reject, however, it is that (one might call it, broadly speaking, the phenomenological approach) which gives absolute priority to the observing subject, which attributes a constituent role to an act, which places its own point of view at the origin of all historicity – which, in short, leads to a transcendental consciousness. It seems to me that the historical analysis of scientific discourse should, in the last resort, be subject, not to a theory of the knowing subject, but rather to a theory of discursive practice." Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1966), xiv.

<sup>107</sup> Sally Ann Ness, "Foucault's Turn from Phenomenology: Implications for Dance Studies," *Dance Research Journal* 43, no. 2 (2011): 19–32.

<sup>108</sup> See Thomas F. DeFrantz and Philipa Rothfield, eds., *Choreography and Corporeality: Relay in Motion* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Paula Guzzanti, "I-Reflexes: The Affective Implications of Bodies in Dance Improvisation Performance," *PARtake: The Journal of Performance as Research* 1, no. 2 (2017): article 9; and for research into the ethical nature of improvisation in relation to Spinoza's *Ethics*, see Philipa Rothfield, "Embracing the Unknown," 89–98.

knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion – that can serve to drive us toward movement, towards thought and extension.”<sup>109</sup> There are several different contexts in which the term *affect* is used, but the use of the term here applies concepts of the so-called *affective turn* of the 1990s that embraced the ideas proposed by Spinoza in his *Ethics*, in relation to current theories of the embodied mind.<sup>110</sup> As will be shown in Chapter Four *Resonance of Affects and Immanent Evaluation*, affect theory and Spinoza’s notion of body-mind provide a useful framework for supporting the articulation of the forces that shape an improvisation practice and composition. Affect theory moves away from the linguistic impetus of philosophy and embraces the materiality and abstract nature of a body-mind by weaving together scientific and social theories.

Theorising improvised performance via affect theory privileges an investigation of the forces in circulation that impact body-minds on an autonomic, pre-subjective level, prior to their crystallisation as feelings of intention or emotion. Affects are the social forces we encounter that motivate body-minds to respond, forces that may not be felt personally but may trigger the action of a collective body of people through shared not-quite-conscious shared experience of intensity, that may not be fully realisable in language. Importantly, for Spinoza, affects are perceptible in the way they increase or decrease a body-mind’s capacity to act. Spinoza explains the impact of affect upon a body’s capacity for action:

By affect I understand affections of the body by which the body’s power of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained, and at the same time, the ideas of these affections.<sup>111</sup>

As that which increases or diminishes the body’s power of action, the use of an affective lens to theorise improvised composition is central to the argument proposed in this thesis. This thesis deploys Brian Massumi’s notion of affect theory in an original way to articulate how compositional choices are motivated by affective forces in

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<sup>109</sup> Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth, eds., *The Affect Theory Reader* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 1.

<sup>110</sup> For more on the affective turn, see Rachel Greenwald Smith, “Postmodernism and the Affective Turn,” *Twentieth Century Literature* 57, nos. 3/4 (2011): 423–46. Spinoza’s *Ethics* was originally published posthumously in 1677.

<sup>111</sup> Spinoza, *Ethics*, 70.

circulation that *resonate* in a body-mind, producing an impulse to move. While other philosophical notions have provided useful models throughout this thesis, it is affect theory that best expresses the experience of practice and is therefore privileged in the following.

### 1.10 Contingency methods

A pivotal question in this research is *what creative practices may offer emergent languages in the articulation of corporeal knowledges*. It is appropriate, therefore, to investigate a theoretical approach via a methodology that is contingent on what arises in practice, which is a “concept driving new ethnographic practice,” according to cultural ethnographer and cultural theorist Stephen Muecke.<sup>112</sup> Muecke describes contingency theory in relation to its Latin root as being about “touching, bordering on, reaching, befalling.”<sup>113</sup> He explains that “contingency theory welcomes stray facts, complexity, intuition, and feelings.”<sup>114</sup> Both the study and the form of the subject of study itself are contingent on the information that arrives, and the gathering of knowledge precipitated is treated as an open system. He suggests that it is a useful methodology for ethnographic research because

[by] treating the world as a complex open system [...] one is alert to the *feeling* that there might be something there, among the contingent effects, that could transform the research agenda [...] It is not therefore about maintaining a critical distance, but about tipping over into new paradigms where encounters (with Others for instance) can teach us [...] by putting our preconceived ideas in jeopardy [...].<sup>115</sup>

Furthermore, a contingent methodology supports the collection of auto-ethnographic data, which are comprised of the kinds of “stray facts, complexity, intuition, and feelings” of my own corporeal knowledges which are experienced much like an interrelated matrix of sensations and movement pathways.<sup>116</sup> Muecke suggests that a contingent methodology “allow[s] oneself to ‘make connections’ in the processes of

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<sup>112</sup> Stephen Muecke, “Contingency Theory: The Madagascan Experiment,” *Interventions* 6, no. 2 (2004): 201–25.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 201.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 202.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 203.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 202.

perception, observation, thought, and writing.”<sup>117</sup>

For Muecke, holding the freedom to make connections is the most effective way to create new knowledge, especially in the case of needing to create a new vocabulary. He explains that

the grasp of the radically contingent is the precondition for developing a newer vocabulary in our academic writing to do with creating knowledge in our encounters with other places and peoples.<sup>118</sup>

In this case, following a contingent methodology will involve drawing on primary interview data collected from case studies, and including rather than excluding the forces that shape this field of knowledge, such as the historical work of pioneers in the lineage, their **psycho-physical** capacities and philosophical influences. Furthermore, the self-reflexive nature of contingent (auto-)ethnographical study mirrors the inherent reflexivity of improvisation practice.

Foster argues that American experimental dance since Cunningham has innovated the form by instituting a common use of reflexive processes that she says “challenge traditional distinctions between thought and action, subject and object, artist and critic.”<sup>119</sup> Contemporary choreographers have integrated reflexivity into their process as an important legacy of the innovative Judson era. However, while the issue of language is most apparent in the communication of corporeal knowledges, the root cause hindering the academic study of dance is the enduring legacy of Cartesian dualism embedded in our structures of language and thought that value the cognitive over the corporeal. Fraleigh identifies an awareness of dualistic thinking as important: “Dualism in dance is perpetuated, I believe, by the practice of dance as well as by the language that supports this Practice.”<sup>120</sup> She explains that

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<sup>117</sup> Idem.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 214.

<sup>119</sup> She compares this to what Michal Foucault and Roland Barthes have done in literature. For more detail, see Susan Leigh Foster, *Reading Dancing: Bodies and Subjects in Contemporary American Dance* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986), xx.

<sup>120</sup> Fraleigh, *Dance and the Lived Body*, 11.

[h]abitual use of language that distinguishes body from mind in the teaching and learning of dance reinforces a view that the mind tells the body what to do; then the body responds to the command. It also reinforces an erroneous view that the inspiration (soul or spirit) for dance lies outside the ken of the body. This is not a *thinking body* (to borrow the theme of Mabel Todd's book); nor is it a *feeling mind* (to recall Langer's work).<sup>121</sup>

Therefore, the problem remains of how to validate the corporeal knowledges of dance as central to an understanding of dancing, when a complex understanding of this knowledge is challenging to circulate through language. Languages must be developed for improvised dance that are informed by the kinds of experiential states in which these corporeal knowledges occur, much like the dancing itself.

The focus of this thesis is to support improvisation pedagogy by finding effective ways to bridge the gap between the specialised language used in somatic movement education that is rooted in tactile experience, and the qualitatively analytical languages of academia. One method to address this gap, asserted by dance theorists, is thought expansion of scholarly research that embraces the senses through a poetic approach.<sup>122</sup> Skinner says of the somatic practice she developed, Skinner Releasing Technique™,

[t]here are so many possible reasons for why the work became poetic, and one of them is that my orientation has always been dance ... what do I mean by dance? To me, everything is dance. Even on a cellular level, I see it all as dance. It seems to me that when you start tuning in to levels of experiencing with movement, it has a poetic aesthetic about it.<sup>123</sup>

The need to describe contemporary dance poetically has become a current topic in dance theory. As an example, writer and editor of *RealTime Arts Magazine*, Virginia Baxter, expresses the difficulty of finding language to describe the somatic-based work of Australian choreographer Russell Dumas:

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<sup>121</sup> Idem. Emphasis in original.

<sup>122</sup> Most notably explored by Louppe, *Poetics of Contemporary Dance*.

<sup>123</sup> Stephanie Skura, "Releasing Dance: Interview with Joan Skinner," *Contact Quarterly* 15, no. 3 (1990): 12.

writing about it induces a sort of poetic wash of words; hands splay, feet grip, hips lift, twist then soundlessly fall ... wordless weight shifting. Simple description also falls short: three young male dancers balance in unison.<sup>124</sup>

As Baxter suggests, simple description of somatic-based work feels especially reductive on the page, as it does not touch the sensation of the lived experience of either the dancer or the observer. While broader dance theory has been stimulated and supported by the advent of poetics and post-positivist theories that argue for different kinds of knowing, there remains the challenge of finding a model for the kinds of languages that could be used to articulate the practices of somatic-based, improvised dance works that are primarily occupied with the senses, interiority, and the experiential, and therefore may be relatively formless and non-representational in nature.

The attention that an improvising performer gives to the interiority of their body may allow an audience a deeper sense of their own bodily interior through the mechanism of **kinaesthetic empathy**. How dance produces kinaesthetic empathy is described by Godard when he says, “what I see produces what I feel, and reciprocally my corporeal state, without me being aware of it, (in)forms the interpretation of what I see.”<sup>125</sup> Therefore, the empathy produced in language via poetics may be a clue to unravelling what could be effective in describing somatic-based dance, as is suggested by Baxter when she writes that while watching Dumas’ work, “when I’m not absorbed in the movement, I begin to imagine my own body going through these motions.”<sup>126</sup> Describing dance poetically may provide an access point to the sensations of the interiority of one’s own body, thereby refining the subtleties of artistic sensibility whether as a viewer or performer of improvisation.<sup>127</sup> As Skinner described earlier, poetics is a key entry point for developing the capacity for sensory imagination in somatic practice. Poetics may engage the body-mind of the reader in the sensory

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<sup>124</sup> Virginia Baxter, “Words for the Time Being,” *Realtime Arts Magazine* 89 (2009), accessed October 3, 2012, <http://www.realtimearts.net/feature/search/9372>.

<sup>125</sup> Hubert Godard, “Gesture and Its Perception,” *Writings on Dance: Inheriting Ideokinesis* 22 (2004): 6. Susan Leigh Foster also extensively explores the notion of kinesthetic empathy in *Choreographing Empathy: Kinesthesia* (New York, NY and Abingdon: Routledge, 2011).

<sup>126</sup> Baxter, “Words for the Time Being.”

<sup>127</sup> Erin Brannigan, “Poetics of Contemporary Dance: Review,” *Dance Research Journal* 44, no. 1 (2012): 101–4.

embodiment of the practice for a deeper understanding of what is actually at play.<sup>128</sup>

However, while this method is lightly touched upon in the following, it is another form of practice that will take time to develop and refine.

As will be discussed in more detail in this thesis, the labour involved in making effective compositional decisions as an improviser involves collecting and utilising somatic intelligence from within the work of art as it unfolds. There are several ways to interpret the notion of somatic intelligence. Howard Gardner describes a multiple intelligence theory, of which bodily intelligence is one.<sup>129</sup> However, dance theorists Myron Howard Nadel and Marc Raymond Strauss attribute the basis of his theory to the earlier work of H'Doubler and her mentor Dewey:

They believed that movement skills were the basis for knowing, imagining, creating and executing in life as well as a stimulus to self-initiated activity and creative communication. Such cutting-edge ideas preceded by three-quarters of a century the theories of Harvard professor Howard Gardner, who today espouses a bodily/kinaesthetic intelligence as part of his theory of 'multiple intelligences.'<sup>130</sup>

More specific to improvisation is Goodall's use of the term, which counters the evolutionary logic proposed by Darwin, arguing that the **mimesis** displayed by traditional tribes is a sophisticated method of somatic intelligence gathering.<sup>131</sup> Goodall equates the process of gathering somatic intelligence to collecting information for espionage purposes. She is describing both the proprioceptive skill of collecting the information via empathetic and nuanced imitation, and the movement vocabulary itself, which is the *intelligence* information. Following Goodall, somatic intelligence is information that can be perceived through the body-mind and in this case, utilised to facilitate an improvisation. A further definition is offered by dance theorist Erin Brannigan, who posits somatic intelligence as a framework for accumulating corporeal knowledges at odds with language:

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<sup>128</sup> Conversely, the personalised nature of this process may actually distance the reader from the experience through the use of poetics. Therefore, the use of poetics must be approached carefully.

<sup>129</sup> Developmental psychologist Howard Gardner (1943–) developed a notion of multiple intelligences beyond the traditional IQ test in Howard Gardner, *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1983).

<sup>130</sup> Myron Howard Nadel and Marc Raymond Strauss, *The Dance Experience: Insights into History, Culture and Creativity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 176.

<sup>131</sup> Jane Goodall, "Knowing What You Are Doing," *The Performance Space Quarterly* 14 (1997): 20–3.



Somatic intelligence is a model of experience that places the body at the site where feelings or sensations are registered, feelings that may be untranslatable into language or any other medium, but which accumulate as corporeal knowledge.<sup>132</sup>

While Goodall's definition of somatic intelligence is information gathered through a process of mimesis, Brannigan extends this notion by including the process of registering sensations and feelings, which is central to how improvisers generate their material. The possibility of translating the danced "feelings" that Brannigan refers to into language has value in that it may draw us closer to the experience of an individual who is in a constant state of flux while in the act of dancing within a particular space and time.<sup>133</sup> Performing improvisation requires radically different techniques to performing set choreography, or learning movement material via imitation. This thesis describes these techniques, and explains how training the body-mind instrument in this way cultivates a capacity to collect and physicalise somatic intelligence.

As part of my contingent methodology, and considering the pedagogical focus in this work, I have not only interviewed my case studies but also improvised with them and report on the findings that I experience from within my own body through my own practice. This methodology tests the theory that improvisation can operate, as Goodall suggests, as a means of somatic intelligence gathering, in that text-based communication of corporeal knowledges needs to speak to specific, lived experience, while encompassing the constant state of flux inherent in those experiences.<sup>134</sup> Applying a contingent approach to somatic intelligence gathering in the collection of relevant corporeal data has allowed me a level of freedom necessary to follow the intuitions of my body-mind in the collection of corporeal knowledges. As Portuguese philosopher José Gil argues,

[t]here is no single visual or kinesthetic image of the dancing body, but a multiplicity of virtual images produced by movement that mark so many *points of contemplation* from which the body perceives itself.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Brannigan, "Moving Across Disciplines," 13–4.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Goodall, "Knowing What You Are Doing," 20–3.

<sup>135</sup> José Gil, "Paradoxical Body," *The Drama Review* 50, no. 4 (2006): 24.

Not only is contingency, as methodology, responding to movement in flux but that movement may or may not be externally observable, because the techniques are both experiential and experimental. Therefore, in addition to interviewing key artists, I have gathered information from within my own experiential body through immersion in practice and pedagogy. Primarily, it is through my direct contact with the practices of these specific case studies that I conduct an axiological (auto-)ethnography, observing while practicing with each of the interviewees in separate workshop contexts.

This practice-based method understands that contingencies have real effects on research, particularly research involving a body-mind's embodied consciousness, as this rarely achieves stasis in the way the written word does. In rejecting the notion of a body-mind as a passive receiver of stimulation, theories of embodied cognition propose that a person's way of engaging with the world constitutes the experience of their own reality. This suggests that the type of consciousness that someone experiences is influenced by that individual's actions in the world, including their physiology, behaviours, thoughts, beliefs, and even use of language.<sup>136</sup> In other words, what we do affects how we experience the world.<sup>137</sup> This is not to say that there is no place for theorists who research dance without an engagement in practice; their powers of observation and articulation are highly refined and can offer a valuable, expert, non-practitioner perspective. However, the methodology developed here is to engage with self-observation through practice, attending to how practice has impacted my ways of thinking.

An example of how, in this case, language shapes experience culturally, is the French term *expérience* (for which there is no direct English translation), representing both experience and experiment.<sup>138</sup> This term offers the subject a completely different sense

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<sup>136</sup> Alva Noë, *Out of Our Heads: Why You Are Not Your Brain, and Other Lessons from the Biology of Consciousness* (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 2009).

<sup>137</sup> For example, social psychologist and classically trained ballet dancer Amy Cuddy has conducted research into how physical expressions of power (or *power poses*) have a measurable impact on hormone levels by increasing testosterone and decreasing cortisol, effectively making the subject feel more powerful. See Dana R. Carney, Amy J. C. Cuddy, and Andy J. Yap, "Power Posing: Brief Nonverbal Displays Affect Neuroendocrine Levels and Risk Tolerance," *Psychological Science* 21 (2010): 1363–8.

<sup>138</sup> Sally Gardener explains these details of French translation in Louppe, *Poetics of Contemporary Dance*, xiv. These terms were also interchangeable in English until the sixteenth century. Williams, *Key Words* (London: Flamingo, 1984); Dewey, *Art as Experience*.

of engagement with what it is to *experience* than the English understanding of the word: for the French speaker, experience is inherently *experimental* and is to be entered into with a spirit of inquiry as an **experience-experiment**. This thesis therefore focuses not only on naming, describing, and identifying what is specific to states of consciousness in order to elucidate the process of how improvisation is composed, but also how this physical experience exposes our human condition as being one of experimentation; this moment isn't a rehearsal for something else – this is it! So, when dance is truly experiential, it is part of an ongoing improvisational experiment. In just such a way, this thesis addresses the kinds of language that could be useful for extending compositional theory and pedagogy that elucidate the experience-experiment of improvised dance.

As a scholarly approach to improvised performance, the central aim of the thesis is to deepen understanding of the conditions in which practices precipitate corporeal knowledges by translating the details of movement research experience-experiments. However, this is not to suggest that this research is in any way a definitive account of the corporeal knowledges of improvisation. It belongs within a much larger conversation. Therefore, to avoid generalisations, by design it is an investigation interrogating the depth of knowledges within a very narrow field of specific and specialised practices, for the purpose of bringing to light the level of detail and complexity of those practices. The small collection of case studies that, as noted earlier, are connected by their use of improvisation as a way of thinking-through-the-body-mind and accessing a state where the body-mind instrument has an agency in the manifestation of improvised composition. This is important because, while there has been much literature that speaks to the subjective experience of the improviser and useful explanations of embodied cognition, *there has been little analysis of the body-mind as an instrument in relation to how compositional choices are made in performed improvisation.*

This research investigates how compositional choices in dance can be interrogated using the tools developed, and engaging with the practices of Karczag, Watts, Peisl, and myself. Such a method reveals what these artists' work can offer in terms of understanding the capacities of the body-mind in improvised composition and contribute to the pedagogy of current practices. In this way, this work will join with others in valorising the role that somatic knowledges play in sophisticated solo and

group compositional processes. These case studies have been chosen as their practices support the dissolution of a binary within contemporary dance that separates somatic and imitative ways of **thinking-through-the-body**. This supports the hypothesis that embodied consciousness can be approached as a technical capacity within improvised dance that might be developed. The hypothesis is that case studies Karczag, Watts, and Peisl (via Forsythe) may represent the philosophically diverse aesthetic approaches of somatic-based (or an **ethics of being**) and deconstructed ballet (or what is described as the capacities of an **über dancer**) respectively, the diversity of their practice meets at an optimal point where the binary between them can be dissolved, producing a highly sophisticated cultivation of embodied consciousness in an improviser.

Building on existing scholarship, this research qualitatively investigates how the body-mind in these case studies operates during improvisation to consider what somatics and the notion of somatic intelligence can offer compositional theories, and what effect these refined knowledges might have on pedagogies and dance composition. This thesis thus aims to problematise aspects of somatics in an original way through an investigation of somatic intelligence and somatically informed compositional practice supporting relevant pedagogical frameworks. In addition to the primary data of contemporary case studies, the ongoing impact and resonance of lineages of pioneering improvisers will be revealed in terms of the ethical and aesthetic values of improvisation.

## Chapter Two

### *Dewey and the Pre-history of Western Improvisation*

#### 2.1 Introduction

If composition can be thought of as primarily a process of decision making, improvised composition further complicates this notion with the presupposition that decisions are made spontaneously, in response to the moment. Certainly, to an extent this is true; however, the ways in which one might respond to a moment are influenced by ideas or ideologies absorbed from one's mentors, and one's own personal history and experiences. This chapter traces the historical lineage of practitioners who pioneered Western somatic-based improvisation practice in order to highlight the key influences shaping their decision-making processes, and therefore also the decision-making processes of those who followed. In so doing, it contributes significantly to uncovering an unprecedented direct link between philosophy and contemporary dance, in the encounter between pragmatist philosopher John Dewey and dance pedagogue Margaret H'Doubler at the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>139</sup> The following original reading of this encounter emphasises the direct influence of philosophy on the development of Western improvisation practices.<sup>140</sup>

Understanding the implications of this encounter is important because although the nexus of philosophy and dance has expanded in recent times as a field of interest for both theorists and dance-makers, evidence of *direct contact* between philosophy and dance is extremely rare.<sup>141</sup> There are a few early examples of Western contemporary

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<sup>139</sup> American philosopher Dewey (1859–1952) was instrumental in education reform in North America and a key influence on many theorists and artists through his seminal book, *Art as Experience* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1934). Other notable works by Dewey are *How We Think* (Boston, New York, Chicago: D.C. Heath and Co., 1910, revised 1933), and *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1916).

<sup>140</sup> This chapter is indebted to the extensive research of H'Doubler historian Janice Ross in bringing to light the connection between Dewey and H'Doubler. Janice Ross, *Moving Lessons: Margaret H'Doubler and the Beginning of Dance in American Education* (Madison, WI and London: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000). Other key references were introduced in Chapter One.

<sup>141</sup> Dance theorist Bojana Cvejić discusses choreographers' current fascination with philosophy, and more relevant to this thesis, a lack of philosophy of improvisation, in Bojana Cvejić, *Choreographing Problems: Expressive Concepts in Contemporary Dance and Performance* (New York, NY and London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 130–7. Some examples of texts that look at the nexus of dance and philosophy are Bojana Cvejić, "From Odd Encounters to a Prospective Confluence: Dance-Philosophy," *Performance Philosophy* 1, no. 1 (2015): 7–23; Susan Leigh Foster, "Philosophy and Dance," *Topoi*, *Springer* 24, no. 2 (2005): 255–56; and Einav Katan, *Embodied Philosophy in Dance: Gaga and Ohad*

choreographers engaging with theory and philosophy, such as Isadora Duncan's reading of Friedrich Nietzsche and Martha Graham's fascination with psychoanalysis.<sup>142</sup> The dance–philosophy connection has gained traction more recently in a wider pre-occupation with the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari within dance and contemporary performance, as well as William Forsythe's early interest in post-structuralism and his later interest in embodied cognition, particularly through his connection with philosopher Alva Noë.<sup>143</sup> This chapter brings to light the impact that Dewey had on the pedagogical innovations made by his student H'Doubler, which later became central to the formation of Western improvised dance composition in the twentieth century. This rare case of a direct link between a philosopher and a dance practitioner is a significant moment in terms of writing an alternative history of Western contemporary dance from the formative stage in which central ideas that influenced improvisation practices emerged. Furthermore, Dewey was a student of Frederick Matthias Alexander's somatic method, giving credence to a notion of practice directly influencing philosophy, which in turn went on to influence practice in a two-way flow of ideas. In examining how Dewey's philosophy is manifest in H'Doubler's practice and writing, and therefore how his philosophy impacted H'Doubler's contribution to the development of practices of Western improvisation in the twentieth century, this chapter builds on the archival work of H'Doubler historian Janice Ross to further address the nexus of dance and philosophy in dance studies.

Much of the research on improvisation as a mode of performance focuses on important artists working in New York in the 1960s.<sup>144</sup> Very few dance scholars consider the

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*Naharin's Movement Research* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016). See also Frédéric Poillaude, *Unworking Choreography: The Notion of the Work in Dance*, trans. Anna Pakes (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017).

<sup>142</sup> Kimerer LaMothe, “‘A God Dancers Through Me’: Isadora Duncan on Friedrich Nietzsche’s Revaluation of Values,” *The Journal of Religion* 85, no. 2 (2005): 241–66. See also Ramsay Burt, “Dance, Gender and Psychoanalysis: Martha Graham’s ‘Night Journey’,” *Dance Research Journal* 30, no. 1 (1998): 34–53.

<sup>143</sup> Forsythe has a dialogue with philosopher Alva Noë who collaborated with him on *Motion Bank* and is a member of *Dance Engaging Science Project*, [www.motionbank.org/en/content/dance-engaging-science](http://www.motionbank.org/en/content/dance-engaging-science). See also Forsythe and Noë discussing *Consciousness Is a Kind of Dance* at the New York Public Library, October 9, 2009, accessed October 6, 2019, [www.nypl.org/audiovideo/william-forsythe-alva-noe](http://www.nypl.org/audiovideo/william-forsythe-alva-noe). Noë is the author of *Out of Our Heads: Why You Are Not Your Brain, and Other Lessons from the Biology of Consciousness* (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 2009). Phenomenology is another very popular field of interest among dance theorists, notably Sondra Horton Fraleigh’s work, which includes *Dance and the Lived Body: A Descriptive Aesthetics* (Pittsburgh, PA and London: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1987).

<sup>144</sup> The innovations of artists brought together by Robert Dunn at Merce Cunningham’s studios and in performances at the Judson Memorial Church in the 1960s is well researched by theorists such as Sally Banes, *Democracy’s Body: Judson Dance Theater, 1962–1964* (Michigan, MI: UMI Research Press,

aesthetics of improvised composition in relation to the innovative ideological shifts in dance pedagogy at the beginning of the twentieth century, in particular the nexus of the pioneering dance pedagogy of H'Doubler and the philosophy of Dewey.<sup>145</sup> The fundamental ideas and methodologies of key practitioners are historicised in what follows in order to map the nexus between pioneering Western somatics and an experimental approach to dance pedagogy. In this way, we can identify how their methods have qualitatively impacted upon the aesthetics of improvised composition. It is only by tracing this alternative history of North American contemporary dance, one that existed in parallel with the professional stages of the mainstream, that it becomes clear how improvisation has been fundamentally shaped by the countercultural practices of somatic practitioners and dance pedagogues such as H'Doubler, whose approach to dance treats it as an *alternative science*.

The lineage that H'Doubler belongs to is described here as an alternative science of dance because, rather than privileging movement on an aesthetic basis as per the mainstream, the practitioners are concerned with methods of anatomical observation, investigation, and experimentation with the experience of movement.<sup>146</sup> This lineage is described as an *alternative science* because the research methods employed do not aim to be objective as they are in traditional science. As dance theorist Isabelle Ginot explains, “somatics does not depend on traditional scientific procedure that would require the description of experiments, the determination of the limits of validity of an argument, or the possible presentation of a contradictory hypothesis.”<sup>147</sup> In other words, the results of these methods are not measured using objectively verifiable data but are achieved through observation and experimentation supported by a study of subjective

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1980) and *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post-modern Dance* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1987). In the context of broader Western dance history, see Nancy Reynolds and Malcom McCormick, *No Fixed Points: Dance in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 2003), 393–7.

<sup>145</sup> As mentioned in Chapter One, dance theorists who address the impact of H'Doubler on subsequent postmodern dance artists include: Meredith Morse, *Soft Is Fast: Simone Forti in the 1960s and After* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2016); Sabine Breitwieser, ed., *Simone Forti: Thinking with the Body* (Salzburg: Hirmer and Museum der Moderne, 2014); and Anna Halprin and Rachel Kaplan, eds., *Moving Towards Life: Five Decades of Transformational Dance* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1995).

<sup>146</sup> The Oxford Dictionary's definition of *science* is “an intellectual and practical activity encompassing the systematic study of the structure and behaviours of the physical and natural world through observation and experiment.” John Simpson and Edmund Weiner, eds., *Oxford English Dictionary*, second edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

<sup>147</sup> Isabelle Ginot, “From Shusterman's Somaesthetics to a Radical Epistemology of Somatics,” *Dance Research Journal* 42, no. 1 (2010): 15.

experience.<sup>148</sup>

This research is critical because, since the 1990s in particular, somatic ideologies have become an essential feature of tertiary dance institution training and therefore are highly influential to Western contemporary dance.<sup>149</sup> This research follows dance theorists Elizabeth Dempster and Laurence Louppe, among others, in advocating for the ways in which somatic practitioners have innovated dance practice through their undisciplined corporeal knowledges.<sup>150</sup> As will be outlined in this chapter, alongside the pioneering work of H'Doubler, somatic pioneers (of ideokinesis) Mabel Elsworth Todd, Barbara Clarke, Lulu Sweigard, and Alexander (creator of the Alexander Technique®) have had considerable influence on the development of dance education in the twentieth century in North America, the United Kingdom, and Australia. Of these pioneers, who I describe collectively as alternative scientists of dance, several developed syllabi for academic institutions and were therefore directly involved in shaping dance pedagogy as a field of tertiary study.<sup>151</sup> However, as pointed out by Ginot, these predominantly female Western somatic practitioners suffered from meagre institutional recognition disproportionate to the importance or influence of their work, particularly when compared with the prominence of their male counterparts such as Alexander and later Moshé Feldenkrais, creator of the Feldenkrais Method®.<sup>152</sup> A lack of recognition is, in part, due to the “unassertive” and subjective nature of the work and the resistance of

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<sup>148</sup> Furthermore, these experiments do not often include those aspects of science concerned with predicting the outcome of testable hypotheses. A notable exception is Lulu Sweigard's PhD research on the improved posture of 500 students, which couldn't be published due to the lack of a control group. See Lulu Sweigard, “Bilateral Asymmetry in the Alignment of the Human Body.” Unpublished PhD thesis, New York University, 1939, accessed March 31, 2016, <http://www.ideokinesis.com/pioneers/sweigard/sweigard.htm>.

<sup>149</sup> There is considerable research on the influence of somatics on dance pedagogy, some of which is mentioned in the previous chapter, most notably Martha Eddy's historical outline, “A Brief History of Somatic Practices and Dance: Historical Development of the Field of Somatic Education and Its Relationship to Dance,” *Journal of Dance and Somatic Practices* 1 no. 1 (2009): 5–27. See also Jill Green, “Somatics: A Growing and Changing Field,” *Journal of Dance Education* 2, no. 4 (2002): 113.

<sup>150</sup> While Mabel Todd is mentioned in this chapter because she developed the highly influential somatic practice of ideokinesis, which has provided dancers (and particularly improvisers) with a rigorous method of working with imagery and movement, her approach to practice will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Seven *Prohibitive and Emancipative Self-Surveillance*. See also Elizabeth Dempster, “Undisciplined Subjects, Unregulated Practices: Dancing in the Academy,” in *Conference Proceedings: Dance Rebooted: Initializing the Grid* (Melbourne: Ausdance National, 2004) and “An Embodied Politics: Radical Pedagogies of Contemporary Dance.” Unpublished PhD thesis, Centre for Drama and Theatre Studies, Monash University, 2002; and Laurence Louppe, *Poetics of Contemporary Dance*, trans. Sally Gardener (Southwold: Dance Books, 2010), 117.

<sup>151</sup> Todd taught at the Colombia University Teachers College where H'Doubler studied at the same time as Dewey. While H'Doubler was teaching at the University of Wisconsin, Sweigard taught at Juilliard.

<sup>152</sup> Ginot, “From Shusterman's Somaesthetics,” 12–29.



ideokinesis practitioners to codify their processes, unlike the Alexander Technique®, the Feldenkrais Method®, and later, Body Mind Centering® and the Skinner Releasing Technique™.<sup>153</sup> Towards the end, this chapter will show that the lack of recognition for these predominantly female ideokinesis pioneers by the scientific establishment was also due to the conservatism of the time.

This chapter maps the key lineage in the formation of improvisation as a performance practice in the West, beginning with Dewey's non-dualist methods of pedagogy that were so vital to the philosophical underpinnings of H'Doubler's academic and experimental approach to dance. This thesis argues that the philosophy influencing this lineage informed the subsequent practitioners of new dance, via artists associated with Judson Dance Theater and the formation of improvisation as a performance practice. By tracing H'Doubler's student Anna Halprin's influence on the development of improvised performance, this chapter builds on the important work that dance scholars have done in mapping the impact that H'Doubler's approach had on the New York dance scene via Halprin's mentee Simone Forti, as well as her students Trisha Brown and Yvonne Rainer.<sup>154</sup> As is well documented, these lineages were at the nexus of the anti-establishment zeitgeist in North American dance during the mid-twentieth century.<sup>155</sup> The account of this lineage here focuses on the practices that precede Halprin and also straddles the well-known work of one of Halprin's mentees, Brown, in order to show how these early philosophies have informed a leading dancer in Brown's early works and contemporary improvising performer, Eva Karczag, whose practice is discussed as a case study in Chapter Five *The Aesthetics of an Ethics of Being*.<sup>156</sup> This

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<sup>153</sup> However, the gender bias here also seems clear and historically consistent with fields beyond dance. Brannigan describes the ways in which dance is "unassertive" in Erin Brannigan, "Positively Unassertive: Dancing in the Art Gallery of NSW," *Broadsheet* 45, no. 2 (2016): 26–9.

<sup>154</sup> After participating in Halprin's workshop in 1960, Brown and Rainer went on to become founding members of the Judson Dance Theater. Several scholars have identified the importance of Halprin and Forti in connecting the East- and West-Coast dancing hubs in 1960s North America, including: Morse, *Soft Is Fast*; Breitwieser, *Simone Forti*; and Ramsay Burt, *Judson Dance Theater: Performative Traces* (New York, NY and Oxford: Routledge, 2006). Brown was also introduced to somatics through Elaine Summers' work in kinetic awareness, and Karczag's work with the Alexander Technique, according to Eva Karczag, interview by the author, Arnhem, Netherlands, 2014.

<sup>155</sup> For more on these experiments, which crossed disciplinary boundaries via collaborations between dance artists and musicians such as John Cage and visual artist Robert Rauschenberg, see Kay Larson, *Where the Heart Beats: John Cage, Zen Buddhism, and the Inner Life of Artists* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2012); Banes, *Democracy's Body, Terpsichore in Sneakers*; and Susan Rosenberg, *Trisha Brown: Choreography as Visual Art* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2017).

<sup>156</sup> The direct lineage of Halprin to Karczag is via Brown (1936–2017). Brown studied at Mills College in Oakland, California and went to summer school classes with Louis Horst, José Limón, and Cunningham. Upon graduating, she was invited to set up a dance department at Reed College in 1958 where she taught

summary is admittedly an oversimplification of the idea of *lineage* as it doesn't include the multitude of practitioners who have informed each of these individuals' practices.<sup>157</sup> The few key practitioners mentioned in this chapter are chosen primarily for their importance in pioneering the alternative scientific practices central to improvisation, highlighting how the important themes in their methods impacted the aesthetic of improvised composition.

Chapter Seven *Prohibitive and Emancipative Self-Surveillance* focuses more specifically on an important genealogy of Western contemporary dance's alternative sciences: the work of ideokinesis pioneers Todd, Sweigard, and Clarke.<sup>158</sup> In addition to the work of the women mentioned above, the Australian somatic practitioner Alexander's methods are also important through his association with Dewey. Furthermore, Karczag is a certified Alexander teacher and the case studies for Chapter Five – Riley Watts and Nicole Peisl – also studied the Alexander Technique.<sup>159</sup> Dewey developed his philosophy while maintaining a close and productive relationship with Alexander, with whom he continued to take lessons for thirty-five years.<sup>160</sup> Dewey invited Alexander to teach on the faculty at Colombia University after they met in 1915,

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for two years before leaving to pursue compositional rather than pedagogical interests, including improvisation. She participated in a workshop with Halprin in 1960, and as Banes describes, attended regular workshops with Dunn in New York. Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers*, 77. Brown will not be addressed in detail in this chapter as there is considerable scholarship on her work, for example, Hendl Teicher, ed., *Trisha Brown: Dance and Art in Dialogue 1961–2001* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003); Philip Bither, Trisha Brown, and Peter Eleey, eds., *Trisha Brown: So That the Audience Does Not Know Whether I Have Stopped Dancing* (Minneapolis, MN: Walker Art Centre, 2008); and Rosenberg, *Trisha Brown*.

<sup>157</sup> While a temporal map of intersecting practitioners would be a fascinating project, it is beyond the scope of this research.

<sup>158</sup> Todd's student, Barbara Clark (1889–1982) was a founding ideokinesis practitioner, and a very important figure in facilitating the uptake of ideokinesis in dance training in the 1960s via her connections with Joan Skinner and Marsha Paludan at the University of Illinois dance faculty. Her influence on Joan Skinner's Skinner Releasing Technique™ is highly relevant to this lineage and is discussed in Chapter Seven. However, in this chapter, her work is not discussed as much as her colleagues' because she did not seek institutional recognition to the same extent. For more on Clark, see Pamela Matt, *A Kinesthetic Legacy: The Life and Works of Barbara Clark* (Lewiston, NY: Clark Manuals Trust, 1993).

<sup>159</sup> Watts studied Alexander while at the Juilliard School and both he and Peisl were exposed to Alexander as part of The Forysthe Company's training schedule. Watts is also featured on Jane Kosminsky's DVD *For Dancers: The Alexander Technique* (New York, NY: Victory Multimedia, 2007).

<sup>160</sup> Dance researcher Michael Huxley examines the proximity of Alexander and Todd during the period between 1914–1937, and in relation to Dewey and H'Doubler, in "F. Matthias Alexander and Mabel Elsworth Todd: Proximities, Practices and the Psycho-physical," *Journal of Dance & Somatic Practice* 3, nos. 1/2 (2011): 25–42. Dewey also introduced three of Alexander's books: *Man's Supreme Inheritance: Conscious Guidance and Control in Relation to Human Evolution in Civilization* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1918), *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Wisconsin Press and E. P. Dutton, 1923), and *The Use of the Self* (London: Orion Books, 1932).

and wrote glowingly of Alexander's application of the scientific method to the physical sciences, affirming that an education that does not include knowledge of the "psycho-physical life" was a "mis-education."<sup>161</sup> However, as it has been the subject of much literature, Alexander's work is only touched on briefly in this chapter, which seeks to address the gender disparity in levels of recognition. The lineage of dance described here as an *alternative science* begins with H'Doubler's academic approach to dance pedagogy that stemmed from her undergraduate studies in biology and philosophy, and postgraduate study of aesthetics with Dewey during his tenure as professor of Philosophy at Colombia. While H'Doubler's observation of Alys Bentley's classes stimulated key ideas in the practical development of her pedagogy, it will be shown that exposure to Dewey's philosophies informed H'Doubler's preferences, aesthetics, and sensibilities.<sup>162</sup>

## 2.2 H'Doubler, Dewey, and alternative science at Colombia

In a well-documented narrative of the first decades of the twentieth century, the absence of able-bodied men following the First World War meant that women were required to take up physical roles from which they had previously been excluded. As a result of this, together with the momentum gained by the suffragette movement, there was a shift in societal attitudes towards women's physical exertion and an abandonment of strict and immobilising Victorian corsets. Within the context of these massive changes for women in society, the director of physical education at the University of Wisconsin, Blanche Trilling, asked H'Doubler to develop a syllabus of dance that was "worth a college woman's time."<sup>163</sup> H'Doubler was ideally positioned to take up this challenge as a well-educated sportswoman who held an undergraduate degree from Wisconsin in both biology and philosophy, in addition to her postgraduate study of aesthetics under Dewey at Colombia in 1916–1917.<sup>164</sup>

Dewey was also a fiercely democratic thinker and advocate for women's rights who invited H'Doubler to join the Educational Philosophical Club at Colombia Teachers

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<sup>161</sup> John Dewey, "Preface," in Alexander, *The Use of the Self*, 12.

<sup>162</sup> Ross describes Dewey as the "father of dance in American Higher education" and H'Doubler as "the catalyst between Dewey's ideas and the dance." Ross, *Moving Lessons*, 123, 124. See also Ross, *Moving Lessons*, 123–144 for more on Dewey.

<sup>163</sup> Mary Alice Brennan, "Foreword," in Margaret H'Doubler, *Dance: A Creative Art Experience*, (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), x.

<sup>164</sup> Ross, *Moving Lessons*, 123.

College where he and his colleague William Heard Kirkpatrick held regular discussions on education theory.<sup>165</sup> Dewey's efforts to erase the duality of science and aesthetics, and his promotion of the educative value of process over product left a strong impression on H'Doubler when she returned to her job at Wisconsin where she later developed the first dance major in 1926.<sup>166</sup> Dewey's influence on H'Doubler is evident in her writing and therefore also on the foundational practices and aesthetics of dance pedagogy in North America, as I will show in this chapter. Dance historian Mary Brennan concurs, explaining how H'Doubler's approach treated dance "as an art and a science ... Her classes were not dependent on a dance 'style' but rather 'natural' movement with no requirement of formal training. Students were asked to describe movements in scientific terms."<sup>167</sup> Therefore, coinciding with the early twentieth-century's corporeal turn, Colombia became a cradle for the pre-formation of somatic philosophy and practice during Dewey's tenure as professor of Philosophy.

In her erudite research on H'Doubler, Ross describes how Dewey's progressive educational ideas shaped H'Doubler's teaching, explaining that her innovative pedagogical methods were heavily informed by Dewey's philosophy. Ross states that "H'Doubler shaped her method of dance education into a Deweyan process of experience."<sup>168</sup> Dewey and Kirkpatrick also presented symposiums at Colombia University Teachers College, which also produced key ideokinesis pioneers.<sup>169</sup> Todd studied at the College and later devised and taught a syllabus there in which mental imagery was used to improve posture and body mechanics.<sup>170</sup> Sweigard studied this syllabus under Todd while on a leave of absence from Columbia in 1926.<sup>171</sup> Therefore, in addition to influencing the beginning of academic dance, Dewey's philosophy also influenced the foundations of ideokinesis and Western somatics. This is illuminating

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>166</sup> Also, note that Alexander's second book was first written for the University of Wisconsin in 1923.

<sup>167</sup> Mary Brennan, Thomas Hagood, and John Wilson, *Margaret H'Doubler: The Legacy of America's Dance Education Pioneer* (Youngstown, NY: Cambria Press, 2006), 22. H'Doubler is very specific about her definition of "natural" movement, which is discussed later in this chapter. See also Margaret H'Doubler, *A Manual of Dancing: Suggestions and Bibliography for the Teacher of Dancing*, (Madison, WI: Tracy and Kilgore/Printemps, 1921).

<sup>168</sup> Ross, *Moving Lessons*, 127.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>170</sup> Accessed September 10, 2019,

<https://web.archive.org/web/20170622045129/http://www.ideokinesis.com/pioneers/todd/todd.htm>.

<sup>171</sup> Accessed September 10, 2019,

<https://web.archive.org/web/20170530185019/http://www.ideokinesis.com/pioneers/sweigard/sweigard.htm>.

because it places Dewey right at the centre of key innovations in the study of psycho-physical movement at the core of improvisation practices. This chapter will return to Todd and Sweigard after first identifying the links between Dewey's philosophy and H'Doubler's approach to dance pedagogy.

### **2.3 H'Doubler's Deweyan approach to dance pedagogy**

With a considerable interest in anatomy and Dewey's pragmatist aesthetics, an egalitarian ideology, and no formal training as a dancer, H'Doubler's interests diverged markedly from traditional pedagogical concerns focused on the mastery of professional skills. Instead, she created an academic rather than a vocational model for dance, expanding the notion of dance as a form of knowledge that could, and should, be explored by everyone. According to H'Doubler, dance should be the "providence of every human being" and therefore be antithetical to the elitist pressures of professionalism.<sup>172</sup> Her work reversed the traditional hierarchy of dance pedagogy that sought to mould one's corporeality into a codified form through processes of imitation, by focusing on the facilitation of the functional anatomy of the individual. She firmly believed that through a process of self-reflexive movement investigation, a practitioner could access the psycho-physical potential of the body-mind that would not only affect their way of moving, but also thinking.

Dewey's "problem-based approach" and interest in treating the arts as a scientific process of discovery appealed to H'Doubler as a sportswoman and biology major, and became vital to her teaching methods.<sup>173</sup> As Ross explains, student-led, experimental approaches to pedagogical methods were considered radical at the time:

At about this same time Dewey was also clarifying and defending his theory of knowledge and his position that thinking, or reflection, is inquiry and that factors involved in thinking or knowing must be viewed within the context of inquiry.... This was in sharp contrast to the prevailing view of reality as a ready-made, fixed world waiting to be known.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Margaret H'Doubler, *Dance: A Creative Art Experience* (Madison, WI and London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1940), 48.

<sup>173</sup> Ross, *Moving Lessons*, 124.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

The idea that learning is tied to exploration, and that interaction is a process that both changes the student and the world with which they are engaged, is central to the practice of improvisation.

In preparation for the creation of the dance major, Trilling sent H'Doubler to New York to research current dance pedagogies. Having never studied dance herself, H'Doubler was passionate about the potential for an education in dance that had nothing to do with stage performance, and was far less enthusiastic about the way that dance as an art form was presented at the time, even once describing a performance of Graham's in Chicago as "a little too professional."<sup>175</sup> H'Doubler rejected the codified forms and imitative methods of Graham and Hanya Holm that she experienced at private dance studios. However, when she encountered New York music teacher Bentley, she recognised the potential for applying Bentley's unorthodox approach to dance. Bentley taught children via a method whereby students lay on the floor as she directed them through exploratory tasks.<sup>176</sup> Lying on the floor was important to Bentley's work, and later to H'Doubler's, because the use of the floor "removed the pull of gravity and allowed a student to explore their natural, structural movements."<sup>177</sup> Following Dewey, H'Doubler combined her scientific, physical, philosophical, and aesthetic research in the design of a holistic dance syllabus that was not based on techniques of dance but rather **natural movement**, and thus did not require previous formal training.<sup>178</sup>

### 2.3.1 *Natural movement*

H'Doubler's concept of natural movement did not come from a universalising notion of the ultimate natural body, but through the self-reflexive study of one's own functional anatomy in relation to personal and socially constructed histories and experiences of an individual body-mind.<sup>179</sup> Her understanding of *natural* is not of an uneducated or

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<sup>175</sup> From an interview with H'Doubler's student Mary Hinkson in Ross, *Moving Lessons*, 8.

<sup>176</sup> Brennan, Hagood, and Wilson, *Margaret H'Doubler*, 331.

<sup>177</sup> Brennan, "Foreword," x.

<sup>178</sup> A contemporary of H'Doubler's, Gertrude Colby, also taught *natural dancing* at Speyer College (1913–1916) and at Columbia University Teachers College (1916–1930s) where she influenced Jesse Feiring Williams. Williams taught Todd while she was a mature student at Columbia Teachers College and wrote *The Principles of Physical Education* (Oakland, CA: W. B. Saunders, 1942). See Huxley, "F. Matthias Alexander," 31. See also Alexandra Carter and Rachel Fensham, eds., *Dancing Naturally: Nature, Neo-classicism and Modernity in Early Twentieth-Century Dance* (New York, NY and London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

<sup>179</sup> As is discussed in Chapter Seven *Prohibitive and Emancipative Self-Surveillance*, somatics aims to dissolve the socially constructed psychophysical body in favour of facilitating the efficiently natural

untrained physicality but highly refined in terms of awareness and efficiency through a self-guided process, which she describes as developing a “consciousness of art movement.”<sup>180</sup> To further clarify her use of the term *natural* H'Doubler explains:

The word *natural* ... is an unfortunate one to have crept into dance parlance. It has come to be synonymous with that which is formless and without discipline. The natural should mean the perfect state. In this light, *correct* might be substituted for *natural*. So few people have developed, without training, the control necessary for good body motion; consequently the first step is to train back to the natural or correct way of moving. This is the only basis upon which consciousness of art movement can be established.<sup>181</sup>

While identifying the importance of a “consciousness of art movement,” H'Doubler indicates a preference for self-guided activity that is central to the development of natural or correct movement.<sup>182</sup> Therefore, H'Doubler believed that following Bentley's semi-structured approach to anatomical experiential exploration would facilitate the cultivation of natural movement far more effectively than the imitation of codified dance forms, such as Graham's technique.

An interest in a natural development of knowledge is also expressed in Dewey's instrumentalist pragmatism, put forth in his most significant work *Experience and Nature* (1925). In this book he refutes modern philosophy's dualist epistemology in favour of a “naturalistic empiricism” in which knowledge is understood to arise from an active adaptation of the human organism (via the nervous system) to its environment by explaining, “anything changes according to the interacting field it enters.”<sup>183</sup> He likens the acquisition of knowledge to the process of evolution, in that changes occur in response to ideas emerging from the social milieu that in turn restructures the conditions of that milieu.<sup>184</sup> Dewey outlines these ideas in an earlier article in which he posits:

The organism interacts with the world through a self-guided activity that

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movement of an individual by increasing their conscious awareness of their functional anatomy and integration of the body-mind.

<sup>180</sup> H'Doubler, *Dance*, 93.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> John Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, second edition (Chicago, IL: Open Court, 1929), 1, 233.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

coordinates and integrates sensory and motor responses – active manipulation of the environment is involved integrally in the process of learning from the start.<sup>185</sup>

Ideas such as the importance of the coordination and integration of “sensory and motor responses” through “self-guided activity” to acquire knowledge is common to both Dewey and H’Doubler.<sup>186</sup> Dewey’s notions concerning the self-guided nature of knowledge acquisition are also expanded in his work, *Democracy and Education* (1916), in which he explains that experience is not primarily cognitive but that there are two types of experiences, *active* and *passive*.<sup>187</sup> Dewey explains that learning from experience requires making a “backward and forward connection between what we do to things and what we enjoy or suffer from things in consequence.”<sup>188</sup> H’Doubler follows Dewey’s precedent of devising student experiences that facilitate learning through stimulating the student to be an *active* participant in their own education via methods of personal discovery. This is a key feature of Dewey’s advocacy for whole body-mind involvement in learning experiences.

Dewey underlines the importance of a holistic approach to learning by explaining that any meaning that is formed from an experience is information that has been collected by the senses.<sup>189</sup> He says that the

senses are avenues of knowledge not because external facts are somehow ‘conveyed’ to the brain, but because they are *used* in doing something with purpose. The qualities of seen and touched things have a bearing on what is done, and alertly perceived: they have meaning.<sup>190</sup>

A core principle of his philosophy is the lamentation of the pervasiveness of dualism in education, whereby “bodily activity becomes an intruder,” emphasising that it would be “impossible to state adequately the evil results which have flowed from this dualism of

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<sup>185</sup> John Dewey, “The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology,” *Psychological Review* 3 (1896): 356–70.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> This book was published at the time H’Doubler was studying with Dewey at Colombia. Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 134.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> There is a connection here to Jane Goodall’s notion of *somatic intelligence* gathering that was explained Chapters One and Two. See also Jane Goodall, “Knowing What You Are Doing,” *The Performance Space Quarterly* 14 (1997): 20–3.

<sup>190</sup> Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 135.



mind and body.”<sup>191</sup> Therefore, not only is physical engagement of the student paramount in Dewey’s philosophy of education, but students must also be actively mentally engaged in the experience of learning via problem-solving methods. This approach allows students to negotiate their experiences within their own parameters of active engagement that, as Dewey said, means they are also in a two-way interaction with their surrounding milieu.

Consistent with this pedagogical model, H’Doubler’s methods must be categorised as a form of somatic practice due to the way in which she approached the study of movement via the integration of body-mind. This thesis thus proposes that H’Doubler’s pedagogical methods be added to the eight pioneers of somatics identified by Martha Eddy.<sup>192</sup> H’Doubler’s method of movement inquiry consists of three phases that, like Alexander’s method and ideokinesis, emphasise the individual student body as the site of authority by instructing students to lie on the floor and feel the sensations of their body.<sup>193</sup> Firstly, the *feedback* phase brings information from the muscles, joints, and tendons. The second, or *associative*, phase occurs in the brain, and finally, the *feed forward* phase, is the process of sending messages back to the muscles.<sup>194</sup> She imparted this cycle as an integration of “moving, thinking and feeling,” and facilitated this approach of *kinaesthetic thinking* by leading her students through a movement inquiry into space, time, force, and variations in quality.<sup>195</sup> This somatic, investigative, and self-reflexive process was the foundational method for her students’ dance education, and while it has been refined in various ways by individual artists, self-reflexive movement inquiry continues to be the cornerstone of Western improvisational dance practices.

### 2.3.2 *Feeling tones of physical origin*

The necessity of active experience is the key feature that distinguishes the aesthetic nature of somatic-based improvised composition because, while self-reflexive engagement is important to most types of performance, it is crucial to somatic-based improvisation practice. In terms of a compositional approach, this may seem a tenuous

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>192</sup> The eight pioneers are: Alexander (1869–1955), Todd (1874–1956), Ida Rolf (1896–1978), Irmgard Bartenieff (1900–1981), Charlotte Selver (1901–2003), Moshé Feldenkrais (1904–1984), Gerda Alexander (1908–1994), and Milton Trager (1908–1997). Eddy, “Brief History of Somatic Practices,” 5–27.

<sup>193</sup> Brennan, Hagood, and Wilson, *Margaret H’Doubler*, 234.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 217.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

basis on which to produce the aesthetics of an artwork. However, it requires re-framing the position of observation from one based on the creation of a product, towards an investment in processes that may be complex or hard to perceive from the outside, but which are nonetheless rigorous and systematic. H'Doubler emphasises that “it is entirely erroneous to think that this type of dancing is a combination of erratic movements and gestures distributed at random.”<sup>196</sup> She insists that a proper study of movement, by the dancer as they are dancing, is not an arbitrary physical expression without thought. Rather, it is a kind of corporeal thinking that originates in a different place to cognitive thought. H'Doubler explains:

In dance the body is employed as the instrument, and movement as the medium. Consequently, a dancer has two goals to keep in view. First, he must train the mind to use the body and to reflect its conditions, for the primary concern of the dance is the feeling tones of physical origin. Second, he must train the body to be responsive to the expressive mind. Whatever thought and feeling tones are to be expressed must be felt through the body. Therefore, the importance of feelings and emotions, and their power to motivate muscle activity, cannot be overlooked. Muscles contract in proportion to the intensity of the emotional drive of the experience to be expressed. The inner force, or motive power that drives us on in the life of our choosing, resides in that complex centre which perceives, thinks, reasons, comprehends, remembers, imagines, and creates – the centre we call mind.<sup>197</sup>

H'Doubler's description maintains a dualist dominance of mind over body by emphasising the mind as the “inner force, or motive power” which must be “trained to use the body,” revealing the legacy of her scientific training.<sup>198</sup> However, she emphasises the importance of body-mind integration in that she seeks to reorient her scientific perspective towards the “primary concern” of dance, which she believes is the “feeling tones” of a physical origin.<sup>199</sup> This aspect of H'Doubler's methods where she describes the “intensity of the emotional drive” which causes muscles to contract “in proportion to the intensity of the emotional drive,” speaks to the perception of the

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<sup>196</sup> H'Doubler, *A Manual of Dancing*, 9.

<sup>197</sup> H'Doubler, *Dance*, 70.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

**resonance of affect**, which will be discussed further in Chapter Four *Resonance of Affects and Immanent Evaluation*.<sup>200</sup>

In emphasising an inquiry-based or scientific, rather than performative, purpose for dance, H'Doubler investigated the potential for body-mind expression without prescriptive aesthetic limitations. Ross explains that H'Doubler

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<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

was leading students into discovering how they could use their own bodies as stimuli and modulate their physical responses to the essential limitations nature exercises on bodies in motion. This heightened attention to the effect of internal mental stimulation on the external movement of the body also prompted an awareness of the fundamental integration between the dancer's intellect and her responding body. To make the body more expressive, one first had to re-establish these forgotten paths of communication.<sup>201</sup>

In her efforts to re-establish these “forgotten paths of communication” H'Doubler was bridging the gap between somatics and dance as a fundamental tenet of Western dance pedagogy, thereby facilitating the practice of a union of somatics and dance.

### 2.3.3 *Affective phase of movement*

In her writing, H'Doubler highlights the importance of the “affective phase” of movement in dance as an artform by explaining that it can be the “source of meaning as well as the medium for expressing and communicating its own meaning.”<sup>202</sup> Her use of *affective* is linked to the act of listening to or perceiving the “feeling tones of physical origin” as integral to the performance of dance.<sup>203</sup> H'Doubler says,

when he is dancing, the dancer's movements communicate back to him, and he must be constantly aware of them and their effect on him. If the dancer is not stimulated by the truth and beauty of his movements, there will be no communication either to the dancer or to the audience. This kind of concentration is the secret of projection. Both the dancer and the audience must be aroused to an aesthetic reaction. The ‘feed-back’ into consciousness completes the creative integrating act.<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> Ross, *Moving Lessons*, 127–28.

<sup>202</sup> H'Doubler, *Dance*, xxxiii, xxx.

<sup>203</sup> It is unclear how H'Doubler is using the term *affective* here, that is, as a signifier of emotion, as is common in psychology, or following a philosophical interpretation introduced to her when studying under Dewey, which might potentially align in some ways to the Spinozan interpretation used in this thesis. H'Doubler, *Dance*, 70.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, xxxiii.

For H'Doubler, the dancer's/audience's experience of the "feeling tones" that arise in movement are simultaneously the content of the work, the meaning of the work, and the means of transmitting this meaning.

It is clear that H'Doubler's primary interest is to place the student's own physical exploration and somatic forms of intelligence-gathering at the core of the syllabus, effectively utilising the observational methods used by somatic practitioners in dance practice.<sup>205</sup> To do this, H'Doubler prioritised the physical manifestation of the resonance of affect through movement, by aiming to avoid any hesitation in body-mind communication that might occur through the process of imitation:

The physical being must of necessity be perfected but primarily to serve as a well-ordered instrument correctly tuned, and sensitive to the impressions of the mind. It must, to repeat, be able to respond instantaneously without hindrance. When thought, feeling and action are coordinated, free and spontaneous movements result.<sup>206</sup>

This statement describes the capacity of the somatically trained dancer to realise the human creative potential via an emphasis on psycho-physical integration.<sup>207</sup> To achieve this refined capacity, H'Doubler steadfastly refused to demonstrate her methods. Even when composing works for her performance group *Orchesis* she is described as a "coach of dance" rather than the choreographer, as she encouraged students to focus on developing their own movement.<sup>208</sup> For her, the effort of imitation takes the focus of the dancer's conscious awareness away from the immediacy (or what she might describe as the *truth*) of the affective phase within a dancer's own body-mind, and instead be subservient to a hierarchical power relationship with another body as the source of the movement. According to Brennan, "not only was dance to be approached by exploring the natural structural possibilities and limitations of each body, but it was to emerge

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<sup>205</sup> The gathering of *somatic intelligence* is discussed in Goodall, "Knowing What You Are Doing," 20–3.

<sup>206</sup> H'Doubler, *A Manual of Dancing*, 9.

<sup>207</sup> Michael Huxley discusses the origins of the term *psycho-physical* in Huxley, "F. Matthias Alexander." This sentiment of H'Doubler's echoes Dempster's emphasis on the necessity for a "sufficiently articulate physical medium" to reveal the affective charge of movement, which is discussed later in relation to improviser Eva Karczag in Chapter Five *The Aesthetics of an Ethics of Being*. Elizabeth Dempster, "Imagery, Ideokinesis and Choreography," *Writings on Dance: Ideokinesis and Dance Making* 1 (1985): 21.

<sup>208</sup> Ross, *Moving Lessons*, 214.

from each individual's own experience and direction."<sup>209</sup> Similarly, a somatic method enables a dancer to *listen* to what H'Doubler would describe as the "feed-back" processes of kinesthetic thinking, which is re-articulated here as the process of becoming aware of how the affective phase motivates movement. H'Doubler further emphasises that "the affective phase of movement (its power to evoke thought and feeling) is the important issue in studying movement preparatory for dance as an art form."<sup>210</sup>

H'Doubler's lessons involved inspecting cadavers to gain a deeper insight into the functional capacities of the body through the tangible study of its form, offering a holistic and scientific approach to working with human movement. While conducting a dissection in H'Doubler's class, Halprin was

astonished by what muscles look like! They look like fish; they're covered with this luminous sheath. Inside are millions of tiny silver fibers. Seeing that, you understand how you can use degrees of force, how you can contract or release a little bit.<sup>211</sup>

In addition to working deeply with anatomy, H'Doubler explored principles of composition: climax, transition, balance, sequence, repetition, harmony, variety, and contrast.<sup>212</sup> H'Doubler broadened the field of dance theory by attending to the important scientific and anatomical aspects of dancing through practice and research situated at the juncture of science and art.

The historical backstory outlined in this chapter therefore informs the description of improvisation in this thesis, because H'Doubler's methods provide a framework for the *physiophilosophical* position of improvised performance practice that was to follow. Subsequent Western improvisation practice clearly follows an H'Doubler approach to dancing as it privileges what she emphasised as valuable: "the importance of feelings and emotions, and their power to motivate muscle activity."<sup>213</sup> Therefore, a description of the methods an improviser uses to compose from a somatic base, in subsequent

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<sup>209</sup> Brennan, "Forward," xi.

<sup>210</sup> H'Doubler, *Dance*, xxx.

<sup>211</sup> Wendy Perron, "Anna Halprin," *Dance Magazine* 84, no. 9 (2010): 56.

<sup>212</sup> H'Doubler, *Dance*, 144.

<sup>213</sup> Ross, *Moving Lessons*, 127–8.

chapters, is connected to an H'Doublan approach. An H'Doublan, or somatic, approach to practice effects the aesthetic **style** of composition at the level of the gesture, resulting in movements that are often imbued with a particular sensitivity to micro-qualitative shifts in effort, weight, and by the breath, as will be identified in Karczag's embodiment of these characteristics in Chapter Five. In that chapter the study of an *ethical* approach to dance via improvisation reveals that ethics is not only central to the development of improvisation in Western theatre dance, it is also the result of a direct connection between dance and philosophy. In identifying a direct link between dance and philosophy this thesis posits the potential for resonances of pantheism to have affected the formation of somatic-based improvisation.

#### 2.3.4 Dewey and Ethics

At the beginning of his career as a philosopher, Dewey was introduced to philosopher Benedict de Spinoza's *Ethics* by his first mentor and college teacher H. A. P. Torrey.<sup>214</sup> His subsequent critique of *Ethics* was the second article Dewey sought to publish in the hope of distinguishing himself as a philosopher of merit. In this article, Dewey critiques Spinoza by saying that *Ethics* actually describes a "Pancosmism."<sup>215</sup> However, throughout the text Dewey expresses a high regard for Spinoza's philosophy, commenting that it is through *Ethics* that "a final unity seems obtained, and real knowledge possible."<sup>216</sup> W. T. Harris, Dewey's subsequent mentor who published these early articles in the only North American philosophical journal at the time, *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, was firmly Hegelian. Dewey historian Jay Martin identifies that "Harris and his group of St. Louis Hegelians were among the few laymen devoted to philosophy for nontheological reasons."<sup>217</sup> It is well known that while Hegel also critiqued Spinoza, he held him at the centre of modern philosophy, saying that "it is therefore worthy of note that thought must begin by placing itself at the standpoint of **Spinozism**; to be a follower of Spinoza is the essential commencement of all

<sup>214</sup> Jay Martin, *The Education of John Dewey: A Biography* (New York, NY and Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2002), 52.

<sup>215</sup> John Dewey, "The Pantheism of Spinoza," *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 16, no. 3 (1882): 249. *Pancosmism* is a term established by Dewey in order to distinguish the focus of Spinoza's philosophy as having to do with the cosmos rather than with Pantheism.

<sup>216</sup> Dewey, "The Pantheism of Spinoza," 257.

<sup>217</sup> As Martin explains, years later Dewey remarked to William James that "by some sort of instinct, and by the impossibility of my doing anything in particular, I was led into philosophy and into 'idealism'." Martin, *Education of John Dewey*, 53.

philosophy.”<sup>218</sup> He also said, quite famously, that “you are either a Spinozist or not a philosopher at all.”<sup>219</sup> Therefore, while little has been said of Dewey’s apparently brief interest in *Ethics*, traces of the formative influence of Spinoza emerge in various ways, in particular in his abhorrence of dualism, which is evident in his continual references to the body-mind.

As noted earlier, at Columbia Dewey had encouraged H’Doubler to think more broadly about the philosophical and experiential nature of art through his innovative pedagogical methods that brought together physical experience and aesthetic philosophy. As a result, according to dance theorist Thomas Hapgood, within H’Doubler’s multi-layered syllabus a “grounded perspective (philosophy), is of foremost importance followed by understanding a rigorous conceptual framework (science) and then by creative vision and interest (art).”<sup>220</sup> Her approach can therefore be linked to Spinoza’s philosophy via Dewey, because while I have not found evidence that Dewey specifically lectured on Spinoza at Colombia, he was certainly influenced in fundamental ways by his philosophy. Clearly, H’Doubler’s physiophilosophical approach to dance – particularly in her rejection of dualisms and privileging of affects – certainly suggests an appreciation for Spinozist philosophy. In mapping the historical lineages of pioneers in both the alternative sciences of contemporary dance and somatic corporeal knowledges, it is possible that H’Doubler’s compositional aesthetics may have been shaped by her exposure to a monist philosophical paradigm.

## **2.4 Alternative sciences, institutional recognition, and divergence**

H’Doubler’s syllabus began a new era of dance education that enabled young women to secure a teaching career and financial independence. By 1936, only ten years after H’Doubler began the first dance major at Wisconsin, the burgeoning field of dance studies expanded in North America with twenty-five colleges employing her students.<sup>221</sup> As Ross explains, “in the mid-1940s, almost all the heads of dance sections

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<sup>218</sup> David Duquette, ed., *Hegel’s History of Philosophy: New Interpretations* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2003), 144.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

<sup>220</sup> Thomas Hapgood, *A History of Dance in American Higher Education* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2000), 145.

<sup>221</sup> Brennan, Hapgood, and Wilson, *Margaret H’Doubler*, xi. Tertiary dance following H’Doubler’s methods was also offered later at other North American universities such as Columbia University Teachers College, Mills College and Iowa. However, Bennington College in Vermont provided a professional alternative in 1932, led by former Graham dancer Martha Hill.



and divisions in the nation's universities and colleges were H'Doubler's former students."<sup>222</sup> H'Doubler's major work *Dance: A Creative Art Experience*, published four years after Dewey's *Art as Experience*, also dominated the field of dance theory for nearly forty years.<sup>223</sup> Therefore, while contemporary dance gained prominence as a performative art on North American stages via the ideology of traditional methods of training, dance students in American universities were learning a distinctly different – Deweyan – process of experiential learning. Rather than learning codified techniques these students learned anatomy, scientific methodologies, problem-solving methodologies, self-expression (and incidentally, assertiveness training), and importantly, about their own capacity for creativity. H'Doubler's vision for dance was a holistic life practice; she insisted that the best way to test the "efficacy of her dance teaching would be to contact them when they were fifty years old and see what effect the experiences of her dance classroom had had on their lives."<sup>224</sup> This holistic approach suggested another possibility for what dance could offer, not only as an artform, but also as a method of enriching the experience of being human.

As the twentieth century progressed and H'Doubler's pedagogy flourished in Wisconsin, a trend towards conservatism began to impact the pioneering somatic practitioners of New York. While deeply informing the understanding of body-mind integration, Todd's somatic experiments were slow to be taken up by institutions due to the lack of support they received, and at times suffered from direct opposition. Todd and Sweigard developed somatic systems of re-educating the body not dissimilar to Alexander's, however, while seeking to validate the scientific nature of their work these female somatic practitioners faced a disproportionate challenge in gaining recognition from the wider scientific community. For example, in the 1948 libel case of *Alexander v. Jokl* and others, Alexander claimed five thousand pounds in defamation damages after his work had been described as "a dangerous and irresponsible form of quackery" by Ernst Jokl, and Dewey was one of several leading figures called on to witness and recommend Alexander's work.<sup>225</sup> Not only did Alexander instigate the libel case, he was able to call

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<sup>222</sup> Ross, *Moving Lessons*, 124.

<sup>223</sup> H'Doubler, *Dance*; Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 1934.

<sup>224</sup> Ross, *Moving Lessons*, 144.

<sup>225</sup> Ernst Jokl in his article "Quackery versus Physical Education," *Manpower (Volkskrate)* 2, no. 2, (1944): 1–26. For further detail, see Michael Bloch, *F. M. The Life of Frederick Matthias Alexander: Founder of the Alexander Technique* (New York, NY: Little, Brown & Company, 2004).

on a broad support base to endorse his methods. In contrast, female somatic practitioners did not experience this same level of support.

Todd's postural engineering research, *Basic Principles of Posture*, which was based on the Structural Hygiene syllabus she began to teach at Columbia Teachers College in 1928, was initially published across several articles in the *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal*.<sup>226</sup> Her tutor, the Head of Physical Education at Columbia University, Dr Jesse



Feiring Williams, cited her in his 1920 paper, *Principles of Physical Education*, and co-authored her second book, *The Hidden You: What You Are and What To Do About It*.<sup>227</sup> Her major work, *The Thinking Body*, was also well received when it was published in 1937 and became a seminal text for dancers and performers, including Marilyn Monroe who studied Todd's book while developing her distinctly effervescent physicality for her starlet persona.<sup>228</sup> However, by the 1950s the New York City medical authorities became

concerned with the lack of verification for Todd's practices and threatened her with a lawsuit.<sup>229</sup> Unable to afford a proper legal defence, she left for California after agreeing to an out-of-court settlement that required her to terminate her work in New York.

<sup>226</sup> Mabel Todd, "Principles of Posture," *The Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* 182, no. 26 (1920): 645–9 and "Principles of Posture, with Special Reference to the Mechanics of the Hip Joint," *The Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* 184, no. 25 (1921): 667–73.

<sup>227</sup> Huxley, "F. Matthias Alexander," 29. Williams also followed a Deweyian approach to physical education, developing a progressive "laboratory" method of pedagogy to challenge the dualistic paradigm of traditional education which included an integral component he called "natural dancing." Williams, *Principles of Physical Education*; and Mabel Todd, *The Hidden You: What You Are and What To Do About It* (New York, NY: Dance Horizons, 1953).

<sup>228</sup> Figure 1. Marilyn Monroe writes of studying Todd's *The Thinking Body* (New York, NY: Princeton Book Company, 1937) in her diary, which features in the HBO documentary *Love, Marilyn* (2013). Note the book in the photo taken by Ernest Bachrach, while Monroe was on the set of *Clash by Night* (1952), accessed August 31, 2017, <http://blog.everlasting-star.net/2011/06/art-and-photography/glamour-of-the-gods/>. Halprin also discovered it while studying with H'Doubler, who Libby Worth and Helen Poynor suggest was also influenced by Todd. See Libby Worth and Helen Poynor, *Anna Halprin* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 2004), 6.

<sup>229</sup> Accessed March 24, 2014, <http://www.ideokinesis.com/pioneers/todd/todd.htm>.

Todd's mentee, Sweigard, was motivated to build on and support Todd's kinesiological findings with a study based on neurology. However, Sweigard's efforts for scientific recognition were also thwarted when she was unable to publish the results of her PhD documenting the postural changes of 500 students through ideokinesis.<sup>230</sup> She did, however, publish her research in her book, *Human Movement Potential: Its Ideokinetic Function*, in 1974, the year she died.<sup>231</sup> However, despite their lack of recognition from the scientific establishment, Todd's and Sweigard's work became important somatic methods for generations of dance practitioners in North America.

From the beginning of this very early stage in the history of dance education in North America, the ideological split between vocational and academic methodologies began to widen. H'Doubler's desire to impart a "philosophy of life" through holistic dance education was in contrast to the performative focus of Bennington College which opened in 1932.<sup>232</sup> The head of dance at Bennington, Martha Hill, briefly studied under H'Doubler (after beginning her training with Graham), but went on to reject H'Doubler's methods and promote traditional training.<sup>233</sup> Hill later became head of dance at the Juilliard School in 1951. While each educator endorsed a different method of dance pedagogy, the aesthetics of the dancing they created also diverged. Hill complained: "At Wisconsin they never used anything below their waists. Everything was arms. No torso. That would be too erotic!"<sup>234</sup> Ross explains:

Over time the subjective, aesthetic nature of dance found itself at odds with the utilitarian, objective desires of physical education. Both turned away, one from the other, towards allied areas of study in the face of external questions and doubts raised about each others' academic discipline.<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>230</sup> Sweigard, *Bilateral Asymmetry*.

<sup>231</sup> Lulu Sweigard, *Human Movement Potential: Its Ideokinetic Function* (London: Harper & Row, 1974).

<sup>232</sup> Brennan, Hagood, and Wilson, *Margaret H'Doubler*, x. Myron Howard Nadel and Marc Raymond Strauss, *The Dance Experience: Insights into History, Culture and Creativity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003).

<sup>233</sup> Patricia Vertinsky, "From Physical Educators to Mothers of the Dance: Margaret H'Doubler and Martha Hill," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 27, no. 7 (2010): 1113–32. Interestingly, Sweigard adapted Todd's approach for the dance curriculum at Juilliard in 1956.

<sup>234</sup> Vertinsky, "From Physical Educators," 1122. Through her training with Graham, Hill also had a strong sense of the importance of the centre of the body.

<sup>235</sup> Quote by Ross in Vertinsky, "From Physical Educators," 1122. The animosity continues in the work of theorists today. For example, Myron Howard Nadel and March Raymond Strauss describe dance and physical education as a "failed marriage ... because of leaders such as Blanch Trilling, who, following the Dewey school of thought, believed that young people needed vital movement experiences, women

The disparity of these methods laid the foundations for the more public rupture of the counter-culture movement in dance in the 1960s via Halprin's experimentations, and continues to have a considerable impact on institutional dance pedagogy.<sup>236</sup> What is less understood is how the ideological shift in early dance pedagogy laid the foundations for this rupture many decades earlier in the pioneering work of scientific, academic dance.

## 2.5 Halprin

Halprin became the catalyst for the incubation of Western methods of improvisation due to her H'Doublan approach and distance from the dance hubs of New York. While somatic practices had burgeoned at the beginning of the twentieth century in North America, the mid-twentieth century saw a swing towards conservatism. With a push for vocational dance training, spearheaded by Hill's professional approach, experiential practices such as H'Doubler's began to be considered counter-cultural in relation to formalist training methodologies.<sup>237</sup> The mid-century period saw the codification of movement become a central tenet of Western dance practice. For example, contemporary choreographers such as Graham, Cunningham, Lester Horton, and Erik Hawkins developed signature dance techniques.<sup>238</sup> During this time, Halprin became a crucial but relatively secluded figure in the history of Western dance improvisation, innovating the form from the sanctuary of an outdoor deck built for her by her architect husband Lawrence Halprin at their house in the San Francisco Bay area.<sup>239</sup> The geographical separation of her work from the professional stages of New York contributed to the freedom with which she was able to explore experimental movement ideas. On her deck she would explain,

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physical educators embraced – or at least tolerated – the goals and interests of H'Doubler's philosophy." Nadel and Strauss, *The Dance Experience*, 176.

<sup>236</sup> Morse, *Soft Is Fast*, 2016.

<sup>237</sup> Isabelle Ginot describes the way in which somatic practices are thought of as counter-cultural in dance rather than as a core feature of contemporary practice in Ginot, "From Shusterman's Somaesthetics," 12.

<sup>238</sup> In the 1940s, choreographers such as Martha Graham (1894–1991), Lester Horton (1906–1953), and later Merce Cunningham (1919–2009) began formalising their technical approach to movement as a way of training their dancers to embody their physical concerns. By the 1950s this formalist aesthetic was at its peak. Eric Hawkins (1909–1994) also codified a technique and had danced in ballet choreographer Balanchine's company and in Graham's company. However, his own work developed a somatic approach influenced by ideokinesis. Hawkins studied under Mabel Todd and Barbara Clark and his work influenced André Bernard (ideokinesis) and Bonnie Bainbridge-Cohen (Body-Mind Centering®).

<sup>239</sup> Anna Halprin graduated from Wisconsin in 1938. A comprehensive account of Halprin's (1920–) work is beyond the scope of this study, but for a more detailed account, see Halprin and Kaplan, *Moving Towards Life*; Janice Ross and Richard Schechner, *Anna Halprin: Experience as Dance* (Berkeley, CA and London: University of California Press, 2007); Worth and Poynor, *Anna Halprin*; and Perron, "Anna Halprin," 56–7.

there is no centre: you are the centre. There are no boundaries unless you make them. Our boundaries aren't just the ends of our fingers or the tops of our heads: There are energetic forces moving out through our bodies.<sup>240</sup>

She used scoring as “a process based on creativity rather than on one person having an idea and telling other people what to do.”<sup>241</sup> By determining the scores she allowed for an improvised group response that mobilised “the collective want.”<sup>242</sup> Many of the approaches to experimental dance, theatre, and/or contemporary performance today have been influenced by the innovative methods developed by Halprin and those who followed her.<sup>243</sup>

After early dance lessons at Isadora Duncan's school, Halprin narrowly missed out on a place at Bennington under Hill due to the college having already reached their quota of Jewish students, and instead enrolled at Wisconsin under H'Doubler.<sup>244</sup> While fate may have intervened it is clear that the rigour of H'Doubler's syllabus inspired Halprin in the way that it realised the academic potential of dance education.

After her immersion in H'Doubler's syllabus, Halprin was shocked by her first encounter with codified movement in performance during the peak of the formalisation of dance in 1950s New York:

I noticed that everybody in Graham's group looked like Martha Graham, and the same with Doris Humphrey. It made me very angry. It felt autocratic, like there was no room for individual creativity.<sup>245</sup>

Rejection of current trends fuelled her desire to find *authenticity* in her approach and this, along with her experiential H'Doubler/Dewey aesthetics, drove her to actively embrace the anti-establishment agenda of the 1960s.<sup>246</sup> Halprin student Forti describes Halprin's workshops as highly theoretical. Following H'Doubler, she would begin with

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<sup>240</sup> Perron, “Anna Halprin,” 57.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>244</sup> Ross and Schechner, *Anna Halprin*, 91.

<sup>245</sup> Perron, “Anna Halprin,” 56.

<sup>246</sup> Halprin and Kaplan, *Moving Towards Life*, Page?

an examination of a skeleton in order to observe the organisation of bones and the attachment of muscles, ligaments, and perhaps nearby organs. The dancers would then use the information they had gathered through observation to explore the movement possibilities of their own bodies. They would also explore working with weight and noticing how it affected movement in the rest of the body, while allowing the work to be joyfully playful. The basis of these tasks was informed by Halprin's anatomical and therapeutic approach to dance, influenced by her formal study with H'Doubler, as well as further research she undertook including ideokinesis and, in particular, Todd's book, *The Thinking Body*.<sup>247</sup>

A compelling distinction that Halprin makes about her practice in an interview with Nancy Stark Smith is between her definition of the terms *improvisation* and *exploration*.<sup>248</sup> She explains that her use of improvisation has changed over time and now she uses it to describe movement that comes from the automatic nervous system without any "thought interference."<sup>249</sup> Halprin describes how she might use what she now calls improvisation:

I might do it because I want to really challenge my nervous system, want to get *completely* out of my head. Or I might want to get in touch with what my unconscious body is saying to me at that moment.<sup>250</sup>

In contrast, she uses exploration for movement that is in response to a cognitively mobilised task or idea, for example, space, time, force. She says, "we would work with a *very* specific focus and then we would explore what are all the possibilities around working with [that focus]."<sup>251</sup> Halprin describes how she began to collect information within the exploration process that she calls *resources*, such as "work[ing] with space in terms of areas, or density and sparsity, or levels or directions or horizontal space, or outside space or inside space."<sup>252</sup> Furthermore, it is this specificity when working with, or exploring a response to, a situation that is most pertinent to the use of spontaneous

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<sup>247</sup> Ibid., 6. See also Worth and Poynor, *Anna Halprin*, 6.

<sup>248</sup> Nancy Stark-Smith (1952–) was a founding participant in Contact Improvisation. Halprin and Kaplan, *Moving Towards Life*, 191.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid., 192.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid., 193.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid., 191.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid., 192.

movement as an approach to choreography. The practices that Halprin distinguishes as either improvisation or exploration are a differentiation made in Chapter Three between two types of *embodied consciousness*: **thinking-through-the-body** and **the body's mind**. Halprin's interest in *authenticity* remains integral to improvisation, as discussed in Chapter Seven *Prohibitive and Emancipate Self-Surveillance* in relation to Authentic Movement.

The aesthetics of improvisation are articulated through the lens of philosophy here because philosophy is central to its formation. Halprin describes the particular *authentic*, aesthetic qualities of improvisation as having a

surrealistic effect in which untrammelled psychological and movement behavior rubbed against the cool task like performances produced by scientific kinesiological explorations.<sup>253</sup>

Halprin's scores built on H'Doubler's experientially anatomical methodologies, which were designed to be an *actively embodied* Deweyan experience rather than dictatorial. Therefore, she did not teach a style but a "situation to move in," with the belief that "the dance changes the dancer."<sup>254</sup> Halprin's embrace of somatic practices was, according to Kaplan, in order to

go deep inside the self through improvisation. This was not ... for the purpose of self-expression. Rather it was to plumb the depths of the human corporeal imagination, to discover capabilities that had been stymied by the conventions of modern dance. [Furthermore, through this approach] Halprin penetrated the interior of the body/mind, guiding her dancers and students to scrutinize individual anatomical workings as well as unconscious needs and desires.<sup>255</sup>

As Halprin's work progressed, she became more concerned with authenticity and with finding meaningful applications for art.<sup>256</sup> She explained that engaging with real issues

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<sup>253</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>256</sup> In the 1970s, after she had done considerable work on her own self-reflexive process as a cancer survivor, Halprin began developing artistic processes to address real issues through methods of dance therapy. She actively engaged non-dancers from marginalised communities in her therapeutic work using dance to transform social issues of feminism, racism, and AIDS. Through a workshop (and performance)

prevented her work from becoming self-indulgent. As an inexperienced improviser, Brown garnered a lot from one workshop with Halprin; according to Forti, she “really cut loose. Her natural athleticism was freed by the ideas that Anna was having us work with.”<sup>257</sup> Some of Halprin’s exploratory anatomical approach informed Brown’s *released* approach to movement that influenced much of her later work with Karczag.<sup>258</sup> In particular, Halprin developed a system for working with emotional material and imagery or what she called a *psychokinetic-visualisation* process.<sup>259</sup>

There is the mind working in terms of images that think faster than the linear verbal thinking process. But images are like dreams. They go instantaneously with the movement, with the impulse to move, and the feeling ... They’re a single impulse.<sup>260</sup>

The images that are described here are actually felt as sensation rather than necessarily seen in the screen of the mind.<sup>261</sup> They are also incredibly elusive and changeable, escaping language, thought, and emotion. Halprin explains: “the body is made up of a series of polarities: front/back, up/down, right/left. Once you can integrate those polarities physically, it affects you emotionally and helps you connect to the natural world, the idea that you’re part of an environment.”<sup>262</sup> For her, the “intent is to find the fullest life experience expressed artistically.”<sup>263</sup>

By following methods that combine **experiential-experimental** movement, philosophy, and science, improvisation has become a way to engage directly with the physiophilosophical nature of dance. This practice of improvisation has emerged from the direct connection between the philosophy of Dewey (and indirectly Spinoza), influenced by Alexander, and the nexus of dance–science that emerged from his

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practice she sought to empower people by addressing and physicalising their personal issues as a way of processing and resolving them, so that they could authentically embody reciprocal respect despite difference. Halprin and Kaplan, *Moving Towards Life*.

<sup>257</sup> Breitwieser, *Simone Forti*, 22.

<sup>258</sup> Karczag explains that the Trisha Brown Company did not perform improvisation but worked with it to generate movement for choreography. Eva Karczag, interview by the author, Arnhem, Netherlands, 2014.

<sup>259</sup> Halprin and Kaplan, *Moving Towards Life*, 12.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid.

<sup>261</sup> Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen uses the term **somatisation** rather than *visualisation* to describe how an image “engages with the kinaesthetic experience directly.” Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, *Sensing, Feeling, and Action: The Experimental Anatomy of Body-Mind Centering* (New York, NY: Contact Editions, 2012), 1.

<sup>262</sup> Perron, “Anna Halprin,” 57.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid.



movement students at Colombia; the somatic-based dance of H'Doubler and the ideokinesis of Todd and Sweigard. Through research at the nexus of dance–science and aesthetics, the acquisition of knowledge continued the process of evolution via a two-way flow of practice (Alexander) to philosophy (Dewey) and back to practice (H'Doubler, Todd, and Sweigard), restructuring the conditions of the milieu of dance from which improvisational practice emerged.

## Chapter Three

### *Embodied Consciousness*

#### 3.1 Introduction

Methods used to compose improvised performance can be influenced by a diverse range of factors, such as critical or social theory, science, philosophy, aesthetics, therapy, or spirituality, yet commonly remain undertheorised due to the complex, ephemeral, and personal nature of practices.<sup>1</sup> Each person's experience of their own improvisation practice is uniquely subjective and not only is practice personal, it is also in a constant state of flux: changing daily, and moment to moment. As a result, there is a strong tradition within improvisation theory of first-person or anecdotal accounts of practice; this chapter is one such example.<sup>2</sup> While improvisers' practices are diverse, it is possible to identify certain commonalities across a broad aesthetic spectrum. For example, setting tasks is a commonly used method for many improvisers to limit the range of possibilities so as to generate more specific movement qualities or pathways. Tasks can be described in different ways. For example, William Forsythe has developed improvisation *technologies*; Anna Halprin, Deborah Hay, and Lisa Nelson all use *scores*; and Steve Paxton has compiled the *principles* of Contact Improvisation.<sup>3</sup> What is important about tasks is that they offer a framework through which to compose an improvisation, and maintain a sense of cohesion within the work, while also allowing for serendipitous moments or unexpected choices. By starting with an anecdotal account, the aim of this chapter is to move beyond the documentation of tasks themselves towards an examination of how an improviser might negotiate those tasks, thereby establishing a framework for an improvisation method that will be built on throughout the thesis.

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<sup>1</sup> See the range of improvisation theory outlined in Chapter One. Substantial portions of this chapter have been published in Nalina Wait, "Embodied Consciousness," in *The Oxford Handbook of Improvisation in Dance*, ed. Vida Midgelow (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019), 135-149.

<sup>2</sup> As a professional dance artist with an established twenty-five-year practice of improvised performance, I draw from my own experience in addition to engaging with pre-existing theory and case study interviews. My physical research will inform, but will not take the place of, the written articulation of my argument.

<sup>3</sup> William Forsythe, *Improvisation Technologies: A Tool for the Analytical Dance Eye*, CD-ROM (Berlin and Stuttgart: Hatje Cantz, 2012); Lawrence Halprin, "The RSVP Cycles: Creative Processes in the Human Environment," *Choreographic Practices* 5, no. 1 (2014): 39-47; Deborah Hay, "What If Now Is?," *Contact Quarterly* 27, no. 1 (2002): 34-7; Lisa Nelson, "The Sensation is the Image," *Writings on Dance: Exploring the New Dance Aesthetic* 14 (1995/1996): 4-16; Steve Paxton, "A Definition," *Contact Quarterly* 4, no. 2 (1979): 26.

In performance an improviser is always negotiating a dialogic exchange within a broader spatial, aural, and social context, because improvisation is an inherently relational practice. Therefore, the interrelationship between improvisers, and space/place, and the audience will be addressed in the following chapter. This chapter temporarily excludes these important variables by focusing on the activities of the individual in order to elucidate the sophisticated ways an improviser develops their capacities as a body-mind instrument in order to compose improvisation. The examination of the labour of improvisation conducted here seeks to extend the language-based articulation of praxis, without suggesting that there is a universal or ideal experience of improvised performance. Yet, this account also requires that the practice under investigation be familiar and lucid enough to the writer to bear a description in writing. Therefore, this chapter examines my own practice as a case study in order to articulate the improvisational states with enough detail to contribute to an extension of the current language in an original way. In order to account for the subjectivity and variability of practice, later chapters in this thesis draw on a diverse range of first-person accounts as case studies in order to consider key themes and methods of practice in relation to each other and their historical lineages.

As noted earlier, my approach to the theorisation of practice followed in this thesis emphasises somatic awareness, while engaging with dance and improvisation theory, anatomy, and philosophy. Therefore, part of the process of extending language is to examine the existing language developed by improvisation theorists in order to highlight and interrogate important aspects of practice. Dance theorist Susan Foster has suggested that composing improvisation “depend[s] on the performer’s lucid familiarity with the principles of composition.”<sup>4</sup> While this is certainly true, this thesis is aligned to the proposition that there is another dimension of improvisation in which compositional choices are not based on the formal logic of composition principles but on attending to fluctuating, formless intensities, or forces.<sup>5</sup> Before delving into a theorisation of how a formless compositional method might be approached, the practice of **tuning** a body-mind must be discussed as a process that an improviser explores when developing a

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<sup>4</sup> Susan Foster, “Taken by Surprise: Improvisation in Dance and Mind,” in *Taken by Surprise: A Dance Improvisation Reader*, eds. Ann Cooper Albright and David Gere (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2003), 7.

<sup>5</sup> This thesis proposes an original theorisation of these forces as the resonance of affects, which is described in the following chapter.

capacity to perceive the forces in circulation and engage with them as a medium of composition.

As a point of departure for this account, this chapter builds on Foster's term embodied consciousness, which she describes as that which "enables the making of the dance and the dance's making of itself."<sup>6</sup> The following text extends Foster's useful terminology by further examining the practice of embodied consciousness, how it operates in an improvised performance, and how it can be cultivated through practice. Furthermore, as a contribution to improvisation theory, this chapter examines the bifurcation of different types of embodied consciousness that commonly recur in accounts of practice.<sup>7</sup> The two types of embodied consciousness described here as *thinking-through-the-body* and *the body's mind* are interrogated to examine the subtle distinctions between these states of being. It is important to note that the body-mind processes discussed here may not be externally observable, but offer insight into how an improviser might **tune** their body-mind so that they can direct and be directed by the forces that are in circulation between the self and others within space and time. As Foster explains, the composition of an improvisation is dependent on the improviser's heightened sensitivity to forces in circulation that she calls "hyperawareness."<sup>8</sup> Foster describes hyperawareness as an inherently relational way of extending one's awareness in order to perceive and determine the compositional needs of an improvised performance as it unfolds. In contrast to foregrounding the freedoms associated with improvisation practice, this research posits that cultivating hyperawareness via states of embodied consciousness

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<sup>6</sup> Foster, "Taken by Surprise," 9.

<sup>7</sup> The notion of two types of consciousness when improvising is not a new concept. As was explained in the previous chapter, pioneering improviser Anna Halprin describes a dual activity as key to her creative process. She explains that "there were two ways I was working – and still am – one was when the body speaks to the mind and informs the mind, or when the mind informs the body," distinguishing these states by calling the former *exploration* and the latter *improvisation*. Anna Halprin and Rachel Kaplan, eds., *Moving Towards Life: Five Decades of Transformational Dance* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1995), 191. See also Kent De Spain, *Landscapes of the Now: A Topology of Movement Improvisation* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), 176. Halprin's mentor, Margaret H'Doubler, also taught a method of movement inquiry that consisted of three phases, which was described in the previous chapter. First, the *feedback* phase is described as bringing information from the muscles, joints, and tendons. The second, or *associative*, phase is said to occur in the brain, and finally the *feed forward* phase is the process of sending messages back to the muscles. She imparted this cycle as an integration of *moving, thinking, and feeling*, and she facilitated this approach to kinaesthetic thinking by leading her students through a movement inquiry into space, time, force, and variations in quality. For more detail see Mary Brennan, Thomas Hagood, and John Wilson, *Margaret H'Doubler: The Legacy of America's Dance Education Pioneer* (Youngstown, NY: Cambria Press, 2006), 217.

<sup>8</sup> Foster talks about a *hyperawareness* in relation to improvisation in Foster, *Taken by Surprise*, 7 and *Dances That Describe Themselves: The Improvised Choreography of Richard Bull* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2002), 243.

requires considerable dedication, as part of an extremely rigorous practice.<sup>9</sup> By further examining and bifurcating embodied consciousness, this chapter aims to demystify the cultivation of this skill, and describe the ways in which it may be refined.

Conceptualising a body-mind as an instrument is a useful way of negotiating the subjective/objective nexus at the heart of dance theory.<sup>10</sup> Using the term *instrument* in dance theory is popular but contentious, as it is argued that it may conjure a sense of a dehumanised machine/body. Yet, here it is used in appreciation of the intelligence at all levels of the living, breathing, fleshy, feeling, sensing, thinking organism, as dance theorist Glenna Batson explains:

The concept of ‘the dancer’s instrument’ – a machine neatly obeying laws of mechanics and following the dictates of the will – has evolved to a more dynamic view of organisational behaviour. Human movement is self-regulating, non-linear behaviour that is spontaneously assembled and environmentally embedded.<sup>11</sup>

This thesis proposes that a body-mind operates as an instrument via the conscious embodiment of the sensorium, in order to perceive the **resonance of affects**, similar to the way a flute requires air to pass through it for a sound to be made. Tuning one’s instrument involves cultivating perceptive faculties that allow a body-mind greater capacity to connect imaginatively with a) the multi-dimensions of *space-time*, by telescoping attention outwards to become hyperaware of the macro relations in circulation between the self, other(s), and the environment; and/or b) telescoping awareness inward towards the micro detail of the sensorium, to perceive the resonance of affects via embodied consciousness.<sup>12</sup> There are many ways to improvise that require different levels of preparation and perceptiveness, but this chapter falsely excludes the relational aspects to articulate how embodied consciousness may work as a method for composing improvisation from within.

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<sup>9</sup> A discussion of the value of disciplined and *undisciplined* approaches to improvisation practice is examined in greater detail in Chapter Seven *Prohibitive and Emancipative Self-Surveillance*.

<sup>10</sup> This subjective/objective nexus was discussed in Chapter One.

<sup>11</sup> Glenna Batson, “Teaching Alignment: From a Mechanical Model to a Dynamic Systems One,” in *The Body Eclectic: Evolving Practices in Dance Training*, eds., Melanie Bales and Rebecca Netti-Fiol (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 134–5.

<sup>12</sup> Psychogeographer Derek McCormack uses the term *space-time* to describe the qualities of affective spaces in Derek P. McCormack, *Refrains for Moving Bodies: Experience and Experiment in Affective Spaces* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013).

### 3.2 Embodied consciousness

In a general sense, embodied consciousness involves observing/sensing where movement originates, how that movement is initiated, and how that action unfolds in relation to the time, space, and effort used. An improviser's capacity to be consciously embodied can be enhanced through somatic practices that attend to an observation of the body-mind and in particular the sensorium. Observational practices such as somatics refine an improviser's perceptive faculties, allowing greater capacity to connect imaginatively with the sensorium as well as the multi-dimensions of space-time. Key activities of somatic practices can provide an improviser with access to a greater range of movement investigations with which to compose improvisation, as well as assist in the refinement and diversification of an improviser's stylistic sensibility. In examining Foster's term *embodied consciousness*, this research follows the somatic approach of the pioneers of ideokinesis by investigating the lived experience of the dancer in relation to the study of human biology.<sup>13</sup> It is therefore useful to briefly establish how methods of ideokinesis provide a model of body-mind relationship foundational to this research.

Ideokinesis pioneer Mabel Elsworth Todd's seminal text *The Thinking Body* outlines a kinesthetic, image-based approach to balancing the dynamic forces of vertical posture in humans.<sup>14</sup> Her method rejected the fashionable militaristic postural practices of the time, which asserted that only by exercising weakened muscles could correct alignment be achieved. Instead her work was based on the **ideation** of simple engineering principles as images/actions that are structurally supportive of efficient body alignment. For example, in the following she suggests distributing the load of the shoulder girdle:

The position of the shoulder girdle is similar to that of the yoke by which the  
Hollanders carry their water pails: the arms swing freely in their sockets in line  
with the crest of the ilia.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> As was explained in the previous chapter, the pioneering practitioners of somatics who engaged with the biological sciences in their contribution to the corporeal knowledges of dance, are described here as the alternative scientists of contemporary dance.

<sup>14</sup> Mabel Elsworth Todd, *The Thinking Body: A Study of the Balancing Forces of Dynamic Man* (New York, NY: Princeton Book Company, 1937).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

The specific feature of ideokinetic practice is the use of mental imagery alone, rather than muscular effort, to train anatomical alignment, a radical departure from biomechanical theory of the time.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, in her book, *Human Movement Potential: Its Ideokinetic Facilitation*, Todd's mentee Lulu Sweigard posits that, “**subcortical** patterning cannot be changed through voluntary effort.”<sup>17</sup> Moreover:

The most effective procedure for changing the upright alignment is concentration of imagined movement in the body without exerting any physical effort. This is the ideokinetic process in which ideation results in movement of various parts of the skeletal framework; it does this only if *no* physical effort is put forth, because voluntary movement would interfere with the subcortical planning of muscle coordination in response to ideation.<sup>18</sup>

Ideokinesis practitioner André Bernard further clarifies that the re-education of muscle patterns can occur by first identifying movement as a neuro-musculo-skeletal event.<sup>19</sup> The nervous system not only communicates between the body (in this case muscles and bones) and the brain, it also organises the muscle pattern for the movement on a subcortical level: the level of activity in the brain below conscious awareness. If an attempt to organise a muscle pattern is made with a disregard for the primacy of the body-mind's pre-existent subcortical patterning, any effort to change the pattern directly interferes with the organisational process due to conflicting neural signals. Bernard says physically enacting alignment principles, rather than using ideation, creates “a tug-of-war between the established muscle pattern and the new one that's trying to be established. And the established message or muscle pattern is usually going to win out over the new image.”<sup>20</sup>

This discovery made through ideokinetic praxis is possibly one of the most pivotal corporeal knowledges of twentieth-century dance, because it completely changes the Western paradigm for understanding the unity of body-mind. Understanding that the

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<sup>16</sup> Sweigard's reference. John Alfred Valentine Butler, “Pictures in the Mind,” *Science News* 22 (1951): 26–35.

<sup>17</sup> Lulu Sweigard, *Human Movement Potential: Its Ideokinetic Function* (London: Harper and Row, 1974), 224.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 221.

<sup>19</sup> André Bernard, Wolfgang Steinmuller, and Ursula Stricker, *Ideokinesis: A Creative Approach to Human Movement and Body Alignment* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2006), 5.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

actual labour of neuromuscular organisation occurs on a subcortical level, which can be refined through mental imagery rather than muscular effort, or what Sweigard calls **neuromuscular re-education**, is now *de rigueur* among high-level athletes wanting to improve their performance. Movement therapist Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen developed the notion of working with imagery further by developing the term **somatisation** to mean, “engage the kinesthetic experience directly, in contrast to *visualization* which utilizes visual imagery to evoke a kinesthetic experience.”<sup>21</sup> What makes this discovery so radical is the sophisticated understanding of the functional integration of body-mind, which makes the need for deliberate muscular effort to correct anatomic alignment not only redundant, but also inhibitive. As Bernard explains quite simply, “Don’t *do* the image, let the image *do* you.”<sup>22</sup> Engaging the subcortical level of body-mind is pivotal to somatic-based improvisation, and will therefore re-emerge later in Chapter Seven *Prohibitive and Emancipative Self-Surveillance*.

In order to locate this practice in the corporeality of the body, it is important to define key biological terms and processes. Rudolph Laban’s term kinaesthesia is sensed primarily through **proprioception**, which, along with other sensations, is perceived through the sensorium. Much of the information collected through the proprioceptive receptors and the network of the sensorium is processed in the region below the cerebral cortex, the subcortical level of the brain, which means that it (usually) goes unnoticed during our everyday activities. However, the activity of somatics and embodied consciousness brings a greater conscious awareness to otherwise indiscernible bodily sensations, including those sensations mentioned earlier: sensing where a movement originates, how that movement is initiated, and how that action unfolds in relation to the time, space, and effort used. In this altered state of embodied consciousness an improviser can cultivate a deeper self-awareness of the co-perceptive condition of being a unified body-mind where thought/awareness and sensing/moving interweave, and thoughts/images are felt as sensations.

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<sup>21</sup> Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, *Sensing, Feeling, and Action: The Experimental Anatomy of Body-Mind Centering*, third edition (North Hampton, MA: Contact Editions, 2012), 1.

<sup>22</sup> André Bernard quote accessed July 30, 2019, <https://web.archive.org/web/20170531113412/http://www.ideokinesis.com/dancegen/bernard/bernard.htm>.



Part of my improvisation practice involves paying considerable attention to my sensorium while engaging with somatised images, building on the pioneering work of ideokinesis, in order to perceive how certain body-mind states can be generated through the use of tasks. To achieve the state of awareness as an integrated body-mind, I follow release methods, such as using the floor to support my weight and deepening my breath to allow the sensation of cellular oxygenation to release any habitual holding of my muscles and/or organs. I also move through Bartenieff Fundamental Patterns of Total Body Connectivity to establish coordinated movement pathways that integrate connectivity of breath, the core to what is distal, the head to the tail, the upper to the lower body, the body-halves, and the cross-lateral ends.<sup>23</sup> I do this via a series of locomotive explorations (yielding, pouring, pushing, pulling, and reaching) in order to cultivate a state of **global** body-mind awareness, receptivity, and preparedness. I practice these coordination pathways so that I can be inventive with movement, and anatomically efficient, and to cultivate somatic intelligence in order to collect movement qualities beyond the codified pathways that have been burned into my muscle memory.

In order to name and theorise the commonly experienced bifurcation of embodied consciousness, these states are described here as *thinking-through-the-body* (active) and awareness of *the body's mind* (passive). While these states could be thought of as different approaches to embodied consciousness, distinguished here by their active or passive condition, they are not entirely active or passive but contain fluctuating elements of both conditions simultaneously. For example, the passive state is actually active in receiving information, by *listening to* or *feeling through* the sensorium. Through a practice of rigorous sensorial self-observation, I have noticed that by enhancing my capacity to switch (or slide along the spectrum of gradients) between these two states I am able to activate, or reactivate, my desire to dance and to perceive what initiates my impulse to enact specific compositional choices while performing improvisation.

### 3.3 Thinking-through-the-body

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<sup>23</sup> Bartenieff Fundamentals is an extension of Laban Movement Analysis, and was developed by Irmgard Bartenieff (1900–1981) in the second half of the twentieth century. For more detail, see Peggy Hackney, *Making Connections: Total Body Integration Through Bartenieff Fundamentals* (New York, NY: Harwood Academic and Routledge, 2000), 43.

Thinking-through-the-body is the more commonly experienced type of embodied consciousness, as it includes language-based thoughts. It is used regularly in improvisational methods but is also the way in which many corporeal knowledges of dance are practiced. To a certain extent, it is a key method of **imitative training**. It is operating when a dancer can mentally and physically adjust her movement pathway or position to correctly perform a specific technique using kinesthetic perception in response to language-based thought cues. However, this type of embodied consciousness also operates when a (practical) methodological inquiry is explored through the use of tasks or questions, as the effort of rigorously attending to a task can become a method for cultivating diverse and specific movement qualities, ultimately broadening the palate of possible movement materials and compositional choices. Tasks are directives that can be used to imaginatively set restrictions or limitations in order to cultivate specific movement qualities. Some examples of tasks that I might use are *swing the bones*, *press skin surfaces*, *lead through the ends*, or *fall upwards*. Forsythe often uses geometric-based tasks building on Laban's *Choreutics*, such as *folding*, *bridging*, *matching*, *hinge points*, finding the *line* between two points, or extending the *plane*.<sup>24</sup> In her teaching, Eva Karczag also uses tasks, or images, that have been developed from principles of ideokinesis and the Alexander Technique™, and influenced by her practice of T'ai Chi Ch'uan. These tasks make it possible to create a sensation-image in a body-mind by locating the parameters of a movement investigation, as will be explained in a moment.

As tasks commonly circulate through language, they require another process to become consciously embodied in order to shift from a word or idea to an image and/or sensation. This requires a self-reflexive dialogue between the sensorium and language-based thinking. Self-reflexive dialogue helps an improviser to perceive any gap between what the task specifies and what is actually happening in the body. For example, a body-mind dialogue about *swinging bones* may include asking, or sensing, "questions" while dancing such as: "Which bones am I swinging?" "What does it mean to swing?" "Is what I'm doing really swinging?" By that I mean "Am I allowing the forces of

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<sup>24</sup> These examples were used in Riley Watts' workshop presented by STRUT in Perth from August 4–15, 2014. For more detail, see Nalina Wait, *Riley Watts Workshop: Journal* (2014), accessed October 6, 2019, [www.strutdance.org.au/blog/riley-watts-workshop](http://www.strutdance.org.au/blog/riley-watts-workshop). There are approximately 100 examples of improvisation tasks on Forsythe, *Improvisation Technologies*. For more information about Laban's *Choreutics*, see Rudolph Laban, *Choreutics* (Southwold: Dance Books, 2011).

gravity, breath, and momentum to actually swing the weight of my bones or am I adding muscular force to illustrate the ‘swinging’ of bones?” “How heavy are my bones if I actively switch off the muscles to allow their true weight to be more accurately perceived?” “Am I continuing to disengage those muscles or are they habitually reengaging?” This example seems heavy in language-based thinking, but actually, all of these tasks are felt/thought through the sensorium and only occasionally are self-reflexive questions voiced cognitively. The resulting quality of the movement that most closely enacts *swinging the bones* (in this case) is very specific and distinct from the movement quality of another task. Therefore, tasks enable an improviser to specify, diversify, and innovate their available palate of movement qualities through a process of inquiry by thinking-through-the-body.

There is no limit to what types of tasks can be used to generate movement, although improvising artists are often very specific about the tasks they use.<sup>25</sup> What is important about most tasks is that they can be sustained, or transformed, for a duration and therefore require a certain endurance of attention. Self-reflexive dialogue allows an improviser to monitor how she feels in relation to a task and can help her refine her response to a task over time. It can also activate a sense of *aliveness* in a movement inquiry by facilitating an improviser to self-reflexively innovate her responses to the task in real time.<sup>26</sup> The labour of negotiating a task while improvising involves continually refreshing one’s attention to the task, approaching it as though for the very first time, every time, all the time. This is not to say that in the context of the performance a recognisable movement won’t be repeated, as a habit or as a deliberate compositional choice. For the most part, however, movements need to be enacted without mentally skipping ahead, or holding on to what has passed, so that the improviser is attending to the moment in which the movement is performed.

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<sup>25</sup> Often, improvising artists, such as Forsythe, avoid emotional or psychological qualities as the resulting movement may create a theatrical sense of narrative that would be misleading in an **abstract** or process-based investigatory work. Forsythe’s preference not to use emotional, or even qualitative, tasks was relayed to me by Riley Watts, interview by author, Frankfurt, Germany, 2014.

<sup>26</sup> Constantly producing familiar or habitual movement pathways, which is a function of muscle memory, is a persistent problem for improvisers. This research investigates the rigorous practice of self-reflexivity and unfamiliar tasks to counter this issue and undisciplined practice, as outlined in Chapter Seven *Prohibitive and Emancipative Self-Surveillance*.

An improviser can then use tasks to develop a collection of known material that Forsythe calls a “field on information.”<sup>27</sup> A collection of tasks that work together is described here as a **terrain** due to the qualitatively geographical experience of being in this state, like entering a landscape of textures collected in a body-mind’s sensory imagination. Therefore, while in the initial stages of warming up, including warming up an awareness of body-mind unity, this level of diligent self-reflexive questioning is important because it deeply embeds the dancer’s conscious attention to the sensory-motor feedback arising while in motion. As dancing progresses, the self-reflexive questioning becomes embodied as a habit of hyperawareness which occurs extremely quickly as it no longer requires the labour of the slower language-based thought processes. This is useful, as endless self-reflexivity would ultimately produce a deadening sense of fatigue and disengagement. However, the transition to habitual, hyperaware self-reflexivity must occur in its own time and shortcutting the process produces vague results. Ultimately, this practice changes the habitual way a body-mind *thinks* through a task. Self-reflexive dialogue in relation to a task therefore transforms a body-mind through the use of imagination similar to the way that using a tool extends a body’s capacity to function.

Through the use of tasks, the improviser is also able to transfigure his/her **body-schema**.<sup>28</sup> In psychology and phenomenology, the term *body schema* refers to the sensed kinaesthetic map of a subject’s own body or the “organised model of ourselves.”<sup>29</sup> The map or schema of the body allows one to know one’s dimensions, one’s shape, and where one is in space. It is a flexible perception of the limits of one’s own body that enlarges as the body grows (from childhood) and can be extended deliberately in particular ways to include tools or physical skills that a person may develop. For example, while driving a car one’s body-schema is extended to sense how large the car is while reversing into a car park. If the task suggests an external relationship to the environment, such as *reaching ends to the edges of the space*, then it is the imaginative body-schema that reaches to the edges of the space. When the body-schema is extended through the use of a tool, such as a cane for a blind person, it has

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<sup>27</sup> Guy Cools, *Body Language #6: Dana Caspersen* (London: Sadler’s Wells, 2012), 5.

<sup>28</sup> Sue Hawksley, “Choreographic and Somatic Strategies for Navigating Bodyscapes and Tensegrity Schemata,” *Journal of Dance & Somatic Practices* 3, nos. 1/2 (2012): 101–10.

<sup>29</sup> Neurologists Henry Head and Gordon Morgan Holmes first described the concept of body-schema in 1911. See Henry Head and Gordon Morgan Holmes, “Sensory Disturbances from Cerebral Lesions,” *Brain* 34, nos. 2/3 (1911): 102.

been shown to also enlarge the cortical representation of the associated parts in the brain.<sup>30</sup> Over time, an improviser's self-reflexive dialogue can inform the quality or scope of the imaginative body-schema that can be cultivated, which can also change according to the way in which the dancer engages with certain tasks.

The way I extend my own body-schema through improvisation not only changes my perception of my dimensions but also imaginatively shifts the quality or textures of my movement.<sup>31</sup> For example, in order to transform my body-schema to embody the image of a *water bag* I begin to notice through my sensorium the ways in which I am anatomically similar to a water bag (primarily the fluids contained by skin: blood, lymph, plasma, synovial, and cerebrospinal fluid).<sup>32</sup> Then I connect to the sensation of the weight of those fluids and the pull of gravity on them, and aim to only initiate motion through *pouring* those fluids: allowing gravity to take my body into motion rather than initiating locomotion via my musculoskeletal system. This is one method for generating a collection of movements that relate to each other because they are governed by the same rule or image. Then, to keep myself interested, I might decide that the direction from which gravity moves the water bag should suddenly shift, so that I can *fall upward*, for example. Therefore, the body-schema has the potential to transform the experience of one's anatomy imaginatively in ways that cannot be arrived at through other means, suggesting actions that might be physically impossible but which promote innovative movement qualities. It is important to use an image that is in action rather than static because when the body is in motion, stronger or weaker gradients of sensation can be felt more clearly.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, the specificity with which these actions are described or imaginatively perceived is important, because each word is imbued with its own qualitative associations. For example, *pouring* is thicker, slower, and more viscous than *spilling*.

As a task is essentially a linguistic directive embodied imaginatively, it needs to become known corporeally as a *concrete* sensation if it is to transform an improviser's body-

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<sup>30</sup> Alva Noë, *Out of Our Heads: Why You Are Not Your Brain, and Other Lessons from the Biology of Consciousness* (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 2009), 79.

<sup>31</sup> The body schema of a dancer is described in detail in Hubert Godard, "Reading the Body in Dance," *Rolf Lines* October (1994): 36–41.

<sup>32</sup> The water bag image is just one example; for a task to work I do not need to be physiologically similar to the image that is used.

<sup>33</sup> Bernard, Steinmuller, and Stricker, *Ideokinesis*, 59.

schema, so that it might be re-called or re-performed as required. While in the initial stages of learning to improvise, the diligent self-reflexive questioning described earlier can be useful because it brings awareness to the sensory-motor feedback of the sensorium. As improvisational expertise progresses, self-reflexive questioning can become habitual. However, to use a task effectively requires consciously and specifically sensing it with exceptional detail during the self-reflexive process, so that it does not become vague or blur into another task (unless that is the intention). Cultivating a habit of self-reflexivity requires considerable practice over time and can involve working with a broad range of tasks in order to deepen the physical/mental understanding of what a task is, or what it might require of one to enact. The types of tasks that can be used are only limited by the imagination of the practitioner. Some possible categories of tasks are those that are qualitative (concerned with textures, and gradients of effort or tone), dimensional (to do with scale, space, time, or mathematical or conceptual in nature), relational (imagining connections or relations between places/bodies), or poetic (in response to words, images/sensations).

During group improvisational activities, such as *flocking*, the multiple body-schemas of the dancers conjoin into one group body-schema. There is then a felt sense among the group of connectedness, so if one person moves away from the group there is a distinct feeling that they are stretching the collective body-schema. Stretching the collective body-schema is perceived differently to multiple, individual body-schemas interacting or overlapping: if someone moves away, they are simply creating a relational distance between body-schemas in the space rather than stretching the collective whole. A term used by Forsythe, and his wife and colleague Dana Caspersen, to describe a sense of rhythmic connectivity between performers is *entrainment*.<sup>34</sup> Academic Kirsten Marr describes entrainment as “space-time-affected relationalization” or more simply “the process that occurs when two or more people become engaged in each other’s rhythms, when they synchronize.”<sup>35</sup> Entrainment is the core focus for the dancers in the Forsythe work *Duo* (1996), performed by Riley Watts and Brigel Gjoka in *DUO2015*.<sup>36</sup> *Duo* is a

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<sup>34</sup> Steven Spier, “Engendering and Composing Movement: William Forsythe and the Ballet Frankfurt,” *Journal of Architecture* 3 (1998): 135–46. *Entrainment* was coined by Edward T. Hall, *The Dance of Life, The Other Dimension of Time* (New York, NY: Anchor Books/Doubleday, 1983).

<sup>35</sup> Kirsten Marr quote is from Erika Fischer-Lichte and Benjamin Vihstutz, eds., *Performance and the Politics of Space: Theatre and Topology* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 2013), 257.

<sup>36</sup> I saw Watts and Gjoka perform *DUO2015* at the Sydney Opera House alongside Sylvie Guillem’s farewell tour of *Life in Progress* (2015). Their performance won a Positano Prize for *Contemporary*

choreographed sequence of material that the dancers must perform together while also choosing when and how to slip in and out of unison. Watts describes entrainment in this processual work as an “elastic temporal integrity.”<sup>37</sup> Watts says that for Forsythe, entrainment also extends to include the audience, and is part of the process of preparing an audience to view and connect with the work.<sup>38</sup>

Forsythe’s interest in the manipulation of the body-schema is evident in his early works, such as the choreographed *Steptext* (1984). Kate Mattingly describes the imaginatively extended body-schema of the Ballet Frankfurt dancers:

... the dancers appear to dislocate their sensory organs to their limbs. This dislocation recalls the aquatic creatures whose eyes are relocated from their skulls to the ends of antenna, thereby allowing each creature to ‘see’ space far from its torso. The Forsythe dancer uses his or her extremities in the same manner, both experiencing the state that is at the farthest from her or his torso, and attempting to escape sensorial bombardment.... Our thirsting for disturbances of habitual perception, a taste for optical tension.<sup>39</sup>

In the above example, the effort of trying to *see* from the torso, as Mattingly suggests, disturbs *habitual perception* to make imaginatively embodied possibilities more accessible.<sup>40</sup> In later work, Forsythe found improvisational tasks very effective in producing a highly virtuosic, imaginative extension of the body-schema.

As noted earlier, self-reflexive dialogue in relation to a task transforms the body-schema using imagination in a similar way that using a tool extends the body’s capacity to function. The improviser’s body-mind is a state of creative receptivity motivated by the tension between the task they’re engaging with and the potential that may arise from that engagement. Therefore, it is used as a way of *tuning* the body-mind instrument to become a method for producing or innovating movement, even if there is no task to

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*Dancers of the Year* 2015. See also Watts’ account of dancing *Duo* in Elizabeth Waterhouse, Riley Watts, and Bettina Bläsing, “Doing Duo: A Case Study of Entrainment in William Forsythe’s Choreography *Duo*,” *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 8 (2014): 1–16.

<sup>37</sup> Watts discussed entrainment in Watts, interview.

<sup>38</sup> Forsythe’s notion of entraining the audience is explored in more detail in Chapter Six *Cultivating Movement Situations*.

<sup>39</sup> Kate Mattingly, “Deconstructivists Frank Gehry and William Forsythe: De-signs of the Times,” *Dance Research Journal* 31, no. 1 (1999): 20–8.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

enact, because approaching all movement with hyperawareness as an inquiry into a specific experience-experiment creates compelling performative states. Tasks also have the potential to extend the conception of the body-schema in ways that might defy logic or physical limits, which may not always be directly perceptible through vision but can be sensed externally in a shift in the movement quality and effort of the dancing. After considerable work, this practice can change the habitual way a body-mind thinks/feels through a task. However, a transition to habitual self-reflexivity must occur in its own time and rushing or truncating this process produces an unclear body-schema that doesn't support a rigorous investigation.

By working with imaginative images over time, an improviser can metamorphose their perception of their body-schema. For example, performance-maker/writer Victoria Gray describes how she was able to create a “rich kinaesthetic universe” in her work *Pressure Points* (2011) through the transmogrification of her body schema:

It felt that my bones were conducting and amplifying the minutest sound of people's movements ... these movements were sensed through my body as vibrations, rather than as visual information. My spine became a powerful aerial, conducting my peripheral senses ... an interface that processed not visual but kinaesthetic data. Put simply, it was as though each of the thirty-three vertebrae in my spine became eyes, whilst the 31 pairs of spinal nerves acted as highly sensitised fingertips. A visual reference might be ... a cubist morphology of body parts [that] created a radical reorganisation of sensory organs, thus questioning how the body functions on the level of perception.<sup>41</sup>

Gray is describing a very different sense of the world, perceived through a transfiguration of her body-schema. If we compare the normally fairly limited capacity for human perception, opening up to an extended sensory perception (be it imagined, felt, or a confluence of both) takes the work of art into an exciting new dimension. It follows that, especially with the addition of anatomical study, the known parts of the internal body-schema are much more detailed and accessible for an improviser who has developed this imaginative body-mind capacity. When a body-mind is habitually self-reflexive, the dialogic process can occur extremely quickly and sometimes effortlessly,

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<sup>41</sup> Victoria Gray, “Beneath the Surface of the Event: Immanent Movement and the Politics of Affective Registers,” *Choreographic Practices* 4, no. 2 (2013): 176.



but it is the specificity with which improvisers attend to a task that enables improvisation to be a virtuosic performative method.

Thinking-through-the-body offers a practitioner a way to deepen their improvisation practice that is far from arbitrary, as it aims to extend the range of possible movement investigations through a process of focused limitation. Whatever task is used to focus the movement investigation, it must be deeply established in the body-schema through the self-reflexive process, described above, so that it can be available as a tangible method of inquiry. Therefore, rather than movement arising from *spontaneous inspiration*, a sophisticated improvisation practice often follows an extremely rigorous method which can be refined over time. This is true both when improvisation is to be performed in a choreographic situation, in which specific limitations have been established, or when the improvisation is completely open and no preset decisions have been made. As with any practice, it is the time and attention given to training this capacity that ultimately determines the quality of the result in both articulation and inventiveness. There is also great potential for this practice to assist the production of innovative movement material because, even if the tasks appear to only suggest a singular response, through a self-reflexive dialogue this, and any other assumption, is examined. Tasks require habitual questioning, and the purpose of a task is to provoke creativity rather than to be inexorably obeyed. Through practice, the body-mind of an improviser can become proficient at interrogating tasks to produce diverse and articulate responses by actively and inventively attending to the creation and innovation of the movement vocabulary, which is a core feature of a sophisticated improvisation practice. It is therefore not a process of *getting it right* but of finding creative and motivating ways to engage with tasks in an ever-changing inquiry.

In addition to generating a tangible body-schema, the endurance and inventiveness of an improviser's attention can be refined in a way that extends improvisation from the level of practice to that of a work of art. Tasks that are movement puzzles or conundrums and are actually impossible to do, may be particularly interesting when explored physically because they demand a heightened state of presence, and a hyperaware state of body-mind engagement, as the dancer grapples with the impossibility of the task. Complex tasks also have the potential to extend the conception of the body-schema in ways that might defy logic or physical limits but produce an engaging shift in the movement

quality of an improviser. A task such as *no body part can touch the floor* may not be achievable literally, but creates a quality of urgency and levity in an improviser's attempt to produce it. For example, Trisha Brown describes her process of working from an improvisation task to choreograph *Trillium* (1962):

[I was] working in a studio on a movement exploration of traversing the three positions sitting, standing, and lying. I broke those actions down to their basic mechanical structure, finding the places of rest, power, momentum and peculiarity. I went over and over the material, eventually accelerating and mixing up to the degree that lying down was done in air.<sup>42</sup>

While Brown is describing an improvisation process for the creative development of a choreographed work, in an improvised performance the use of tasks enables an improviser to sustain hyperawareness by negotiating the tension between performing the task and considering alternative approaches to it that might offer opportunities to further extend the investigation.

Tasks that can be used to extend the body-schema of the improvising dancer may be considered processes of *embodied cognition*.<sup>43</sup> A key theorist for the analysis of the first approach is philosopher Alva Noë who has been influential to Forsythe's creative practice. Noë conflates what he considers the activities of consciousness and dancing in interesting ways that build on Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology.<sup>44</sup> Noë suggests that

To move forward in our understanding of consciousness, we need to give up the internal, neural microfocus ... The locus of consciousness is the dynamic life of the whole, environmentally plugged-in person or animal. Indeed, it is only when we take up this holistic perspective on the active life of the person or animal that we can begin to make sense of the brain's contribution to conscious experience.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Ramsay Burt, *Judson Dance Theater: Performative Traces* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006), 67.

<sup>43</sup> For a thorough overview of current theories of embodied cognition see Lawrence Shapiro, *Embodied Cognition: New Problems of Philosophy* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 2010).

<sup>44</sup> See Alva Noë, *Action in Perception* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004) and Noë, *Out of Our Heads*.

<sup>45</sup> Noë, *Out of Our Heads*, xii.

Noë suggests that consciousness arises as the result of action and physical intersection with the world as an action of the body-subject in its environment rather than as an event that occurs in a specific site in the brain. A traditional approach to embodied cognition focuses on the interaction between the gross morphological sensorimotor function and cognition, which supports the theory of embodied consciousness as an activity of body-mind.

It might seem to be a great leap to consider consciousness as an interaction between the body-subject and *the world* but consider how these events might be separated. When we are not, to use Noë's term, *enactive* in the world, we are also not conscious.<sup>46</sup> As Noë says, "Consciousness is not something that happens inside us. It is something we do or make. Better: it is something we achieve. Consciousness is more like dancing than digestion."<sup>47</sup> Yet, to consider consciousness as an action or interrelationship between the body-mind and the world is to somewhat decentre the role of the brain within the action of consciousness. Although Noë's philosophy provides a compelling model for the idea of an embodied mind, one that has supported Forsythe's approach to improvisation practice, it is not central to this thesis that consciousness is, or is not, an event that is located in the brain.<sup>48</sup> Certainly, the brain has central importance to the biological system as a whole, but this does not mean that consciousness in the brain refutes the notion of body-mind. The traditional, morphologic approach to embodied consciousness that Noë describes could be categorised as *kinaesthetic* because it focuses on the engagement between the body-mind and the world. A kinaesthetic approach to embodied consciousness follows the main thrust of embodied cognitive science that questions the hierarchy that privileges the brain by providing models that show how the activity of the body reduces the load on brain processing. This model has been useful for Forsythe as an approach for contemporising ballet because it remains within the realm of form, but also extends the field through the heightened awareness of thinking through action.

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<sup>46</sup> *Enactive* is derived from Noë's term *enactivism*, which is used to describe his sensory motor theory of consciousness.

<sup>47</sup> Noë, *Out of Our Heads*, xii.

<sup>48</sup> While experimenting with epilepsy treatments in 2014, neuroscientist Mohamad Z. Koubeissi accidentally discovered that electrical stimulation to the claustrum caused unconsciousness in one case study. This event requires further research, but potentially contests part of Noë's argument that consciousness cannot be located within the brain. See Mohamed Koubeissi, Fabrice Bartolomei, Abdelrahman Beltagy, and Fabienne Picard, "Electrical Stimulation of a Small Brain Area Reversibly Disrupts Consciousness," *Epilepsy & Behavior* 37 (2014): 32–5.

Recall that the practice of self-reflexive dialogue is a way of *tuning* a body-mind instrument to become a method for producing movement (even if there is no task to enact) because approaching all movement with hyperawareness, as an inquiry, is one way an improviser can develop and refine their practice. Artists from different disciplines often capitalise on their imaginative capacities of self-reflective, mind-body hyperawareness; for example, writers and visual artists have benefited from the effect of synesthesia and imaginative associations. Similarly, developing the capacities of a body-mind as an instrument for hyperawareness, or extending the parameters of a body-schema, through specific practices of embodied consciousness, is an intriguing development in contemporary dance. If improvisers train their body-minds to tune into and invest in their impulsive sensations, which are circulating in both the body-mind and in space-time, they might begin to feel the subtle desires of *the body's mind* and allow these impulses to drive compositional movement choices. This means that rather than being the author of the improvisation, the improviser enters a state where their movements are composed by forces in circulation within the space and time of the improvisation.<sup>49</sup> Improvisation can therefore be understood as the processes of a) physicalising an imaginatively extended body-schema or task by thinking-through-the-body and/or b) perceiving the resonation of affects and how these forces motivate the desires of the body's mind to be expressed via movement.

### 3.4 The body's mind

The second type of embodied consciousness is more elusive than thinking-through-the-body. It is when the language-based *voice* of thinking is quiet enough that it is possible to observe the *mind* of the corporeality, or the feelings that Erin Brannigan described as “untranslatable.”<sup>50</sup> The term *feelings* is used here to include physical sensations perceived through *somesthesis* as well as emotional feelings, because as Bainbridge Cohen explains, emotions and memories are stored in the body-mind and can be therapeutically released through movement exploration.<sup>51</sup> Neuroscientist Antonio

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<sup>49</sup> This point is discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

<sup>50</sup> “Untranslatable” feelings are discussed earlier in relation to somatic intelligence. Erin Brannigan, “Moving Across Disciplines: Dance in the Twenty-First Century,” *Platform Papers*, no. 25 (2010): 13–4.

<sup>51</sup> Somesthesis is the sensory facilities of bodily perception via various systems of skin, sensorium, proprioception, and the somatosensory system. For more information on how emotions are stored or expressed through the body, see Bainbridge Cohen, 2012.

Damasio describes these phenomena as “somatic markers” of body memory.<sup>52</sup> However, they are described as **psycho-physical archives** here, following Todd’s and Alexander’s use of the term psycho-physical, and in recognition of their use as a potential archive of material in improvisation.<sup>53</sup> Psycho-physical archives perceptible in this state may be experienced as *felt ideas*, and include fragments of memory, emotions, sensations, and images. Improvisation practices privilege listening to the space or to one’s own inner world because if these felt ideas can be perceived it is possible to observe how the body can be moved by them rather than through thought-based cognition. Essentially, this state is described as the body’s mind because it is experienced via hearing-sensing the *intentions* of the flesh, therefore allowing a body to have a mind of its own, if by *mind* we mean intention and desire. In this state, also described as **no-mind**, thoughts do not interfere with the unfolding actions. What is specific about this level of embodied consciousness is that, first, it does not occur in a language-producing state, and second, it heightens the perception of the resonance affects to which I address in the next chapter.

Over the past seventy years, the humanities have worked to reposition the body in language practices and as a site of knowing. Yet a persistent problem for dance theory is the articulation of the corporeal knowledges that elude language. This is because, while the issue of language is most apparent, the root cause is the enduring legacy of Cartesian dualism embedded in our structures of language and thought that hierarchise the cognitive over the corporeal.<sup>54</sup> In contrast, somatic-based improvisational theory proposes body-mind integration and erases the hierarchy of dualism by emphasising the ways in which mind and body are interconnected. This is because improvisers focus their conscious awareness both on the information circulating in the sensorium, and the fact that this information informs patterns of thinking as a two-way flow within a unified system. The body’s mind is perceived through the sensorium and processed via computation activities of the brain and therefore the body effects what is thought, just as a body-schema can be reshaped through self-reflexive dialogue and imaging. *So*

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<sup>52</sup> Antonio Damasio, *Descartes’ Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (New York, NY: Putnam, 2003), 165.

<sup>53</sup> Michael Huxley, “F. Matthias Alexander and Mabel Elsworth Todd: Proximities, Practices and the Psycho-physical,” *Journal of Dance & Somatic Practice* 3, nos. 1/2 (2011): 25–42.

<sup>54</sup> There is considerable mention of the issues of dualism in somatic and dance theory. For an example that attends to the debate around somatics and dualism specifically, see Marie Bardet and Florencio Noceti, “With Descartes, Against Dualism,” trans. Jacqueline Cousineau, *Journal of Dance and Somatic Practices* 4, no. 2 (2012): 195–209.

*thinking also effects sensations in the body.* Tuning one's awareness to notice sensations can amplify one's experience of them, even potentially generating sensations through imagination. *The body is conversely able to influence thought.* Accounting for this two-way flow of language requires not only analysis of this activity by theorists with practical research expertise, but also some consideration of a philosophical model that might support the articulation of these practices.

The assumption that *cognitive* and *affective* activities of the brain exist separately is considered by philosopher Mog Stapleton to be a “hangover” from Cartesian dualism: “for the most part researchers interested in cognition ignored those aspects that ... were considered *subjective*” such as consciousness and affect.<sup>55</sup> Stapleton's approach to embodied cognition theory, which is described here as *integrated*, is based on a discovery that underlines the importance of the affective and motor registers in what was previously considered purely *cognitive* parts of the brain concerned with perception, memory, planning, decision making, and problem solving. Stapleton also critiques “standard” embodied cognitive science (focused on morphology) because

the body qua body does not play a special role; only the body in virtue of its ability to be a vehicle of computations. The result is that, although research in this paradigm is based on the role of the body in cognition, the body really is not the important factor.<sup>56</sup>

Stapleton's distinction brings up the question at the core of embodiment theory: is a *body* the physical form (with its kinaesthetic information effecting cognition) or is it a composite of thoughts, affects, and movements? This question necessitates that the problem of consciousness is addressed in some way: do we consciously *inhabit* our body or is our body conscious, and part of, that consciousness we consider *us*?

Stapleton describes a more recent shift towards a “properly embodied” theory of cognition, with the inclusion of the subjective and affective previously excluded from cognitive research.<sup>57</sup> She finds that the distinctions between what was traditionally

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<sup>55</sup> Mog Stapleton, “Steps to a ‘Properly Embodied’ Cognitive Science,” *Cognitive Systems Research* 22/23 (2013): 1.

<sup>56</sup> Stapleton, “Steps to a ‘Properly Embodied,” 2.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

understood to be the *cognitive*, *affective*, and *motor* parts of the brain are far less distinct in their functions than was previously thought.<sup>58</sup> She cites research by neuroscientists Damasio and Luiz Pessoa who have found that what was previously thought of as *cognitive* brain functions are actually far more integrated and could more accurately be described as *cognitive-affective-motor*. Damasio identifies the superior colliculus, which receives information from the retina and the visual cortex but, in addition, also contains “three varieties of maps – visual, auditory, and somatic.”<sup>59</sup> According to Damasio:

There is no other place in the brain where information available from vision, hearing and multiple aspects of the body states are so literally superposed, offering the prospect of efficient integration. [These maps are] stacked in such a precise way that the information available for one map for, say, vision, corresponds to the information on another map that is related to hearing or body state. The integration is made more significant by the fact that its results gain access to the motor system via the nearby structures in the periaqueductal grey as well as the cerebral cortex.<sup>60</sup>

Similarly, Pessoa proposes that “affect and cognition are mechanistically interdependent” because the amygdala, which is normally considered the affective region, is actually the hub of the brain’s network, indicating that emotion plays a key role in all *cognitive*, *motor*, and *sensory* functions.<sup>61</sup> He explains that the “amygdala is not an emotion module, but a brain circuit with *broad connectivity with the cortex and other subcortical structures* enabling it to play a modulatory role in multiple networks.”<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, Pessoa argues, emotion informs all “abstract dimensions of information processing, including the processing of salience, significance, ambiguity, unpredictability and other aspects of biological value.”<sup>63</sup> This means that emotional processing is a key factor in determining the decisions or movements that are made in order to support homeostasis. In other words, a decision is made to reach towards something because there is a desire to do so, or because of associated good feelings, for example, to reach towards water

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<sup>58</sup> Stapleton’s use of the term *affect* here relates to its use in cognitive science, which is closer to its use in psychology to refer to emotions.

<sup>59</sup> Antonio Damasio, *Self Comes to Mind: Constructing the Conscious Brain* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 2010), 84.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>61</sup> Stapleton, “Steps to a ‘Properly Embodied,’” 8.

<sup>62</sup> Luiz Pessoa and Ralph Adolphs, “Emotion Processing and the Amygdala: From a ‘Low Road’ to ‘Many Roads’ of Evaluating Biological Significance,” *Nature Reviews: Neuroscience* 11, no. 11 (2010): 780; Stapleton, “Steps to a ‘Properly Embodied,’” 9.

<sup>63</sup> Stapleton, “Steps to a ‘Properly Embodied,’” 9.

when one is thirsty. Therefore, emotion always motivates motion and/or cognition at a fundamental level.<sup>64</sup>

Rolf therapist Hubert Godard, a movement theorist who lucidly articulates haptic bodily states as an extension of his practice, also draws on neurophysiologic research that identifies two “levels of analyzers” effecting the senses in ways that allow the subject to experience objective or subjective senses of self.<sup>65</sup> His example uses the sense of sight, but he explains that any sense can be processed with these two levels of consciousness awareness. Godard explains that

the first can be qualified as subcortical vision. It is a form of vision in which the person blends into the context. There is no longer a subject and an object but a participation in a general context. That form of vision is not interpreted, therefore, it does not bear meaning ... And then, if we go in the opposite direction of this vision, we have objective, cortical, associative vision ... that is associated with language amongst other things.<sup>66</sup>

Given the difficulty of articulating some experiences of improvising, it is not surprising that many improvisational sensory experiences are processed at the subcortical level which defies the processing of language. As Godard explains, the subcortical sensory level does not *bear meaning*, so writing about this language-resistant experience is a complex undertaking that is necessarily reductive.<sup>67</sup>

At this level of embodied consciousness, a body-mind has a greater perception of the subtleties of a body-mind’s (affective) *tonus* through the forces of psycho-physical archives in the viscera and neuromuscular system in part influencing the desire to move or not. Even the passive activity of *releasing* the tonus of body-mind can generate an

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<sup>64</sup> This also happens at the subcortical level as has been found in Damasio’s Iowa Gambling Task. See Damasio, *Descartes’ Error*.

<sup>65</sup> Hubert Godard and Suely Rolnik, “Blindsight,” in *Peripheral Vision & Collective Body*, ed. Corinne Dissens (Bolzano: Museion, Hatje Cantz, 2008), 178–9.

<sup>66</sup> Godard further explains that subcortical sensing “is beyond objective sight, which is geographic or spatial; vision which is not connected to time or, in any case, is not connected to memory, which is not connected to the history of the subject.” Godard and Rolnik, “Blindsight,” 178–9.

<sup>67</sup> Kent De Spain has developed some useful methods for collecting information about subjective experiences while improvising. See Kent De Spain, “The Cutting Edge of Awareness,” in *Taken by Surprise: A Dance Improvisation Reader*, eds. Ann Cooper Albright and David Gere (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2003), 26–9.



effervescent sensation of pleasure that sparkles through the body's nerve pathways.<sup>68</sup> Phenomena perceptible at this level of the body's mind are *ideas* that are felt rather than thought as fragments of memory, emotions, and images. Non-dancers may also be familiar with these felt ideas that can occur in the form of an inner *song* or *story* that arises in one's awareness while daydreaming. The music that is *heard* may not be sensed aurally but felt as the rise and fall of the *melody* of movement arising from the breath and the (subtle) shifts in the (affective) tonus of the flesh, which H'Doubler describes, in the previous chapter, as central to dancing. Similarly, the *stories* may not have a narrative *per se* but are rather experienced as body-mind sensations that unfold as a kind of *journey* through a sensory landscape. These sensations can become threads of interest when felt/listened to, for example, they can build to a crescendo or decrescendo imbued with feelings of desire or aversion, providing an internal source of improvisational material. Using imagery or tasks to extend the body-schema may also amplify these sensations through imaginative intention, which may motivate a body-mind instrument to be *played* or *danced* by the forces in circulation.<sup>69</sup>

The practice that encourages the perception of the body's mind, which can be registered at the subcortical level of consciousness, requires an attentive engagement or listening to what is motivating the body-mind's capacity to act. The notion of mysterious *inspiration* in dance as coming from the artist-genius (which has been largely overturned) has little application here in that it fails to recognise that it is the self-reflexive process that is the labour of preparing the improvising instrument to physicalise the sudden *inspiration* of a strongly charged desire to move. Karczag describes her experience of a listening state:

I feel there is a relationship between opening body-mind to release free-flowing energy and following the impulse that rises from somewhere deep within. I, too, experience movement from this place as being moved ... energy and space, a

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<sup>68</sup> Riley Watts spoke of a controversial neologism known as autonomous sensory meridian response (ASMR), which is used in popular culture to describe a pleasant tingling sensation, or *head orgasm*, which is triggered by various stimuli such as whispering or gentle touch. The ASMR experience may be similar to the pleasure of *releasing* the neuromusculature needed to perceive the body's mind.

<sup>69</sup> Former Forsythe dancer Michael Schumacher also describes another level of consciousness used in improvisation which he calls "conscious presence." He says conscious presence can be accessed through the senses while listening and observing on the cellular level, and "experiencing without associating ... it's not naming, not analysing. It's not rational at all. It's simply sensing." Nalina Wait, "Listening with My Skin, Bones, Organs, Eyes," *Real Time Arts* 123 (2014): 24.

listening state, movement everywhere, inside and outside, infinitely. For me, deeply sourced movement happens when I can get out of the way of my preconceptions and habitual patterns.<sup>70</sup>

While Karczag describes the impulse as arising from somewhere “deep within,” this happens because she has cultivated those sensations to arise as a habit, by *undoing* other more *self-determining* habits. She has also invested in the practice enough to know that what is needed is for her to get *out of the way*, that is, to allow her body’s mind to have agency. As an artist whose practice has been deeply informed by somatics, Karczag is a perennial advocate for pleasure while dancing. She says of her work, whether in rehearsal or performance, that she aims

... to play lightly. With complete absorption, utter conviction, and intense pleasure, I enter and inhabit emergent worlds of the imagination and abandon myself to the physical delight of moving.<sup>71</sup>

The subtle negotiation of improvisation operates most effectively when the practice invokes *pleasure* and a *desire* to move. While the traditional practice of dance can be extremely enjoyable, it is also routinely willed into existence through the force of the professional dancer’s self-discipline. While there is certainly a level of pleasure involved in performing feats of technical virtuosity, in a professional working situation it is also necessary to perform when one has no desire to. Yet, sustainably generating curiosity and inventiveness in response to a task cannot be imposed on the dancer in the way of traditional discipline. In order to nurture curiosity within the body-mind to engage in a movement inquiry, a response to a task must be *invited* rather than demanded. In the case of thinking-through-the-body, framing a directive as a task to be investigated creates a gap between the provocation and the response that the dancer must fill by actively extending towards the task, with an effort buoyed up by the pleasure of discovering the outcome of their labour. For this to happen it is most effective if *pleasure* is built into the practice: a body-mind may experience a charge of gratification while enacting a response to the task, so that an improviser might relish the opportunity of further tasks.

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<sup>70</sup> Aileen Crow and Paula Sager, “These Dances Rise Up: An Interview with Eva Karczag,” *A Moving Journal* (2006): 8.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

Fortunately, embodied consciousness can become more pleasurable the more it is practiced by releasing tension following somatic practices and allowing pleasure to activate the desire to dance. However, at least initially, becoming consciously aware of one's body-mind can be surprisingly painful because muscular relaxation reveals the unnecessary tension that goes unnoticed by the sensorium in everyday life, bringing to light unacknowledged habits of holding. Therefore, as a starting point, releasing tension is *essential* to developing the capacity to sense the body's mind. Over time, releasing tension creates a wave of pleasure that invites desire into the creative process, and so self-reflexively noticing if there is any unnecessary or unconsciously held tension in the body is useful for allowing the body to sense the pleasure of release. It is also another situation whereby the first type of embodied consciousness described above conflates somewhat with the second.

When being moved by *the body's mind*, there is no need for self-reflexive dialogue, because both language-based thoughts and the need to achieve an outcome dissolve. The only task is to enact the physical expression of the body-mind, which is felt in the *tone* of the muscle and organ tissues and in the desirous and intentional sensations of the flesh. The desire of a body's mind for movement can be physicalised directly, which effectively bypasses the process by which these impulses might consolidate into thoughts or be experienced as emotions; for example, enacting a strong urge to curl inwards, to run, or to suddenly leap, or to unfold the body through a whole sequence of movements. If the body's mind is attended to, then the impulses can become very clear, whether they feel loud and intense, or quiet and diffuse. An attempt to faithfully articulate this level of conscious embodiment would perhaps sound/feel like a hum of vibrations that is felt as *intensities*, or affective resonances in body-mind, a phenomenon that is most commonly described in philosophical terms via affect theory.

The seventeenth-century monist philosopher Benedict de Spinoza first defined the term *affect* in his *Ethics*: “by affect I understand affections of the body by which the body's power of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained, and at the same time, the ideas of these affections.”<sup>72</sup> Spinoza's definition of affect is useful here as a way to

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<sup>72</sup> Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. Edwin Curley (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1996), 94.

theorise phenomena that have not yet landed in the body-mind as an emotion, or conceptualised cognitively as an idea, but may be perceived in the way that impacts the body's power to act. It is at the subcortical level of embodied consciousness that an improviser is more capable of perceiving the resonance of affect to empower or disempower the body to act. Similarly, impulses are perceptible at the level of the body-mind but can also be felt across the space by different people simultaneously, resulting in serendipitous moments of complementary action because, importantly, and as will be discussed in the following chapter, affect is not individualist but always shared and in circulation.<sup>73</sup> Becoming responsive to impulses is a core feature of improvisation, as it is what propels an improviser into a course of action despite not knowing exactly what that action might lead to.<sup>74</sup> If impulses are to be considered a result of the circulation of affect between and within bodies, then the theorisation of improvisation through the lens of affect theory might offer useful models for thinking through a compositional logic that can otherwise be difficult to grasp.<sup>75</sup>

Spinoza's theory of affect has enjoyed a revival in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, becoming a stimulating point of philosophical debate, particularly in relation to encountering art. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari describe affect in relation to martial arts, which is useful here, as a comparison can be made between improvised dance and martial arts in that both practices rely on the immediate responsiveness of the practitioner:

the martial arts do not adhere to a *code* . . . but follow *ways*, which are so many paths of the affect: upon these ways, one learns to 'unuse' weapons as much as one

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<sup>73</sup> Lisa Blackman explains that affect is "characterised more by reciprocity and co-participation." Lisa Blackman, *Immaterial Bodies: Affect, Embodiment, Mediation* (London: Sage Publications, 2012), 2. See also Erin Manning and Brian Massumi, *Thought in the Act: Passages in the Ecology of Experience* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2014a); and Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affects* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2007).

<sup>74</sup> McCormack clarifies that "affective spaces are nonrepresentational: that is, their force does not necessarily cross a threshold of cognitive representation." McCormack, 4.

<sup>75</sup> Dance theorist Philipa Rothfield theorises the ethics of improvisation via the lens of Spinoza's philosophy, which is addressed in Chapter Four *Resonance of Affects and Immanent Evaluation*. In short, she proposes that with "nothing to hold onto, striving nevertheless to maximize the body's active affections, dancing could be conceived as an ethical endeavour par excellence." Philipa Rothfield, "Embracing the Unknown, Ethics and Dance," in *Ethics and the Arts*, ed. Paul Macneill (Amsterdam: Springer, 2014), 91.

learns to use them, as if the power and cultivation of the affect were the true goal of the assemblage.<sup>76</sup>

If we think of improvisation not as a *code*, or as not codified (or as not a form), but as *ways* to unuse or undo dancing, we reveal the *formless* currents or forces underneath the movement that motivate it. Improvisers often emphasise the importance of *listening* to the space and *being in the moment* because that is when the resonance of affects in the body-mind can best be perceived. Listening is important because, while affect is a powerful motivator, the perception of the resonance of affects is very subtle and can easily be ignored or overridden by a cognitive or language-based *voice* that can pull an improviser's consciousness away from the perception of the felt phenomena and towards a conceptual idea. Listening is, for improvisation, one of the ways one learns to approach a performance with an empty hand (without a *weapon*) or, in other words, without conceptualising how the improvisation will unfold. This is part of the *undisciplined* discipline of consciously embodying the body's mind, suspending a state of subcortical awareness, not by resisting language-based cognition but through maintaining a physical-mental state of *empty-handedness*.

### 3.5 Conclusion

Teasing apart the specifics of these types of embodied consciousness assists the examination of the subtle but important influences they have on compositional approaches to improvisation. These types of embodied consciousness create the possibility for a movement inquiry that is textural, directional, and founded on qualitative sensations. This approach reframes the idea of *composition* from one based on formal logic to one based on fluctuating affective intensities. Furthermore, this process creates space for the dancer's somatic intelligence to make decisions as to how the dance will unfold as it is happening. Usually, both types of embodied consciousness operate in a constant state of flux during an improvisation, each providing currency at different moments in the dance, although some methods of improvising preference one state over the other. As these states of embodiment operate on different levels of perception, the distinction between them is subtle, and dancers already completely

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<sup>76</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Continuum, 1987); Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 442.

engaged with the complex task of improvising may or may not notice that they are weaving between different states of embodied consciousness as they dance.

These states have become known to me and therefore are identified here because I have observed, investigated, and now employ a bifurcation of embodied consciousness in my practice. For example, by engaging with an external task I can activate the curiosity of my body-mind to *think-through-the-body* to attend to a movement puzzle, particularly if it is complex or difficult to achieve. At other times, the desire of *the body's mind* feels stronger, and if I passively allow it to be the source of movement, then my thinking mind *slips back* or *swims* in sensorium and observes the dance as it unfolds. Suggesting a bifurcation of embodied consciousness seems to propose – falsely – that the way in which these states fluctuate is straightforward. In fact, this analysis isolates a small section of what is actually a highly complex matrix of interconnected elements, where the hyperawareness of thinking-through-the-body becomes a framework to support and stimulate the desire of the body's mind to ebb and flow, or to surge as a kind of *spontaneous inspiration*. Composing an improvised performance is rarely a matter of drawing from a clearly defined palette of elements or of carefully considering how they might juxtapose or work together to form a coherent whole. In my own experience, improvisation as an art-making practice has more to do with *holding the tension* along a spectrum of perception, sensing the resonation of affect, and seeking to amplify the affects in circulation in a way that is as authentic to the current space and time as possible.

In my own practice, the passive activity of releasing muscular tension described earlier reduces physical resistance and mental attachment to cortical cognition, which increases my perception of my body's mind. At times, my desire to move is intensified by the effort of performing a specified task in an innovative way (thinking-through-the-body). At other times, my desire for movement is supported by the pleasure of following the *sensory melody* of the shifting tonus in the flesh (the body's mind).<sup>77</sup> Most often, it is a fluctuating combination of the two, but in all cases, what motivates movement is desire. This includes complicated kinds of desire such as that which seeks the joy of effort,

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<sup>77</sup> Spinoza explains that “often as we recollect a thing – even though it does not actually exist – we still regard it as present, and the body is affected in the same way [NS: as if it were present].” Spinoza, *Ethics*, 94.

which might not literally be felt as *joy* but emerges through the thrill of challenging oneself physically and mentally or achieving a state of *flow* through the balance of effort, challenge, and freedom.<sup>78</sup> It is equally possible that aversion can be a motivating impulse for making compositional *choices* in an improvisation; although, without intending to devalue any other approach, I choose to focus here on improvised performance that does not deliberately evade the spectacle, or tropes, of dancing and therefore, for me, virtuosity is a valid compositional option.

Desire and aversion, according to Spinoza, are affects that empower or disempower the body-mind's capacity to act. Furthermore, he points out that contrary to Descartes' assertion that humans have "absolute control over [their] actions, and that [they are] determined solely by [themselves]," humans are actually motivated, consciously or unconsciously, by what affects them.<sup>79</sup> Spinoza observes "man's lack of power to moderate and restrain the affects I call bondage."<sup>80</sup> Therefore, his *Ethics* is concerned with ways to be *free of human bondage* by understanding the power of affect and gaining agency through self-reflection: a conscious awareness of the unification of the body-mind.<sup>81</sup> Similarly, thinking-through-the-body and the body's mind are ways to work with affect as a medium of improvisation, actively/passively directing (amplifying) or being directed by its effects. Allowing the improvisation to be composed by the circulation of affect is a delicate but incredibly useful improvisation *technique*, as it situates improvisers within an immanent context where they can allow

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<sup>78</sup> Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Optimal Experience: Psychological Studies of Flow in Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

<sup>79</sup> Spinoza, *Ethics*, 51.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 113

<sup>81</sup> North American Buddhist meditation practices must also be mentioned here because they were an important influence on pioneering North American improvisers working with both dance and music. For further information, see Kay Larson, *Where the Heart Beats: John Cage, Zen Buddhism, and the Inner Life of Artists* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2012). North American Buddhism, first introduced to America by D. T. Suzuki, is distinct from other types of Buddhism. However, the aim of, for example, Vipassanā meditation is different from improvisation because, while they both practice using the body-mind as an instrument for observing the resonance of the circulation of affect, improvisers aim to act as a conduit for the resonance of affects, whereas meditators attempt to observe them with a detached equanimity. Therefore, while improvisation shares with meditation the practice of observation, the purpose of observation in improvisation is to amplify rather than mitigate the power of affect. In this sense improvisation deviates from Buddhist spiritual practice for the purposes of making immediate and affecting art. This difference is noted by dance theorist Martha Eddy, and is distinguished by her as either *mind-body* (meditation that aims to quiet the mind) or *body-mind* (physical portal to consciousness). Martha Eddy, *Mindful Movement: The Evolution of the Somatic Arts and Conscious Action* (Bristol: Intellect, 2016), 12.

the composition and themselves to be danced by the circulation of affect, which is discussed in the next chapter.



## Chapter Four

### *Resonance of Affects and Immanent Evaluation*

#### 4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter described the ways in which an individual might practice an inwardly focused embodied consciousness, building on dance theorist Susan Leigh Foster's key term for the development of a kind of consciousness central to the activity of a broad variety of improvisation practices.<sup>1</sup> Importantly, Foster emphasises the orientation of an improviser's **hyperawareness** within a broader context by stating that "this body, instigator as well as responsive, grounds the development of consciousness as a hyperawareness of relationalities."<sup>2</sup> In theatre and performance, the collective labour is directed towards the cultivation of specific affecting intensities by, among, and between human and non-human **bodies**: the performers, the audience, any objects present, and the space they share. In a conventional performance, all participants (performers, musicians, technicians, designers, and even the audience) agree to manifest an event that is as close as possible to the author's original vision. For the most part, the communication flows through established and predictable channels. Once it is over, the audience leave having received some part of the meaning the artists intended to transmit, and the artists have a sense of how the audience responded to their offering based on their applause and attention. The labour of an improvised performance is considerably more subtle and unstable because the channels of communication between artist and audience are constantly open to re-negotiation.

In an improvised performance it is difficult to identify if the impetus, content, or compositional choices originate from the body-mind of the artists involved, or from the presence of the audience, or even from the performative space; it often involves all of these bodies and more. Furthermore, the artists may have no pre-conceived notion of the meaning they intend to transmit before it is transmitted, and as a result, any established hierarchies within the artist–audience contract can be deconstructed or dissolved. In many cases the source and meaning of the work are the actions that are occurring as

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<sup>1</sup> Susan Leigh Foster, *Dances That Describe Themselves: The Improvised Choreography of Richard Bull* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2002), 243.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

they happen. For example, Eva Karczag describes a moment shared while improvising with a group in Arnhem:

We often start out working individually then there is certain point where people begin to connect quickly and things start to happen between people, then involving the whole group. At one point I saw two people standing in my field of vision. They happened to be moving very slowly and suddenly I hooked into the slow-motion movement that was happening. At the end, one of the women said that it felt very potent. It felt like something very strong was going on. It wasn't nameable necessarily, but it felt like one of those intangible things happening that while doing it felt incredibly powerful and I wondered if a sense of that power would show up on video or not? Often, I feel that something has a deep resonance for me it will be more hands on. So if there's some kind of emotional touch that I felt through it, then it will feel more satisfying because I feel that I contacted other layers of ways of perceiving, or that which has emerged as movement has risen from a different from maybe a more complex place/space.<sup>3</sup>

As Karczag explains, there is an extension of the practice of listening to or sensing one's own internal sensations, which was described in the previous chapter, to include ways of *listening to the space* (oneself, each other, and the audience) that increases the perception of the interconnectivity and relationality between human (and non-human) bodies. Potentially, as is the case for Karczag here, it is possible to notice a sensation of deep resonance through a relational engagement that is palpable to those who witness it, yet can be difficult to describe. As a progression from the previous chapter, this chapter develops improvisational theory by focusing on the relational aspect of hyperawareness that occurs via encounters between human and non-human bodies within the conditions of improvised performance events, and how developing relational hyperawareness affects the composition of an improvisation.

The relational aspect of dance is a primary interest for a growing number of dance theorists, such as anthropologist Georgiana Gore who argues for an ethnographic approach to dance theory that moves beyond Rudolf Laban's notion of "movement in time and place, and the body as an instrument."<sup>4</sup> Gore suggests that dancing instead be

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<sup>3</sup> Eva Karczag, interview by the author, Arnhem, Netherlands, 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Quote taken from DanceHE media release email, November 16, 2016 to promote Georgiana Gore's

considered “the art of relations, a social space for the enactment of worlds past and for the invention of worlds to come.”<sup>5</sup> Dance theorist Laurence Louppe also emphasises the centrality of relations to composition, explaining that “a choreographer must find everything in her/himself and the specific relation to the other. Establishing this relation is also already part of the work of composition.”<sup>6</sup> In a dance performance the relationship between bodies is always compositional, but a relational hyperawareness between bodies is an especially important aspect of sensing the forces in circulation between bodies in an improvised performance, as it is the method through which participants co-create a composition in real time via non-verbal communication.

Articulating the relational process of composing improvisation requires a re-conceptualisation of the conventional artist–audience contract described above, to one that locates the circulation of forces as the primary medium affecting all participants or bodies (including the audience and the space) who co-contribute to the event. Therefore, this chapter applies affect theory as a model to articulate the ever-fluctuating channels of communication operating in a space-time of improvised performance. This is useful because, as affect theorist Andrew Murphie explains:

Affects make up the relations within the temporary worlds we are constantly creating, and by which we are constantly being created. Affect involves the moment-to-moment question of being in the world, in all its constant change.<sup>7</sup>

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paper, “An Anthropological Passage from the Body to Dance,” which was presented at Roehampton University, 2016/2017. <http://roehamptondance.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Roehampton-Centre-for-Dance-Research-events-2016-17.pdf> Erin Manning has also made a major contribution to theories of relationality in dance. Erin Manning, *Politics of Touch: Sense, Movement, Sovereignty* (Minneapolis, MN and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2006). See also the chapter on dance in the book she co-authored with Brian Massumi, “Just Like That, William Forsythe: Between Movement and Language,” in *Thought in the Act: Passages in the Ecology of Experience* (Minneapolis, MN and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

<sup>5</sup> Gore, “An Anthropological Passage.”

<sup>6</sup> Laurence Louppe, *Poetics of Contemporary Dance*, trans. Sally Gardener (Southwold: Dance Books, 2010), 178.

<sup>7</sup> Here Murphie is following Félix Guattari’s proposal that turning away from science allows for a deeper understanding of affect. Guattari says, “Affect is a process of existential appropriation through the continual creation of heterogeneous durations of being and, given this, we would certainly be better advised to cease treating it under the aegis of scientific paradigms and to deliberately turn ourselves towards ethical and aesthetic paradigms.” Félix Guattari, in Gary Genosko (ed.) *The Guattari Reader* (Oxford, UK: Wiley Blackwell Readers, 1996), 159. Andrew Murphie’s translation in *Affect a Basic Summary of Approaches*, accessed November 24, 2016, <http://www.andrewmurphie.org/blog/?p=93>.

Importantly, affect *speaks* directly to and through a body-mind and therefore finds a unique/special expression via the non-lingual modality of dance. Improvised dance exposes the process of how relational actions affect, and are affected by, proximal bodies through the composition of temporary worlds that are created by the participants who are in turn created by it. Whether improvisers are aware of it or not, their practice is preoccupied by an immense and overwhelming phenomenon occurring beneath the veil of conscious awareness; that which may never be completely comprehended is also the mundane fabric of our everyday existence. This research seeks to articulate the subtleties of sensing the slivers of the resonance of affects that may be perceived, as Karczag suggests, hinting at the complexity and interplay of affective forces in circulation.

This chapter contributes to dance theory through an original theorisation of improvisation practice using models of affect theory to describe the ways in which an improviser might increase their capacity to perceive the resonance of affects, and therefore how the force of affects can potentially compose improvisation via the instrument of the body-mind **automaton**. Furthermore, this chapter addresses how improvisers create meaning through the tone of their body as an expression of style and how composition is evaluated immanently within an improvisational context. Therefore, understanding how the circulation of affects is theorised is central to the methodology of this chapter. Social theorist and philosopher Brian Massumi uses the concept of affect “as a way of talking about that margin of manoeuvrability, the ‘where we might be able to go and what we might be able to do’ in every present situation.”<sup>8</sup> He explains: “When you affect something, you are at the same time opening yourself up to being affected in turn, and in a slightly different way than you might have been the moment before.”<sup>9</sup> Further:

A body’s ability to affect or be affected – its charge of affect – isn’t something fixed. So depending on the circumstances, it goes up and down gently like a tide, or maybe storms and crests like a wave, or at times simply bottoms out. It’s

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<sup>8</sup> Mary Zournazi, “Interview with Brian Massumi” (2007), accessed August 26, year?, <http://www.cristinarizzo.it/img/Sagra.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

because this is all attached to the movements of the body that it can't be reduced to emotion.<sup>10</sup>

Affect theory is used in the following to describe in detail how the circulation of affective intensities or forces is transferred into action, or is enacted, by an improviser. Awareness of this process may help an improviser to develop a hyperawareness of their relational interconnectivity and notice how the effects of habit impact the development of hyperawareness, thereby increasing their capacity to be affected and affecting.

#### **4.2 Affect and improvisation**

The use of affect theory as a theoretical framework for articulating the ways in which the presence of other bodies can affect an improviser, by stimulating impulses or sensations arising in an improviser's body-mind, is a burgeoning area of interest among dance theorists.<sup>11</sup> Defining the use of the term *affect* is necessary as there is an array of affect theories operating across diverse fields of knowledge, and as a notion it is heterogeneous and unstable in nature. The theory of affect referred to in the following pertains to philosophical, rather than medical or psychological, theories, although they are related. As noted earlier, philosophical theories of affect propose that what motivates an individual's feelings, thoughts, and emotions is shaped by affective forces in circulation within, around, and (most importantly) between, self and others. These forces are relational in that they influence not only one's own body-mind but also operate beyond subjectivity. Therefore, the rationale for the use of affect theory here is that it offers a conceptual framework to articulate the hyperawareness of relationalities involved in improvisation.

Both the concept of affect and a Western interpretation of body-mind were originally proposed by the seventeenth-century philosopher Benedict de Spinoza in his *Ethics*.<sup>12</sup> Philosophers and affect theorists such as Henri Bergson, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Massumi, Lisa Blackman, Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, Teresa

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> See current themes within this burgeoning field of affect theory in improvisation via Philipa Rothfield, "Embracing the Unknown, Ethics and Dance," in *Ethics and the Arts*, ed. Paul Macneill (Amsterdam: Springer, 2014), 89–98, "Relay: Choreography and Corporeality," in *Choreography and Corporeality: Relay in Motion*, eds. Thomas F. DeFrantz and Philipa Rothfield (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); and Paula Guzzanti, "I-reflexes: The Affective Implications of Bodies in Dance Improvisation Performance," *PARTake: The Journal of Performance as Research* 1, no. 2 (2017).

<sup>12</sup> Benedictus de Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. William Hale White (London: Wordsworth Editions, 2001), xix.

Brennan, and Kathleen Stewart have contributed to this field through their theorisation of affect.<sup>13</sup> The primarily philosophical lineage followed here is Massumi's reading of Deleuze and Spinoza, along with the mobilisation of Spinoza's original definition: "by affect I understand affections of the body by which the body's power of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained."<sup>14</sup> The visceral and tonal qualities that are invoked via Spinoza's description the "body's power of acting" are suggestive of **impulses** sensed by the body-mind during an improvisation. This chapter mobilises theory to articulate how affect operates as an active and passive, integrating or disintegrating force in circulation, within and between (human and non-human) bodies in an improvised performance.

As a way to locate the notion of forces in circulation, Massumi describes affect as "intensity," emphasising its "irreducibly bodily and autonomic" nature.<sup>15</sup> In particular, he stresses the importance of differentiating between affect and emotion, declaring the former as "unqualified ... not ownable or recognizable and is thus resistant to critique."<sup>16</sup> Gregg and Seigworth proffer the following definition:

Affect, at its most anthropomorphic, is the name we give to those forces – visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally *other than* conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion – that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension, that can likewise suspend us (as if in neutral) across a barely registering accretion of force-relations, or that can even leave us overwhelmed by the world's apparent intractability.<sup>17</sup>

The description of affect as "visceral forces" speaks to the experience of improvisation, in which the impulse to move is not clearly motivated from an emotion or a language-based thought, but sensed as tonal, bodily intensities in response to the current situation

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<sup>13</sup> See Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2002); Lisa Blackman, *Immaterial Bodies: Affect, Embodiment, Mediation* (Los Angeles, CA and London: Sage Publications, 2012); Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, eds., *The Affect Theory Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); Teresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004); and Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affects* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2007).

<sup>14</sup> Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. Edwin Curley (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1996), 70.

<sup>15</sup> Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, 28.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Gregg and Seigworth, *The Affect Theory Reader*, 1.

that is in a constant state of flux.<sup>18</sup> These slivers of surging impulse are often what an improviser uses to motivate spontaneous choices and, therefore, to a certain extent, they determine the shape, flow, and intensity of how an improvisation is composed. However, as Gregg and Seigworth highlight, if these forces are not perceivable via conscious awareness, then how is it that (non-perceptible) affect propels action within the body-mind of a dancer?

Massumi suggests that while affect is imperceptible in that it operates outside conscious awareness, it is possible to perceive the process of bodily resonance that occurs as a result, described as the resonance of affects. He explains:

With the body, the ‘walls’ are sensory surfaces. The intensity is experience. The emptiness or in-betweenness filled by experience is the **incorporeal** dimension of the body referred to earlier. The conversion of surface distance into intensity is also the conversion of the materiality of the body into an *event*. This is a relay between its corporeal and incorporeal dimensions.<sup>19</sup>

Massumi proposes that it is the (plural) effects of (plural) affects, which are pre-cognitive and/or pre-emotional, yet perceptible in the event in that they may be registered sensorially as fluctuating intensities of affects resonating the body-mind.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, through the hyperaware practice of embodied consciousness of the body’s mind, improvisers can increase their capacity to perceive the resonance of affects and be enacted by them as an improvising automaton, because affective resonance is the pull of intention that propels an impulse to move. To put it simply, as affects resonate within and between bodies and *cause them to act*, the body-mind instrument of an improviser is therefore *played* by the *medium* of affects.

By deploying theories of affect, this chapter seeks to a) articulate the relational process of hyperawareness in improvisation, b) describe how affective resonance is experienced through the sensed tone of both a body and the space, c) argue that the tonality of relations is of pivotal importance to the composition of improvisation, and d)

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> *Event* is italicised in the original but incorporeal is in bold to indicate its inclusion in the glossary. Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, 14.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

demonstrate the way in which affect could be considered a medium of improvised dance. Corporeal tonal qualities are discussed in the following using dance theorist Laban's notion of style, as his theory describes how the values evident in the rhythm and effort of one's movement are a result of a dancer's "inner attitude."<sup>21</sup> This includes Louppe's description of how the (rhythmical and effort-based) subtext of a dancer's movement style impacts upon a spectator's sensibility as the primary mode of communication in dance, a mode that can also be its meaning.<sup>22</sup>

Finally, I propose that the way in which preformed improvisation is assessed requires reimagining in a way that is appropriate to its mode of communication, as models for assessing conventional theatre are less relevant to improvisation. I then address this issue by deploying sociologist and philosopher Antonio Negri's interpretation of Spinoza's notion of immanent evaluation in which affect is a form of judgement.<sup>23</sup> This idea opens further questions regarding the ways in which dance expresses the current worldview circulating within what Louppe describes as "contemporary consciousness," and informs a map for an original conceptualisation of the construction of meaning in the performance of improvisation.<sup>24</sup>

In *Ethics*, Spinoza posits a model of ethical behaviour rooted in the realisation of our integration within the world that contrasts and refutes the anthropocentrism that dominates Western philosophy. While improvisation and somatics have been heavily influenced by Eastern philosophy, Spinoza's philosophy is used here as a lens for conceptualising and articulating a practice that refutes dualism while operating in a culture that embraces it. Spinoza's philosophy is a rich source of conceptual models through which to articulate the practices of improvisation, in addition to the notion of affect in circulation. Therefore, this section of the chapter summarises several key ideas

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<sup>21</sup> Dance theorist Rudolf von Laban's work is attended to here primarily via Louppe. The aspect of his work referred to here is his theory of *Tanztheater* as "the site of a historical consciousness of human action" (1924–1927). Louppe, *Poetics of Contemporary Dance*, 89.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Spinoza posited the notion of the divine immanence of a Pantheistic Nature/God, in contrast to a transcendent Judeo-Christian God. Antonio Negri expanded on Spinoza's notion that affect was the only form of judgement in *Savage Anomaly: The Power of Spinoza's Metaphysics and Politics*, trans. Michael Hardt (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1999). Deleuze has also utilised immanent evaluation, drawing on the work of Nietzsche and Spinoza's notion of immanence, and linking it to Antonin Artaud's film *Pour en finir avec le jugement de Dieu* (1947) (To put an end to the judgement of God) in his book, *Pure Immanence: Essays on A Life*, trans. Anne Boyman (Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books, 2005).

<sup>24</sup> Louppe, *Poetics of Contemporary Dance*, 9.



of Spinoza's that may be useful for improvisation theory, including the non-hierarchical relation of body-mind, the relative capacity of various bodies to perceive the resonation of affects, and the possibility of developing this capacity. Then, following Massumi's associated notion that the nature of consciousness is subtractive, I consider how this idea meets Hubert Godard's explanation of senses experienced from a *subcortical* state of being that was examined in the previous chapter.

Central to Spinoza's philosophy is his (monist) description of a singular substance as "God *or* Nature" within which the attributes of mind and body (thought and extension) are unified, according to philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, through *non-causal parallelism*.<sup>25</sup> Spinoza proposes that the mind and the body are not distinct substances, but are "one and the same thing, expressed two ways."<sup>26</sup> However, Deleuze goes on to explain that Spinoza's originality in thinking is not only in his conception of parallelism, but also in the distinct lack of hierarchy in the relationship between body and mind. Thus, there is an

identity of 'connection' between the two series (*isonomy* or *equivalence*), that is, an equal valence, and equality of principle, between extension and thought, between what occurs in one and in the other. In terms of the Spinozian critique of all eminence, of all transcendence and equivocality, no attribute is superior to one another, none is reserved for the creator, none is relegated to the created beings and to their imperfections. Thus, the series of the body and the series of the mind present not only the same order but the same chain of connections under equal principles.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> (IV/II/207) Spinoza, *Ethics*, 114. The term *parallelism* was coined by philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716) to describe, according to Deleuze, "his own system without real causality, where the series of the body and the series of the mind are modelled rather on the asymptote and on projection." Deleuze used Leibniz's notion of parallelism to describe the unity (without hierarchy) of Spinoza's Body-Mind. See Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, trans. Robert Hurley (San Francisco, CA: City Lights Books, 1970), 87–8.

<sup>26</sup> (IIP7S) Spinoza, *Ethics*, 35. Professor of Philosophy and Spinoza scholar Blake D. Dutton further illuminates Spinoza's notion of parallelism of body and mind in that it "ensures that ideas and bodies, though casually independent, are casually parallel." He goes on to explain, "(1) for each simple body there exists a simple idea that corresponds to it and from which it is not really distinct, and (2) for each composite body there exists a composite idea that corresponds to it and from which it is not really distinct, composed, as it were, of ideas corresponding to each of the bodies of which the composite body is composed. Spinoza counts all of these ideas, whether simple or composite, as minds. In this respect he does not consider the human mind to be unique. It is simply the idea that corresponds to the human body (IIP7)." Blake D. Dutton, *Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (2004), accessed December 18, 2017, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/spinoza/#H4>.

<sup>27</sup> Deleuze, *Spinoza*, 88.

Interestingly, Spinoza also postulates that the body can retain the residue of the experience of an encounter, explaining that “the human body can undergo many changes, and nevertheless retain impressions, *or* traces, of the objects, and consequently the same images of things.”<sup>28</sup> Similarly, somatic theory describes stored emotions and experiences that may surface into awareness during practice, which the previous chapter described as psycho-physical archives, or “somatic markers” of body memory according to neuroscientist Antonio Damasio.<sup>29</sup> This theory supports the description of psycho-physical archives as sensed material (the resonation of affects in circulation in the body-mind) when improvising at the level of embodied consciousness described in the previous chapter as the body’s mind. Building on from this to an understanding of how that practice can be refined and developed, is to extend hyperawareness outwards to perceive the resonation of affects in body-mind in relation to forces in circulation when encountering other bodies.

Gregg and Seigworth identify the quality of affective forces in an encounter between bodies in a way that illuminates the utility of a hyperaware experience of relationality, and the potential to develop a sensitivity to an encounter as a capacity. They explain:

Affect is in many ways synonymous with *force* or *forces of encounter*. The term ‘force,’ however, can be a bit of a misnomer since affect need not be especially forceful (although sometimes, as in the psychoanalytic study of trauma, it is). In fact, it is quite likely that affect more often transpires within and across the subtlest of shuttering intensities: all the miniscule or molecular events of the unnoticed.... Affect can be understood as a gradient of bodily capacity – a supple incrementalism of ever-modulating force-relations – that rises and falls not only along various rhythms and modalities of encounter but also through the troughs and sieves of sensation and sensibility, an incrementalism that coincides with belonging to compartments of matter of virtually any and every sort. Hence, affect’s always immanent capacity for extending further still: both into and out of the interstices of the inorganic and non-living, the intracellular divulgements of sinew, tissue and gut economies, and the vaporous evanescence of the incorporeal

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<sup>28</sup> Spinoza, *Ethics*, 70.

<sup>29</sup> Antonio Damasio, *Descartes’ Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (New York, NY: Putnam, 2003), 165.

(events, atmospheres, feeling tones).<sup>30</sup>

As has been established, affect theory describes forces that are already in circulation between and within human and non-human bodies. To examine the use of affect as a medium of improvisation requires transposing the sense of relations between bodies according to an improviser's *capacity to perceive* the force of affects resonating in their body-mind. Yet how can practice of hyperawareness of relationalities when encountering bodies refine an improviser's capacity to be affected by those bodies and express this experience in movement?

While Spinoza's philosophy is far from anthropocentric, Spinoza scholar Blake Dutton explains that for Spinoza, the complexity of the human *capacity* is what distinguishes human and non-human consciousness:

As minds are the expressions of the bodies to which they correspond in the domain of thought, some have abilities that others do not. Simply put, the greater the capacity of a body for acting and being acted upon, the greater the capacity of the mind that corresponds to it for perception.<sup>31</sup>

To be clear, the body-mind is always being affected by forces in circulation whether the subject is aware of what is affecting them or not; this is beyond individual control and occurs predominantly without conscious awareness. The practice of embodied consciousness can, nevertheless, develop the capacity for perceiving what Massumi describes as the "resonation" of the effects of affects within a body-mind as an experience of sensations that can become known to the practitioner as part of the embodied knowledges of practice.<sup>32</sup> As was discussed in the previous chapter, embodied consciousness is a practice that heightens an individual's awareness of bodily and kinaesthetic or somesthetic sensations. Therefore, bringing the mind of the body

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<sup>30</sup> Gregg and Seigworth, *The Affect Theory Reader*, 2.

<sup>31</sup> Dutton explains the potential for a gradient of capacities: "In proportion as a body is more capable than others of doing many things at once, or being acted on in many ways at once, so its mind is more capable than others of perceiving many things at once. And in proportion as the actions of a body depend more on itself alone, and as other bodies concur with it less in acting, so its mind is more capable of understanding distinctly. And from these [truths] we know the excellence of one mind over the others. (IIP13S)." Dutton, *Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*. There is a potential for this interpretation to be taken as prejudicial towards disability, but the capacity to be affected operates according to different parameters with regard to mental or physical abilities.

<sup>32</sup> Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, 14.

into conscious awareness may increase an improviser's capacity to perceive the sensation of affective resonance.

Importantly, for Massumi, "resonance can be seen as converting distance, or extension, into intensity. It is a qualitative transformation of distance into an immediacy of self-relation."<sup>33</sup> In terms of this thesis, it would be the sense of intensity that overcomes distance through one's capacity to perceive resonance, particularly when in relation to another body in a moment of encounter. Therefore, it might be possible to extend Spinoza's notion of gradients of capacity to affect and be affected across a *spectrum*, beyond the categories of human or non-human, to suggest that some people may potentially be more capable than others to perceive their own affective resonance when encountering the affective intensity of another body. It might be possible to increase one's capacity to perceive the resonance of affects within body-mind as an aptitude.

Part of the Spinozan notion of capacity, which it is argued here may be developed via the subtleties of practice, is described as the complexity of the body-mind's capacity for "relations of movement and rest."<sup>34</sup> Massumi unpacks this idea further:

Spinoza defined the body in terms of 'relations of movement and rest.' He wasn't referring to actual, extensive movement or stasis. He was referring to a body's capacity to enter into relations of movement and rest. This capacity he spoke of as a power (or potential) to affect and be affected.<sup>35</sup>

Massumi makes this concept more accessible by explaining that a "relation between movement and rest is another way of saying 'transition'."<sup>36</sup> However, as a somatic practitioner I argue that there is an actual relation between movement and rest that can be experienced when practicing embodied consciousness. This experience is felt as a sensation of movement that occurs while the body is at rest, and therefore could be described as both movement and rest.<sup>37</sup> This sensation is perceptible when in *the mind*

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Gregg and Seigworth, *The Affect Theory Reader*, 2.

<sup>35</sup> Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, 15.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Dance theorist Hubert Godard also describes a moment where movement originates as "gestural anacrusis." Laurence Louppe, "Singular Moving Geographies: An Interview with Hubert Godard," *Writings on Dance: The French Issue* 15 (1996b): 16. See also Erin Brannigan's exploration of Godard's idea in *Dancefilm: Choreography and the Moving Image* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press,

*of the body* state, described in the previous chapter. It is the pull of intention in the flesh, the sensation of memory and/or the stored history of a body-mind's experiences (psycho-physical archives) and/or a body-mind's desires in response to its inner and/or outer situation that seeks to be expressed in movement while that body is at rest. It is also a transition, in the sense that it occurs at the threshold between passive and active states of the body.<sup>38</sup>

Considering the intention of the flesh as having a desire for expression through movement challenges the dualist notion of mind over matter and instead proposes that body-mind has an impulse towards action that originates in the flesh. However, perhaps the sense of *intention* can be attributed to Massumi's notion of *resonance* in that it is the body subtly resonating with affects that are experienced as intention, motivating a body-mind to act. Interestingly, Spinoza explicitly describes how a body-mind is *motivated to action* by the intensity of affect upon the "spiritual automata," rather than by the free will of conscious thought.<sup>39</sup> Spinoza says:

So the infant believes he freely wants the milk; the angry child that he wants vengeance; and the timid, flight. So the drunk believes it is from a free decision of the mind that he speaks the things he later, when sober, wishes he had not said. So the madman, the chatterbox, the child, and a great many people of this kind believe they speak from a free decision of mind, when really they cannot contain their impulse to speak.<sup>40</sup>

Deleuze explains that "Spinoza employs the term 'automaton': we are, he says, spiritual automata, that is to say it is less we who have the ideas than the ideas which are affirmed in us."<sup>41</sup> The practice of listening to the impulses in the space, and to following

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2011), 126.

<sup>38</sup> The threshold between passive and active is discussed in further detail in Chapter Seven *Prohibitive and Emancipative Self-Surveillance*.

<sup>39</sup> Spinoza, *Ethics*.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>41</sup> Deleuze explains that "according to Spinoza, we are fabricated as such spiritual automata. As such spiritual automata, within us there is the whole time of ideas which succeed one another, and in according with this succession of ideas, our power of acting or force of existing is increased or diminished in a continuous manner, on a continuous line, and this is what we call affectus, it's what we call existing ... Affectus is thus the continuous variation of someone's force of existing, insofar as this variation is determined by the ideas that s/he has." Gilles Deleuze, *Cours Vincennes Lecture sur Spinoza*, January 24, 1978, accessed April 4, 2016, <http://deleuzelectures.blogspot.com.au/2007/02/on-spinoza.html>;

or resisting the pull of intensities, opens oneself up to the possibility of perceiving the resonation of affect in the body as sensation. Spinoza says, “we believe we speak from a free decision of the mind ... [but] if we do, it is from a spontaneous motion of the body.”<sup>42</sup> This practice may also make it possible to *amplify* the perception of resonation through focused attention towards it, in order to be more physically expressive while enacting (or being enacted by) affects in circulation, as occurs in an improvised performance. As was described in the previous chapter, this practice may also develop into a process whereby a body-mind is moved by resonation, thereby exposing the mechanisms of *automata* and erasing the illusion of authorship from the context of the performance. I will return to the notion of spiritual automata in my discussion of improvisation practices as a phenomenon that results from a hyperawareness of the relational (circulation of affects).

In order to investigate the possibility and validity of the notion of human automata, Massumi refers to an electroencephalograph (EEG) experiment that consistently found that significant brain activity of participants was recorded 0.5 of a second before their voluntary bodily movement occurred, and, importantly, 0.3 of a second before they became aware of making the conscious decision to move.<sup>43</sup> Interestingly, these cortical and dermal electrical impulses were also only registered by participants if stimulation lasted for more than half a second. Furthermore, participants reported sensing dermal stimulation prior to cortical stimulation, when cortical stimulation was administered first. Based on these findings, the researcher Benjamin Libet proposes that “we may exert free will not by initiating intentions but by vetoing, acceding or otherwise responding to them as they arise.”<sup>44</sup> Massumi draws on this experiment to argue that free will doesn’t operate as a product of consciousness, but that “sensation is organised recursively before being linearized, before it is redirected outwardly to take its part in a conscious chain of actions and reactions.”<sup>45</sup>

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<https://www.webdeleuze.com/textes/14>. See also Christopher Kullenberg and Jakob Lehne, eds., *Resistance Studies Reader* (Gothenburg and London: Resistance Studies Network, 2009), 54.

<sup>42</sup> Spinoza, *Ethics*, 74.

<sup>43</sup> Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*.

<sup>44</sup> John Horgan, “Can Science Explain Consciousness?,” *Scientific American* July (1994): 76–7. See also Benjamin Libet, “Unconscious Cerebral Initiative and the Role of Conscious Will in Voluntary Action,” *Behavioural and Brain Sciences* 8 (1985): 529–66.

<sup>45</sup> Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, 29.

For Massumi, this experiment assists him to articulate how affect circulates and resonates through the body and how the fragile notion of free will is constructed subsequently to support the cohesion of the lived experience:

Brain and skin form a resonating vessel. Stimulation turns inward, is folded into the body, except that there is no inside for it to be in, because the body is radically open, absorbing impulses quicker than they can be perceived, and because the entire vibratory event is unconscious, out of mind. Its anomaly is smoothed over retrospectively to fit conscious requirements of continuity and linear causality.<sup>46</sup>

He goes on to explain that “will and consciousness can be *subtractive*. They are *limitative, derived functions* that reduce complexity too rich to be functionally expressed.”<sup>47</sup> This idea evokes an image of a body-mind with a greater or lesser capacity to perceive slivers of affective resonance that would otherwise be vetoed by everyday (language-based or cortical) conscious awareness.<sup>48</sup> Resonances that aren’t perceived may be too overwhelming, complex, subtle, or delicate and are therefore obscured by the limitations of conscious perception. While a body-mind is always saturated by the fluctuating intensities of affect in circulation, the capacity for an improviser to perceive the resonance of affects is what can be developed as a capacity that determines their effectiveness as a medium for improvisation. The development of this capacity may well hinge on the skill of opening up to a type of less *pointed* (non-lingual) sub-cortical conscious awareness, in which the subtraction of consciousness is less dominant because the formation of a cohesive reality is not as much of a priority in this state.

Massumi’s proposition that consciousness is subtractive suits somatic-based improvisation which seeks to depose the dominance of cortical, language-based thought in order to extend perception of, and I suggest amplify, the “resonating vessel” of brain and skin.<sup>49</sup> Directing conscious awareness to the autonomic systems, and therefore privileging the subcortical, can increase the capacity to make the resonation of affects

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, 29. Italics in original.

<sup>48</sup> The previous chapter drew on the work of dance theorist and Rolf practitioner Hubert Godard, who explains the subcortical processing of sensory information, and the differences between cortical and subcortical consciousness, in Hubert Godard and Suely Rolnik, “Blindsight,” in *Peripheral Vision & Collective Body*, ed. Corinne Dissens (Bolzano: Museion, Hatje Cantz, 2008).

<sup>49</sup> Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, 29.

*recognisable* in that they can be perceived as sensations. These practices, therefore, open and extend the possibility that the resonation of affects can be physically expressed without the *lag* or interference of cortical consciousness.<sup>50</sup> Here the term *amplified* does not necessarily mean “made bigger,” but refers to heightening the capacity to slide along a spectrum or gradients of amplification. Effectively, the performance of improvisation exposes the way in which a body-mind operates or, more accurately, *is operated* as an automaton. While dance is a process of composing the use of effort and movement dynamic in space and time, an improvisation could thus also be described as affording oneself to be composed by the resonance of affects, determined by an improviser’s capacity to allow the amplification of these forces to be expressed through their moving body-mind.

### 4.3 Training and habit

Having established the way in which affective forces resonate within and between improvising bodies, the following section addresses how training and habit impact an improvised composition through the production of meaning in relation to the tone and style of movement. Ultimately, an improvising automaton can only produce the movement palette available to them, which is determined by training and habit. As was outlined in the previous chapter, and following theories of embodied cognition, this thesis is aligned with the notion that habitual action (or practice) shapes thought processes.<sup>51</sup> In other words, how we come to understand the world is shaped by what we do, and it also determines how we think and what kinds of things we think we should be doing. Massumi explains:

Habits are socially or culturally contracted. But they reside in the matter of the body, in the muscles, nerves, and skin, where they operate autonomously.

Although they are contracted in social/cultural context, they must be considered

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<sup>50</sup> To clarify using biological terminology: the hypothalamus (sub-cortical) receives input from the limbic system (emotion, behaviour, motivation, long-term memory, and olfaction). The hypothalamus also controls the autonomic nervous system and links the nervous system to the endocrine system via the pituitary gland (hypophysis).

<sup>51</sup> Alva Noë, *Out of Our Heads: Why You Are Not Your Brain, and Other Lessons from the Biology of Consciousness* (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 2009). See also William Forsythe and Alva Noë, “Consciousness as a Kind of Dance,” *Dance on Camera Journal* 13, no. 4 (2010): 5–6; and Erin Brannigan, “Moving Across Disciplines: Dance in the Twenty-First Century,” *Platform Papers*, no. 25 (2010).



self-active autonomies: spontaneous self-organisations that operate on a level with movements of matter.<sup>52</sup>

For somatically trained improvisers, a core habit shaped by the specifics of practice is an engagement with a conscious awareness that is embodied. This habit is both physical and mental. It follows that the habit of a rigorous, experimental improvisation practice diverges considerably from the habits of dancers who might begin improvising having predominantly trained in a codified form.<sup>53</sup> As has been established, dancers who train in an imitative method typically habitually recreate the movement pathways or positions of their dominant training form when improvising. For example, ballet dancers commonly string together a series of ballet sequences or steps, and yogis find themselves performing *asanas* that extend (stretch) the body in a yogic way. Whatever the practice, be it music, therapy, collaborative relations, audience participation, etcetera, these practices (or *habitus*) dominate their muscle memory and ways of thinking, informing both the material for the improvisation, how it will be performed, and why.

The initial issue that confronts a conventionally (imitative) trained dancer interrogating non-traditional (observational) improvisation practice is how to negotiate the destabilisation of relinquishing an aspiration towards an ideal. What is a dancer to do when asked not to recreate well-known movement pathways when improvising, and how is it possible to know what to do if there is no indication that improvisation has been performed *correctly* or not? This thesis aims to advocate for the (often under recognised) corporeal knowledges that the artform has developed and deployed, in recognition that reorienting the practice requires the development of a different kind of expertise: that of amplifying receptivity to what is emerging in the current time and space and using that sensation to assess the quality of the improvisation. In other words, *listening* to the resonating vessel that is the skin and the brain in order to perceive the resonation of affect in the sensorium. As the resonation of affects occur when bringing conscious presence to an encounter with other bodies, improvisation is a deeply relational practice.

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<sup>52</sup> Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, 236–37.

<sup>53</sup> This point is discussed in detail in Chapter Seven *Prohibitive and Emancipative Self-Surveillance*.

Secondly, while an improviser may accumulate a wealth of corporeal knowledge through ongoing practice, part of what is known is how to be *in* a state of *not knowing*, thereby suspending one's tolerance to inhabit the unknown by surfing a constantly unfolding state of transformation. This is because, even if an improviser is attending to the *same* practice, each new moment brings a new set of working conditions: contingent on the current body-mind and the present space-time as it exists in the ever-changing here and now. Working with the current body-mind and space-time is particularly relevant to improvisation, even if the practice-performance has been scored, as the work cannot help but be highly contingent on what arises in the internal-external situation in that moment. If awareness is focused on receptivity to the here and now, an improviser's habitual consciousness is both shaped by this practice and becomes better at being in a receptive state whereby the forces of affect shape the movement. Furthermore, any act or attitude of aspiration towards a pre-existing *ideal* diverts conscious awareness away from *what is*, as is discussed in Chapter Seven. To achieve this, improvisers predominantly develop practices that cultivate a specific performative state. This habit produces a rarefied type of conscious awareness similar to meditation, where the body-mind is aware, *awake*, and open to sensation, but is not engaged in the internal vocalisation of (cortical) thought. This state makes it possible for the body-mind to be more receptive to the influence of forces in circulation, which I will return to in a moment in the discussion of brainwave frequencies.

#### 4.4 Style and tone

According to Laban, everyone has a style of moving in the way they interact with others or the environment through their relation of effort, weight, and flow which reveals their inner attitude, or values.<sup>54</sup> Attitudinal and socio-cultural habits and how they impact movement style are possibly the most important, but often least discussed, element of dance performance.<sup>55</sup> Louppe explains that for Laban, “the most precious nuances of style can only be understood after a complete study of the rhythmic contents of the attitudes in which combinations of effort are used in specific series.”<sup>56</sup> Laban

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<sup>54</sup> Rudolf von Laban (1879–1958) was a Hungarian dance artist, theorist, choreologist, and theosophist.

<sup>55</sup> An exception is Erin Brannigan, “Transposing Style: Martin Del Amo’s New Solo Works,” *Brolga* 36 (2012): 25–30.

<sup>56</sup> Louppe, *Poetics of Contemporary Dance*, 89.

consolidated his study of movement style as a theory of *Tanztheatre* (1924–1927), which he described as “the site of a historical consciousness of human action.”<sup>57</sup>

In his theory of *Tanztheatre*, Laban examined the way in which elements of movement style (analysable in terms of weight, effort, tone, direction, use of space, and use of time) culminate to create what an audience responds to in a performance. As Louppe explains:

Style in dance seems, a priori, to be something vague and elusive. In fact it is what is most immediately perceived by the spectator, what works most quickly on his or her sensibilities.<sup>58</sup>

There is a highly productive nexus between Laban’s analysis of style and somatic theory which describes how inefficient posture is the result of socio-cultural physical habits that are collected and stored in the neuro-musculature.<sup>59</sup> Therefore, movement that emerges in an improvisation is limited, or not, by the development of expertise both in the improviser’s capacity to perceive the resonance of affects and also their capacity to physicalise this resonance easily, which requires some level of freedom from socio-cultural habits through the practice of somatics.

Expertise in this practice increases along a spectrum, as an improviser is more or less able to sense the resonance of affect and more or less able to then amplify and physicalise that resonance as immediately as possible, through an *open vessel* of the body-mind without the interference or *lag* of conscious awareness.<sup>60</sup> These slivers of sensations and feelings that are the resonance of affect are then expressed physically through shifts of weight, effort, tone, direction, use of space, use of time, and rhythm. Therefore, Laban’s analysis of style is particularly crucial for improvisation because the style of the movement is not only the manner in which a layer of meaning is transmitted, as with other forms of dance which have a pre-conceived intent, but it is often *also its*

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>59</sup> Details of this concept in somatic theory are discussed in detail in Chapter Three *Embodied Consciousness*, and developing a capacity for loosening the grip of socio-cultural habits within the neuromusculature is discussed in Chapter Seven *Prohibitive and Emancipative Self-Surveillance*.

<sup>60</sup> Chapter Five *The Aesthetics of an Ethics of Being* specifically addresses the practice of case study Eva Karczag because of her virtuosic capacities in this sense.

*meaning*. The notion of style in dance theory speaks to the primacy of affect as the medium of improvisation and assists the articulation of that which is all-pervasive yet hidden by the activity of conscious thought.

Laban categorised the elements that contribute to the style of a dance as an embodiment of the dancer's values borne by intention. An example of the physicalisation of dancers' values that Louppe provides is the necessity of *release* as a movement response to the contemporary consciousness of its time. Louppe explains that release is

a corporeal humanism of non-violence, a refusal to take part in authoritarian processes or, even more, in seductions linked to the vision of a body auto-affirming itself in its tension.<sup>61</sup>

The style of dance is also situated in a dancing body in relation to the physiophilosophical perspective of that dancer, which is shaped by both the values that inform a dancer's practice and attitude and also by the intensities of affects in circulation in their milieu. Louppe explains that "our daily movements and our treatment of proximal space allow qualitative preferences to appear which not only constitute our relation to the world but, more importantly perhaps, give it an aura."<sup>62</sup> For example, an exploration of *tone* in the body is relational and is effectively the work of creating *tone in the atmosphere of the space*. Louppe says of tone:

Tonic choices are linked to the dancer's deepest 'engagements' to the point where, in contemporary dance, the freeing up of the tonus was the rallying point for a whole family of bodies (Duncan, Humphery, Hawkins, Brown ...). For these artists 'letting go' was an absolute condition of dance.<sup>63</sup>

While *letting go* is important to the progression of contemporary dance, it is a vital component of improvisation. Somatics has been so important to improvisation because it has provided a method to *undo* the auto-affirmed tension of both traditional dance and the habitually inhibited neuro-musculature of socio-cultural *holding* so that an improviser has the capacity to physicalise a broader (and therefore more virtuosic)

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<sup>61</sup> Louppe, *Poetics of Contemporary Dance*, 92.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 91.

spectrum of values, effectively amplifying their capacity to perceive the resonation of affects in circulation.<sup>64</sup>

For Louppe, Laban's loss of interest "in what the dancer does or 'just the movement,'" and towards "what the dancer is in his movement," is a highly useful contribution to dance theory.<sup>65</sup> According to Louppe, "style is the very soul of dance."<sup>66</sup> Choreographic vocabulary may have particular qualitative characteristics, but style is how the vocabulary (or choreographic *écriture* (writing/inscription of the body and meaning)) *functions* in affecting the spectator's sensibility and the production of meaning.<sup>67</sup> Louppe explains how the subtext of style informs choreographic language:

The 'values' that are borne by our intentions are situated in the margins of the visible, and often appear indirectly in the timing or spatial orientation of our movement. In fact style is the subtext, that is the true text, which murmurs under the choreographic language.<sup>68</sup>

Louppe explains that "it is simply the determinant of the paths through which we will capture the 'grain' of the movement."<sup>69</sup> Style is especially important to improvisation because, unlike codified movement that has an inherent preoccupation with the construction of form, improvisation is primarily concerned with experiencing/experimenting with the elements of style. In other words, the grain of the movement as it emerges in response to the performance situation is most often the primary content and meaning of the work. The style of release is a habit developed through training, which conditions the body-mind to be receptive to the relational aspects of improvisation by tuning a body-mind to perceive the resonation of affects in circulation.

The relational or social aspect of dance is often described as kinaesthetic empathy and commonly attributed to **mirror neurons**. However, Laban adds to this by suggesting

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<sup>64</sup> The use of *virtuosic* here does not necessarily mean athletic but refers to the capacity to inhabit a broad spectrum of movement qualities, such as subtle, delicate, full, powerful, intricate, clean, or refined.

<sup>65</sup> Louppe, *Poetics of Contemporary Dance*, 91.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>67</sup> Erin Brannigan talks about the transposition of style from choreographer to dancer in Brannigan, "Transposing Style," 25–30.

<sup>68</sup> Louppe, *Poetics of Contemporary Dance*, 91.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

that the style of the dancer produces the sensibility of the dance that is its essential *meaning*, and the way in which others can be touched by it through the *values* that are expressed through movement. The values that a dance express contribute to the force of affects in circulation, and in the case of an improvisation, are also determined by them. Laban says, via Louppe:

The ‘values’ carried in the movement ... awaken mechanisms of empathy or resistance in the spectator which provoke in her or him a ‘critical’ work (perhaps the only critical work that should be undertaken in dance) by means of an active a lucid corporeal ‘response.’<sup>70</sup>

The audience are part of the network of relations through which affect circulates, and as a result of the performance, the audience too experience the resonation of affects that dictate how they receive a performance and how that reception contributes to the overall feeling or atmosphere of the performance event.<sup>71</sup> Chapter Five addresses the *ethics of being* in relation to the values that are expressed through movement and in an encounter with Karczag.

As is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Seven *Prohibitive and Emancipative Self-Surveillance*, the inner attitudes of a performer affect the tone of both their corporeality (musculature, bone, viscera, and skin) and the focus of their body-mind, expressed through their micro movements and fluctuations of attention, which can be felt in the tone of the space and in the bodies of the co-participants. The circulation of affect will happen regardless of the improviser’s capacity to be aware of it, but becoming aware of the atmospheric tone (either within the space/time of any given moment, or through the resonation of affects, or sensations activated by the release of stored emotional histories in the body-mind) is a useful way to consciously craft the tone of an improvisation. This is because in an improvised performance, the impact of the fluctuations of attention or tone in the atmosphere of the room can become a key influence in the way the performer makes compositional decisions.

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>71</sup> Including the audience in a discussion of the relational is necessary as exclusion of them would be an oversight. However, delving into the nature of the spectatorial experience for the audience is beyond the scope of this thesis and will therefore not be pursued further here.

This *atmospheric tone* can be thought of as an imaginary substance that can be stretched, played with rhythmically, and sculpted. For example, in performance I often work to stretch the sense of expectation by resisting the urge to make a dynamic shift at the time that is rhythmically expected.<sup>72</sup> This occurs through establishing a rhythmic expectation, shared by other bodies in the space, and then subverting or suppressing (the sensed impulse of) that expectation. In my practice, it is the quality or tone of both the attention and intention of the audience–performer relation that informs the work, in that the group body-mind dictates the kind of realms that are available for me to access in performance. This relationship determines factors such as the duration of a movement progression, including the rate at which changes are made; which movement themes emerge and which ones begin to develop; the intensity and dynamic with which these themes are developed; and to a large extent the qualitative and textural movement/psycho-physical states I can access as a performer. I propose that what motivates this process are the affects in circulation, and my capacity at the time of the performance to perceive and physicalise their resonance in my body-mind. To some extent, the contingent process described above occurs in all dance and live performance, but it is only in an improvised performance that these forces direct the content of the composition explicitly.

Following Louppe’s proposition that somatics is what allows the contemporary dancer a greater capacity to be an “instrument revealing contemporary consciousness,” in the case of improvisation, somatics also allows the immediate perception of the micro-narratives of fluctuating attentions of those bodies present. The “existential registers” of style that Louppe describes are a product of the “affection” (affection) or the mode, state, or quality of a body’s relation to the world.<sup>73</sup> For Deleuze and Guattari “*L’affect*” (or Spinoza’s *affectus*) is an ability to affect and be affected, which in dance is *sensibility enacted through style*. Therefore, unlike the formal values of codified movement, the medium of improvised performance is the resonance of affect.

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<sup>72</sup> The founder of music psychology, Leonard Meyer, explains that “emotion of affect is aroused when a tendency to respond is arrested or inhibited.” Leonard B. Meyer, *Emotion and Meaning in Music* (Chicago, IL and London: University of Chicago Press, 1956), 14. Meyer proposed this theory based on John Dewey, “The Theory of Emotion 1: Emotional Attitudes,” *Psychology Review* (1894): 553–69.

<sup>73</sup> Louppe, *Poetics of Contemporary Dance*, 89; Spinoza, *Ethics*, 70.

As dance theorist Jane Goodall describes, somatic intelligence is the way somatic information can be gathered and pertains to the ability of the body-mind to process and collect information that can be perceived through movement.<sup>74</sup> Goodall's notion of somatic intelligence is mobilised here as a way to theorise how an improviser can develop a greater capacity to perceive the resonation of affects in circulation. The capacity for somatic intelligence may be developed through somatic practices that enhance body-mind integration, kinaesthetic awareness, or proprioception. Viewing the term in this way integrates different notions of somatic intelligence as the capacity for perception, and expression of, the resonation of affects. Embodied consciousness in improvisation not only offers a way to do this, as is the case in movement therapy practices such as Authentic Movement, but this practice seeks to amplify the body-mind's response to the resonation of affects as material for composition. Therefore, the activity of both somatics and improvisation offers ways to activate and amplify an individual's physical response to affect.

For example, when I *map* my own sensorium through embodied consciousness, I become aware of how the volume of my body is inhabited by (my) consciousness. In this subtle practice I notice a slight, habitual, inhibitive *pulling in* that I feel is the underlying anxiety of prohibitive **self-surveillance**, which is normally at the periphery of perception.<sup>75</sup> It is stronger in public situations, but even when I am alone it requires awareness to undo, as it has been so engrained as a neuromuscular habit arising in response to the affects in circulation. Somatic practice focuses my conscious awareness on this habit of inhibition and provides another choice; a way that is not achieved through *doing* but through *undoing*, described later in this thesis as emancipative self-surveillance. As this awareness becomes consciously embodied, rather than rendered invisible via the erasure of cortical consciousness, I am then able to relinquish the habitual action of pulling in and instead allow my body-mind to expand into a more spacious **psychosomatic** potential. This spaciousness increases the capacity for the perception of the resonation of affects, as it allows for a greater sensitivity within the psychosomatic field through which the interconnected relations between bodies become more apparent.

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<sup>74</sup> Jane Goodall, "Knowing What You Are Doing," *The Performance Space Quarterly* no. 14 (1997): 20–3.

<sup>75</sup> Prohibitive and emancipative self-surveillance is discussed in further detail in Chapter Seven.



In the event of an improvised performance, all the human and non-human *bodies* contribute to a collective circulation of affect that determines the trajectory of the performance through the tone of their body-mind. An improvising dancer is primarily physicalising the relational phenomenon of exchange of tonal forces occurring beneath conscious awareness. Approaching all movement with hyperawareness as an inquiry into an experience/experiment cultivates a highly focused performance state, which can also become a method for moving even if there is no task to enact. Therefore, unlike conventional performance, the value of the event cannot be qualified by the capacity of the artists to transmit *their* pre-meditated meaning to the audience, but rather by how the improviser is able to access states contingent on, and revealing of, the forces of affect in circulation in the current space-time. Therefore, it is necessary to conceptualise a new model for the *immanent* evaluation of the labour of improvised performance, rather than using a model applicable to the values of conventional performance.

#### 4.5 Immanent evaluation

The contingent nature of improvisation, and the fact that the medium can also be its meaning, raises a problem for assessment of the resulting artwork regarding modes of critique appropriate to the form. In particular, the issue of expertise or virtuosity is contentious among improvisation practitioners who reject the competitive basis on which traditional dance training relies, in favour of inclusivity.<sup>76</sup> Furthermore, somatics has been central to improvisation, rather than traditional dance pedagogy, because of its alternative ontology of approaching movement primarily through somatic receptivity rather than through a replication of form. Therefore, each individual finds a personal way to move with attentiveness to the body-mind as it is in each moment, supporting the proliferation of individual somatic meta-narratives rather than the traditional process of moulding the body into an ideal aesthetic.<sup>77</sup> However, it is erroneous to suppose that there is no ideal to aspire to in somatic-based improvisation, as virtuosity certainly exists. However, expertise is irrespective of athleticism and is defined by a qualitative capacity to inhabit performative states rather than an ideal form, and is therefore *formless*. The virtuosity of these states, I suggest, is in part determined by the capacity

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<sup>76</sup> As is discussed in more detail in Chapter Two *Dewey and the Pre-history of Western Improvisation*, H'Doubler was instrumental in proposing that dance can and should be for everyone.

<sup>77</sup> The divergence of these processes is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Seven *Prohibitive and Emancipative Self-Surveillance*.

for a dancer to be a self-reflexive automaton (instrument) motivated by the resonance of affects. Furthermore, virtuosic states are more accessible to an emancipated body that has developed the capacity to loosen the unconsciously habitual grip of their socio-cultural coding, to instead physicalise the resonation of affect in response to the situation at hand.<sup>78</sup>

Dance historian Ninotchka Bennahum describes how Anna Halprin developed Western improvised performance by working with “the feeling of immediacy – of creating or unfolding gestures and movements in front of the audience during the course of the performance – worked over time to ‘erase the space between the audience and performer,’ thereby morphing dancing and the surrounding space into one public place.”<sup>79</sup> Halprin further explains how improvisation practice changed the perception of the sense of space to instead encourage a “feel [for] space as a lived substance ... one by one each person began to show through movement different ways of feeling space ... We discovered that we could act upon it and that it in turn could act upon our movements.”<sup>80</sup>

This description of feeling the space as a “lived substance” echoes Spinoza’s Pantheist philosophy, described by philosopher Harry Waton as the understanding that “life is the primordial matrix of all reality for Spinoza recognizes the truth that all existence is animate.”<sup>81</sup> In Spinoza’s philosophy, the notion of judgement by a transcendent (monotheistic) God is decentred, instead proposing the evaluation of affect as immanent.<sup>82</sup> This means that there is no higher authority judging our actions, but that

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<sup>78</sup> The process towards socio-cultural *emancipation* is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Seven *Prohibitive and Emancipative Self-Surveillance*. In Chapter Five *The Aesthetics of an Ethics of Being*, this process is discussed in relation to a virtuosic case study, Eva Karczag.

<sup>79</sup> Quote taken from Cecily Deel, “Anna Halprin at Hunter,” April 22, 1967, Series VI, Box 2, Folder 95, AH Papers. Halprin’s role in the development of Western improvisation is outlined in Chapter Two *Dewey and the Pre-history of Western Improvisation*. Ninotchka Bennahum, Wendy Perron, and Bruce Robertson, *Radical Bodies: Anna Halprin, Simone Forti, and Yvonne Rainer in California and New York, 1955–1972* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2017), 73.

<sup>80</sup> Quote taken from Anna Halprin, Personal notebook, 1943, Box 1, Folder 2, AH Papers, cited in Bennahum, Perron, and Robertson, *Radical Bodies*, 69. Ninotchka Bennahum describes how “Following Kadushin, Halprin came to see Jewish ethics as possessing corporeal form, the ‘physical manifestation of moral principles’.” Bennahum, Perron, and Robertson, *Radical Bodies*, 69. Lawrence Halprin, “The Stones of Jerusalem,” in *Sketchbooks of Lawrence Halprin* (Tokyo: Bunji Murotani, 1981), 122.

<sup>81</sup> Harry Waton, *The Kabbalah and Spinoza’s Philosophy: As a Basis for an Idea of Universal History* (New York, NY: Spinoza Institute of America, 1932), 2.

<sup>82</sup> Evaluation of dance based on corporeal response connects to Spinoza’s *anomalū* (Antonio Negri) where affects constitute the only form of evaluation that is immanent and not transcendent. Antonio Negri suggests Spinoza’s *anomaly* locates his philosophy as post-modern in that it proposes a decentralisation

events and situations are evaluated by us all according to affects in circulation.<sup>83</sup>

Therefore, I argue that in the case of performed improvisation, the value of an artwork is critiqued in terms of its capacity to resonate (affectively) with audience members. For an audience, a feeling of engagement with an improvisation, or not, may be difficult to articulate in language because the work is primarily transpiring within a pre-verbal, sub-cortical level of body-mind. The relative affective power of an improvised performance might also produce kinaesthetic empathy in a spectator in terms of the sensation or motions they produce in response. An affective resonance occurs immanently in that it is a field of communication between the performers' and the audiences' individual and collective body-minds. Therefore, in an improvisation an audience is not a passive consumer of a pre-determined product, but a co-contributor whose participation is their active and attentive witnessing within the collective experience.<sup>84</sup> Furthermore, this co-contributed exchange of experience is, in many cases, the underlying layer of *meaning* within the multi-layered nature of the work.

As was explained earlier through Spinoza, all *bodies* have a capacity to resonate in response to affects in circulation, and this resonance is perceptible according to the body's level of consciousness. Philosopher David Chalmers suggests rethinking models of consciousness by expanding the range of possibilities to include those that are incongruous with a dualistic model, particularly models in which humans are uniquely endowed with this capacity.<sup>85</sup> His first proposition is the possibility that consciousness is *fundamental*. Therefore, like other axioms such as gravity, consciousness is a fact that does not need justification. The second, which builds on the first theory and is a pivotal idea within this thesis, is that consciousness is *universal*. That means that for Chalmers, all living things (and possibly all things) have a consciousness according to the level of their sophistication as a life form or as an entity. If his theory was applied to improvised practice, every cell in the body would have a certain living consciousness that would

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of authority making each individual affective charge the only form of critique. For further detail, see Negri, *Savage Anomaly*.

<sup>83</sup> Deleuze follows Spinoza in arguing for immanent evaluation rather than transcendent judgement. Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1983).

<sup>84</sup> This concept follows Dewey's notions of experience as the core indicator of the meaning and value of an artwork in John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1934). Furthermore, it raises the question of what effect somatic training might have on the spectatorial experience of an audience of improvisation, which is beyond the scope of this thesis.

<sup>85</sup> David Chalmers, "Consciousness and its Place in Nature," in *The Blackwell Guide to the Philosophy of Mind*, eds. Stephen P. Stich and Ted A. Warfield (Hoboken, NJ and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002).

combine as a consciousness of that individual being. If this idea were extended from the micro to the macro level, then all the people in a city would have an cumulative consciousness belonging to that particular city, and there would also be a *collective consciousness* of planet Earth. This is important to improvisation because much of the technical practice is concerned with developing a state of receptivity, or *listening*, to the shared consciousness of the people and other bodies within a space-time. Part of what an improviser does is to *telescope* their attention either inwardly, to the specific cellular consciousness of the body-mind, or outwardly to the collective consciousness of the context they are performing within. This idea is also shared within the work of the *new materialists* who consider the affective charge of non-human bodies.<sup>86</sup>

Drawing concepts of collective consciousness and the animate nature of existence together provides a model for describing how the aesthetic and ethical value of an improvised performance is determined or evaluated immanently, in the way that it resonates in the body-minds present. The way in which physical tonalities resonate in relation and in response to the affects in circulation in the shared space-time of an improvised performance determines its value for all co-participants. One could say that all shared events are evaluated this way because the effect of shared resonance is always occurring, producing positive (empowering) or negative (disempowering) affects. However, improvised performance makes this process more visible by paring this evaluative process back to its most immediate and visceral response.

#### **4.6 Science, affect, and sympathetic resonance**

Towards the middle of the twentieth century new discoveries in science and physics, in particular, influenced artists to consider artwork as a frame for viewing the universal order rather than as a vessel for the creative genius of the individual artist. As a concept in which time is relative to space (in that it stretches when impacted by gravity) and the proposition of multiple realities beyond what can be perceived by the senses, Albert Einstein's theory of relativity was highly compelling along with the prospect of space travel.<sup>87</sup> Modern artists began to work with abstraction as a way to consider the systems

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<sup>86</sup> See new materialist and feminist theorist Karen Barad's notion of intra-action in Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

<sup>87</sup> 70 European visual artists such as Wassily Kandinsky and Marcel Duchamp endorsed the Dimensionist Manifest (1936) explaining "the origins of Dimensionism are the European spirit's new concepts of

through which the fabric of the universe is composed. For example, Piet Mondrian's paintings reduced compositions to their essential elements, and Merce Cunningham used chance procedures to reveal the inherent compositional qualities of movement decentring the agency of the author. In Halprin's early improvisational experiments, performers aimed to extend their sense of conscious awareness to reach beyond their individual body-mind and connect with the consciousness of collaborators, the audience, and non-human bodies within the landscape. However, working with a notion of expanded or shared conscious awareness was not a tokenistic exercise for Halprin. It emerged directly from her theological beliefs. Through the influence of her Rabbi, Halprin became interested in the same ancient Hebrew texts that featured heavily in Spinoza's early education.<sup>88</sup> These texts describe an inherent connectivity between human and non-human bodies, underpinning an ethical framework for the fabric of reality.

The primacy of a body-mind's functionality is core to improvised dance performance. As was explained in Chapter Two, this is a practice that arose from research in the alternative (somatic) sciences and philosophy. Therefore, describing the technical workings requires a combination of both philosophical ideals and the grounding of science. As was explained earlier, improvisers engage in an act of hyperaware *listening* that is fostered through movement research, often described as tuning into a particular *frequency*.<sup>89</sup> The act of listening is not in order to hear an actual sound but as a way of

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space-time (promulgated most particularly by Einstein's theories) and the recent technical givens of our age." Accessed on 19<sup>th</sup> November 2019 from

<https://www.amherst.edu/system/files/media/DM%2520Translation%2520library%2520case.pdf>

Interestingly, Albert Einstein (1879–1955) was enamoured by Spinoza's philosophy, famously writing him a love poem in 1920 titled *Zu Spinozas Ethik (On Spinoza's Ethics)*.

<sup>88</sup> Anna Halprin (née Schuman) received spiritual guidance from Rabbi Max Kadushin while studying at the University of Wisconsin. Kadushin instructed Halprin on the Kabbalistic notion of the body possessing an *aura*. Ninotchka Bennahum explains that at that time, "Kadushin had just published an important theological work, *Organic Thinking*, in which he argued that sacred Hebrew texts possess vital aliveness ... Kadushin linked the philosophical concept of 'organicity' to an active relationship with Jewish thought." Max Kadushin, *Organic Thinking: A Study in Rabbinic Thought* (New York, NY: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1938). Bennahum, Perron, and Robertson, *Radical Bodies*, 64 and 61 respectively. As a keen young scholar, and Sephardic Jew, Spinoza was well educated in the Kabbalah, see <https://spinozaresearchnetwork.wordpress.com/online-resources/>. However, discussing the similarities and differences of Spinoza's philosophy with the Kabbalah is beyond the scope of this thesis. For a detailed analysis, see Harry Waton, *The Kabbalah and Spinoza's Philosophy: As a Basis for an Idea of Universal History* (New York, NY: Spinoza Institute of America, 1932).

<sup>89</sup> The concept of *frequency* arose on several occasions during the fieldwork for this research as a description for what it is that a dancer is *tuning* into when they are in the process of listening to the space. Former Frankfurt Ballet dancer Michael Schumacher also used this word when describing his practice in an interview with me. See Nalina Wait, "Listening with My Skin, Bones, Organs, Eyes," *Real Time Arts* 123 (2014): 24.

tuning the body-mind to match certain frequencies following the process of **sympathetic resonance**. In 1924, German scientist Hans Berger invented the EEG machine to record and measures the frequencies transmitted by the human brain, and discovered the *alpha* wave of neural oscillations between 7.5–12.5 Hz, also known as Berger’s wave.<sup>90</sup> The alpha wave range occurs in different mental states, but predominantly indicates idleness or the state in which a person is on *autopilot* or enacting tasks automatically.<sup>91</sup> The brain emits a spectrum of frequencies simultaneously, but one frequency can become dominant and will synchronise to match an external stimulus in a process called **entrainment**.<sup>92</sup> In 1952, physics professor Winifred Schumann calculated the frequency of Earth (7.83Hz), known as *Schumann resonances*, caused by the friction between the ionosphere and Earth’s crust.<sup>93</sup> Then in the 1960s, German scientist Rütger Wever experimented with human circadian rhythms by keeping people in isolated environments, underground, and away from daylight.<sup>94</sup> He discovered that it didn’t take long for people to begin to suffer poor health and depression when living underground. However, when he (secretly) transmitted Schumann resonances from within the bunker the subjects’ health quickly improved.<sup>95</sup> This experiment suggests that human brainwave frequency synchronises with the frequency of the ionosphere of Earth, at the Schuman resonance of 7.83Hz, by way of sympathetic resonance. Furthermore, synchronising with the frequency of Earth may be important to maintaining good health.

Engagement in hyperaware *listening* in an improvisational context is an attempt to *entrain* one’s brainwaves to the frequencies of other human and non-human bodies, in order to psycho-physically tune into the frequency of the time and space of the

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<sup>90</sup> Hans Berger, “Über das Elektrenkephalogramm des Menschen,” *Archiv für Psychiatrie und Nervenkrankheiten*, 87 (1929): 527–70. The measurements are taken from the skin on the top of the skull.

<sup>91</sup> The alpha state is considered to be the most productive state to be in when visualising as it is the frequency associated with REM sleep. Other brain wave frequencies include beta (13-130 Hz), delta (1-4 Hz), and theta (4-8 Hz). Beta is the state of everyday activities, delta is the state of unconsciousness or coma, and theta is the state of deep sleep (not dreaming).

<sup>92</sup> Accessed January 16, 2018, <http://www.brainworksneurotherapy.com/what-brainwave-entrainment>. *Entrainment* is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Six *Cultivating Movement Situations*, in relation to the work of former Forsythe dancer Riley Watts.

<sup>93</sup> Winfried Otto Schumann, *Zeitschrift Naturforschung Teil A* 7 (1952): 149.

<sup>94</sup> Rütger Wever, *The Circadian System of Man: Results of Experiments under Temporal Isolation* (New York, NY: Springer-Verlag, 1979).

<sup>95</sup> Gábor Lednyiczky and József Nieberl, “Biological Resonance and the State of the Organism: Functional Electrodynamical Testing,” in *Potentiating Health and the Crisis of the Immune System*, eds. A. Mizrahi et al. (New York, NY: Springer, 1997).

improvisation.<sup>96</sup> This state is by no means constant throughout an improvisation, as there are also different states that emerge such as the states of embodied consciousness discussed in the previous chapter. However, the external focus allows a state of consciousness that I experience, possibly within an alpha frequency, where I am no longer the source of the movement but my dancing body becomes a vessel for expressing the collective consciousness of the space-time of the performance event. This self-reflexive method of listening and tuning my body-mind instrument allows the frequencies to play my body-mind as an automaton instrument, by making a kind of subtle sympathetic resonance with the frequencies of the surrounding human or non-human bodies. When occupied with an externally focused improvisational state, the source of the compositional choices can be the collective consciousness that an improviser senses (to a greater or lesser extent depending on their sensitivity and the force of the resonation) through their capacity to affect and be affected.

#### 4.7 Conclusion

This chapter has sought to interrogate the complexity of states of being that are predominantly below language-based (cortical) consciousness and has attempted to find the integration of their functionality in practice. This is certainly not a comprehensive analysis and, as is explained throughout this thesis, specifics of practice that are highly refined and virtuosic are identified with the aim of illuminating a pathway so that the practice may be developed. However, unlike goal-oriented practices, the most important aspect is maintaining a presence in the current space and time in which one finds oneself. There is no end point in the journey of improvisation, there is only inhabiting the continuous state of flux that is being in the now. This in itself is a life-long practice.

The following chapter addresses the nexus of somatics and improvisation in relation to *ethics* as a value expressed through practice, using Spinoza's *Ethics* as a lens to articulate key ideas within the practice. It does so by grounding this understanding in the life-long work of Karczaga, whose somatic work is discussed in the following chapter as an *ethics of being*, an aspect of practice that is not commonly addressed within an institutional context and therefore in danger of erasure. This chapter looks at

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<sup>96</sup> This is not an original proposal and is discussed by another of my case studies, dancer Riley Watts, in Elizabeth Waterhouse, Riley Watts, and Bettina E. Blasing, "Doing Duo: A Case Study of Entrainment in William Forsythe's Choreography *Duo*," *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 8 (2014): 1–16, accessed November 26, 2016, <http://journal.frontiersin.org/article/10.3389/fnhum.2014.00812/full>.

the impact this lifelong practice can have in terms of the aesthetics it can produce both in performance on the stage, or in the informal studio, and in day-to-day life, giving weight to the notion that all artists understand that the practices of art and life are inextricably linked.



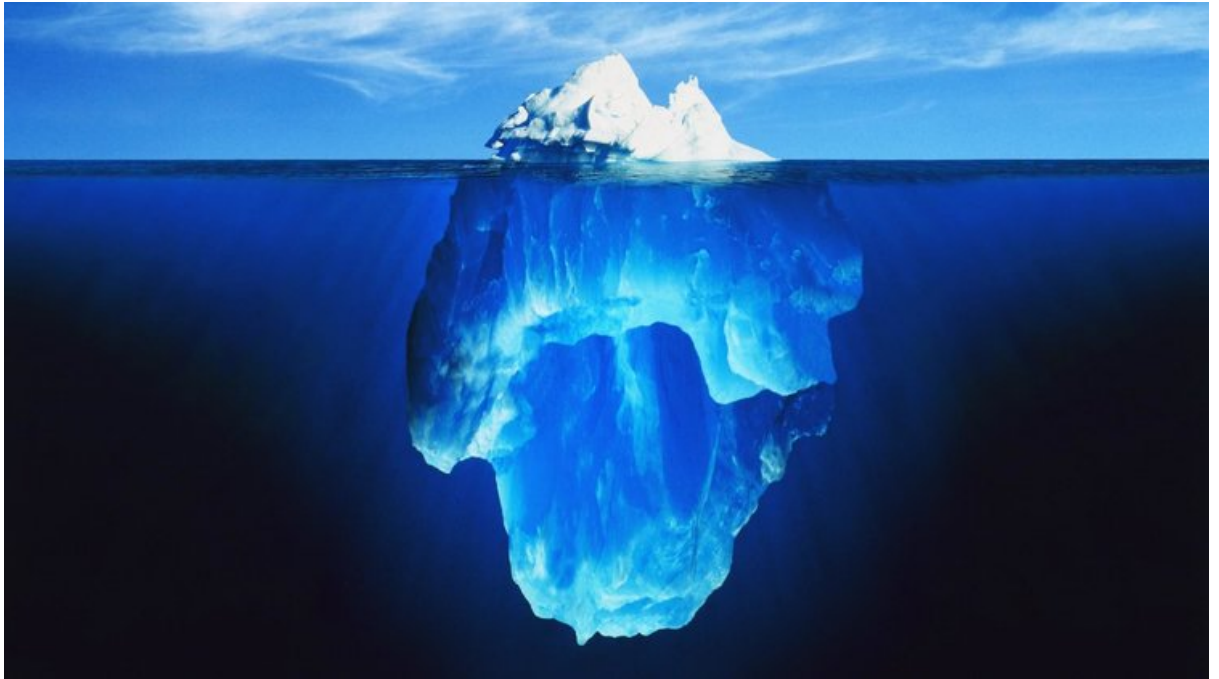


Figure 2. Tip of the Iceberg<sup>1</sup>

## Chapter Five

### *The Aesthetics of an Ethics of Being*

#### 5.1 Introduction

Throughout history, ethics (derived from the Greek word *ethos* meaning habit or custom) has been studied as a branch of knowledge that deals with the moral principles guiding human behaviour. While it is a major branch of philosophy, within the field of dance theory ethical debates are predominantly concerned with sociological or political issues relating to interpersonal contact, citizenship, nomadism, and therapy.<sup>2</sup>

Improvisational practices are often described as ethical due to their use of democratic compositional principles such as a de-centering of the author through co-composition, equivalence in the value of gestures or actions, and a democratisation of the body.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Eva Karczag referred to this image of an iceberg when talking through her practice with me in Arnhem, June 2014. Image accessed September 26, 2018, <https://www.tokresource.org/tip-of-the-iceberg/>.

<sup>2</sup> Some examples are: Ruth Pethybridge, "Relative Proximity: Reaching towards an Ethics of Touch in Cross-Generational Dance Practice," *Journal of Dance and Somatic Practices* 6, no. 2 (2014): 175–87; Malaika Sarco-Thomas, "*touch + talk*: Ecologies of Questioning in Contact Improvisation," *Journal of Dance and Somatic Practices* 6, no. 2 (2014): 198–204; and Karen Schupp, "Informed Decisions: Dance Improvisation and Responsible Citizenship," *Journal of Dance Education* 11, no. 1 (2011): 22–9. Vida Midgelow approaches the concept of ethical practice (also using Karczag as a case study) in "Nomadism and Ethics in/as Improvised Movement Practices," *Critical Studies in Improvisation* 8, no. 1 (2012): 1–8. The considerable literature on the use of somatic-based improvisation in dance therapy is beyond the scope of this research.

<sup>3</sup> A *democratisation* of the body means that no body part is more important than another. This can also

Improvised dance can also be considered ethical in the Spinozan sense, as propositions made by the seventeenth-century philosopher Benedict de Spinoza in his *Ethics* are uncannily relevant to the articulation of improvised practices. The most relevant concepts, such as the unification of body-mind, the circulation of affects, and the notion of encounter, have been developed by affect scholars.<sup>4</sup> Dance theorist and practitioner Philipa Rothfield also deploys a Spinozan lens when arguing that with “nothing to hold onto, striving nevertheless to maximize the body’s active affections, dancing could be conceived as an ethical endeavor *par excellence*.”<sup>5</sup> As was discussed in more detail in the previous chapter, theorising improvised dance via Spinoza supports a description of a practitioner’s attunement to the forces motivating movement that are not pre-determined by conscious thought, but by the resonation of affects within and between bodies. Therefore, a Spinozan theorisation of improvisation describes a practitioner who is attuned to the affective forces (whether they call them that or not) of the present moment and is moved directly by those forces without mediating their expressive response via conscious thought. As Gilles Deleuze explains:

One seeks to acquire knowledge of the powers of the body in order to discover, *in parallel fashion*, the powers of the mind that elude consciousness, and thus to be able to *compare* the powers. In short, the model of the body, according to Spinoza, does not imply any devaluation of thought in relation to extension, but, much more important, a devaluation of consciousness in relation to thought: a discovery of the unconscious, of an *unconscious of thought* just as profound as *the unknown of the body*.<sup>6</sup>

This model of decentred authorship extends beyond an anthropocentric perspective, suggesting that an improvisation is not composed through the conscious thoughts of the

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include a breakdown of the mind-over-body hierarchy. While these compositional principles are relevant to the practice discussed here, they will not be specifically addressed in this chapter. For more on the democratic principles of postmodern dance (and improvisation techniques therein) see Sally Banes, *Democracy’s Body: Judson Dance Theater, 1962–1964* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1980).

<sup>4</sup> As was outlined in earlier chapters, this thesis follows Brian Massumi’s and Deleuze’s reading of Spinoza. Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. Edwin Curley (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1996).

<sup>5</sup> Philipa Rothfield, “Embracing the Unknown, Ethics and Dance,” in *Ethics and the Arts*, ed. Paul Macneill (Amsterdam: Springer, 2014), 97. My Spinozist theorisation of improvisation began in 2012, and therefore reflects and builds on Rothfield’s more recently published research in what is a growing area of interest within dance theory. Italic emphasis in original.

<sup>6</sup> Italics in original quote from Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, trans. Robert Hurley (San Francisco, CA: City Lights, 1988), 18/19.

improviser but by invisible forces in circulation that they may become attuned to and make more visible through movement. However, while Spinoza's *Ethics* can be used as a model to describe this practice, his larger philosophical project also complicates the notion that this activity is ethical, as will be explained in a moment.

Chapter Three of this thesis articulates various kinds of embodied consciousness that are utilised in an improvisational practice, and of relevance to this chapter is how an improviser can be moved by the body's mind. Chapter Four describes how somatic practices can facilitate an awareness of the resonation of affects in a body-mind. This chapter builds on the framework laid out in the previous two chapters to explain why this approach to practice can be considered ethical by grounding the use of Spinozan ethics in the **ethical actions** of an encounter: the transmission between bodies, through touch, that attunes a body-mind to the resonation of affects. These tactile forces are those transmitted with the intent of (therapeutic) non-violence, privileging a capacity to sense the interconnectedness of bodies. An ethical approach to improvisation has the potential to become a life practice because it permeates a way of being that blurs the distinction between art practice and life. An *ethics of being* as a life practice arises in the intersecting pioneering lineages of improvised dance and somatic practice and is influenced by Eastern philosophies.

Spinoza is important here because, while I've found only one direct link between the pioneers of Western improvisation and Spinoza's *Ethics* (via philosopher John Dewey's influence on pioneering dance educator Margaret H'Doubler as discussed in Chapter Two), the concepts Spinoza posits in his philosophy help describe aspects of practice that can be difficult to articulate.<sup>7</sup> In addition to proposing the unity of body-mind (and of God-Nature), Spinoza argues that in order to live an ethical life it is necessary to understand how affective forces motivate desire and behaviour.<sup>8</sup> By way of a brief

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<sup>7</sup> The evidence I have found for the influence of Spinoza on Dewey is a critique that Dewey wrote about Spinoza's *Ethics* in which he endorses Pantheism as the highest approach to philosophical thought, while also arguing that his work is actually Pancosmism. According to Dewey historian Jay Martin, this was one of the first published critiques through which Dewey began his philosophical career. See Jay Martin, *The Education of John Dewey: A Biography* (New York, NY and Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2002), 52. See also John Dewey, "The Pantheism of Spinoza," *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 16, no. 3 (1882): 249–57.

<sup>8</sup> Spinoza's proposition was in response to the ethical problem presented by the Stoics (a school of Hellenistic philosophy founded in Athens by Zeno of Citium in the early third century BC) that destructive emotions are "the result of errors in judgment, and that a sage, or person of moral and intellectual perfection, would not undergo such emotions. Stoics were concerned with the active

recount of Spinoza's argument, he explains that with a greater understanding of what it is that drives human behaviour (*affectus*) people could be liberated from the "bondage" of acting without an awareness of what is motivating their actions.<sup>9</sup> For Spinoza, it is possible to develop a greater *understanding* of the motivating powers of affects, and through that understanding be less subject to their intensity, or more accepting of it through the use of rational thought.<sup>10</sup> His description of *affectus* conjures a notion of a body-mind as an (spiritual-corporeal) automaton that Deleuze elucidates further by saying, "it is less we who have the ideas than the ideas which are affirmed in us."<sup>11</sup> Therefore, an improvisation practice might be thought of as ethical in the Spinozist sense, in so far as it develops an understanding of the forces in circulation that motivate action.<sup>12</sup> However, as Karczag explains, the term *automaton* is contentious in an improvisational context, preferring the *agency* emphasised in Rothfield's term **corporeal agency**.

Even though it's true that one is allowing oneself to be *played by or*

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relationship between cosmic determinism and human freedoms, and the belief that it is virtuous to maintain a will (called *prohairesis*) that is in accord with nature. Because of this, the Stoics presented their philosophy as a way of life, and they thought that the best indication of an individual's philosophy was not what a person said but how he behaved." Donald Yates, *A Life Committed to Its Intended Anchorage and Soar: The Harmony between Spiritual Principles and Sound Science* (Bloomington, IN: WestBow Press, 2011), 30.

<sup>9</sup> Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1996, 113.

<sup>10</sup> There is a parallel that can be made between Spinoza's suggestion that we cultivate an understanding of how we are affected and the Buddhist meditation practice of Vipassanā, in the sectarian tradition of U Ba Khin. I make this observation after having practiced this meditation method, which was taught via recordings of S. N. Goenka during a ten-day silent retreat in Blackheath, New South Wales in 2001. For further information see <https://www.bhumi.dhamma.org/>.

<sup>11</sup> Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics: Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect and Selected Letters*. Translated by Samuel Shirley and Seymour Feldman (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1992), 85, accessed April 4, 2016, <http://deleuzelectures.blogspot.com.au/2007/02/on-spinoza.html>. As was outlined in Chapter Four *Resonance of Affects and Immanent Evaluation*, Deleuze explains that "according to Spinoza, we are fabricated as such spiritual automata. As such spiritual automata, within us there is the whole time of ideas which succeed one another, and in according with this succession of ideas, our power of acting or force of existing is increased or diminished in a continuous manner, on a continuous line, and this is what we call affectus, it's what we call existing ... Affectus is thus the continuous variation of someone's force of existing, insofar as this variation is determined by the ideas that s/he has," accessed April 4, 2016, <http://deleuzelectures.blogspot.com.au/2007/02/on-spinoza.html>. Michael Hardt also describes the body as a "corporeal automaton because in movement and rest the body obeys only the laws of extension." See Michael Hardt, *Gilles Deleuze: An Apprenticeship in Philosophy* (Minneapolis, MN and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 80. See also Deleuze, *Spinoza*, 1988, and Gilles Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York, NY: Zone Books, 1992). Michael Hardt also describes the body as a "corporeal automaton because in movement and rest the body obeys only the laws of extension." See Hardt, 80. See also Deleuze, *Spinoza*, 1988 and Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy*.

<sup>12</sup> However, as this chapter demonstrates, an improviser responds to this understanding very differently to Spinoza's suggestion of developing a rational perspective, by amplifying their physical response to the affects.

*composed by* the resonation of affects, the word ‘agency’ gives the mover active engagement within the act of allowing that ‘automaton’ does not. Rather, within the act of allowing myself to be played by the forces of affects, I feel wide-awake and able to make clear in-the-moment choices.<sup>13</sup>

Therefore, an ethically Spinozist approach to improvisation could be thought of as one that seeks to listen to *the body’s mind* and become consciously aware of the *resonance of affects* and how they are physicalised through movement. By perceiving how movement arises from impulses, which dance a body-mind as a corporeal agent, the somatically attuned improviser is liberated from the *lag* of thinking about what they should do in the improvisation. It is not that an improviser does not have conscious thought, but that they are not always using thoughts to make compositional decisions, and are instead consciously aware of or receptive to what is happening to them in the moment. Somatically driven improvisation, therefore, aims to generate movement from somatic perception rather than from ideas or task-based concepts (as is the case when thinking-through-the-body).

The use of a Spinozist lens to articulate improvisation deserves further scholarly attention because it offers a conceptual framework to interrogate the integrating, or disintegrating, effect of an *encounter*. Spinoza’s notion of an encounter is explained further by Deleuze:

When a body ‘encounters’ another body, or an idea another idea, it happens that the two relations sometimes combine to form a more powerful whole, and sometimes one decomposes the other, destroying the cohesion of its parts ... we experience *joy* when a body encounters ours and enters into composition with it, and *sadness* when, on the contrary, a body or an idea threatens our own coherence.<sup>14</sup>

Following Deleuze’s Spinozan notion of an encounter and degrees of “composition,” “cohesion,” and “coherence,” this chapter describes how specifically touch-based,

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<sup>13</sup> Karczag, email correspondence, 2019.

<sup>14</sup> Deleuze, *Spinoza*, 19.

ethical actions of somatic practice can exemplify a cohesive encounter.<sup>15</sup> Developing the capacity for cohesive encounters in an improvisation practice requires a dual attention to affects moving between and through bodies: receptively witnessing without judgement so as to “enter into composition with” other bodies, while also perceiving the reciprocal resonance of one’s own body-mind.<sup>16</sup> The cohesion of body-mind is maintained in this kind of somatic encounter because the witness is actively engaged while also having no intention to intervene or dominate/change (or fix) the other, thereby supporting attention towards *what is* and moving away from judgement or dominance. This chapter refers to Eva Karczag as a case study as she is an artist whose practice was not devised with Spinoza in mind but which, nonetheless, enacts Spinoza’s propositions.

As was explained earlier, the impact of somatics on composition is under-theorised because while it is central to many choreographers’ methods, historically, very few choreographers credit somatic practices as directly influencing their compositional processes. However, a recent trend is gaining momentum with a new generation of dance-makers whereby the somatic aspect of practice is becoming more visible, particularly via the exploration of improvisation in performance. In this sense Karczag’s work is both pioneering and ahead of the curve. While Karczag has had a long career as a somatic-based dance educator and mentor, she identifies foremost as a dancer and belongs to a handful of artists who approach improvisation not as a vocation, but as an ongoing practice cultivated and sustained over a lifetime.<sup>17</sup> Karczag’s work continues a lineage of improvisation practices that, in Chapter Two, was traced back to the work of H’Doubler. As Dewey’s pupil, H’Doubler engaged with an experiential philosophy by seeking to erase the separation of art and life and, in so doing, perpetuated what Dewey describes as the “continuity of aesthetic experience with normal processes of living.”<sup>18</sup> Following that idea, this chapter frames Karczag’s improvised performances as windows onto an ongoing practice that continues before and after the participation of an audience, and makes an original contribution to improvisation theory through interviews

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Karczag emphasises the distinction between her job as an educator and her identity as a dancer in Eva Karczag, interview by author, Arnhem, Netherlands, 2014. For accounts of other important pioneering improvisers who have sustained their practice over a lifetime, see Kent De Spain, *Landscapes of the Now: A Topology of Movement Improvisation* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014).

<sup>18</sup> John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1934), 9.

with Karczag. However, it is my proposition that Karczag's work demonstrates an ethical approach to dancing, which I argue embodies the philosophy of Spinoza, which I have described as an *ethics of being*.<sup>19</sup> This chapter thus contributes to the mapping of pioneering lineages in both the alternative sciences of contemporary dance and somatic corporeal knowledges throughout the thesis, and the theorisation of improvisation through an articulation of practice.

This research is particularly relevant at this moment in dance history because, while there has been considerable expansion of somatic-based improvisation within Western tertiary institutions in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, these knowledges are more often used as a way to leverage greater facility from professional dancers than promoting the ethical value of practice.<sup>20</sup> As is well documented, somatics assists dancers' development of key skills: erasing the identifiable tropes of codified movement, generating a broader range of original movement qualities and pathways, and an experiential understanding of anatomical function for injury prevention.<sup>21</sup> However, in an institution the value of an *ethical life practice* is often overlooked in favour of using somatic practices to enhance a dancer's corporeal versatility.<sup>22</sup> As a consequence, the subtleties of the ethical actions that will be described in the following can easily be lost in the transfer of information between generations of practitioners. This chapter employs Karczag's work as a case study to bring to light and re-prioritise

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<sup>19</sup> The theory of an (Spinozan) *ethics of being* presented here was developed through my own observation and reflection while spending time with Karczag. As the subject of my observation, Karczag may agree or disagree with my summations. Coincidentally, Rothfield's research into the Spinozist ethics of improvisation also looks to Karczag as a case study.

<sup>20</sup> Karczag raised this issue with me in Eva Karczag, interview. The role of somatics within the dance institution has also been addressed by dance scholars such as Henrietta Bannerman, "A Question of Somatics: The Search for a Common Framework for Twenty-First Century Contemporary Dance Pedagogy: Graham and Release-Based Techniques," *Journal of Dance and Somatic Practices* 2, no. 1 (2010): 5–19; Julie Brodie and Elin Lobel, "Integrating Fundamental Principles Underlying Somatic Practices into the Dance Technique Class," *Journal of Dance Education* 4, no. 3 (2004): 80–7; and Shona Erskine, "The Integration of Somatics as an Essential Component of Aesthetic Dance Education," *Dance Dialogues: Conversations Across Cultures, Artforms and Practices* (2009): 1–11.

<sup>21</sup> There is extensive research in this area. See, for example, Julie Brodie and Elin Lobel, *Dance and Somatics: Mind-Body Principles of Teaching and Performance* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2012); Becky Dyer, "Theories of Somatic Epistemology: An Inspiration for Somatic Approaches to Teaching Dance and Movement Education," *Somatics* 16, no. 1 (2009): 24–39; and Martha Eddy, "A Brief History of Somatic Practices and Dance: Historical Development of the Field of Somatic Education and Its Relationship to Dance," *Journal of Dance and Somatic Practices* 1, no. 1 (2009): 5–27. See also the trend towards "eclectically" or somatically trained dancers in professional contexts in Melanie Bales and Rebecca Nettl-Fiol, *The Body Eclectic: Evolving Practices in Dance Training* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2008).

<sup>22</sup> Bethany Good also raises these issues in her master's thesis, in which Karczag is also a case study. Bethany Good, "Somatic Value System for Life and its Integration into Dance Practices," Dance master's thesis, 2015, accessed March 14, 2016, [http://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/dns\\_theses/3](http://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/dns_theses/3).

the broader value of the ethical aspects of improvisational practice.

Again, it is worth noting that while somatic practices have gained traction within tertiary educative contexts, at the turn of the twenty-first century the actual act of dancing in dance performances diminished in the wake of a conceptual turn that coincided with contemporary arts more broadly, described as non-dance. Furthermore, funding for full-length works by independent artists has been eroded to such an extent (particularly in Australia) that an informal showing of work-in-progress has effectively replaced the performance season, as it becomes the only public showing of a work.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, examining improvised performance as a life practice (following Dewey), rather than as a body of finished works, is highly relevant in this context. The work of Karczag is also mobilised as a case study here due to the quality and refinement of her practice, rather than her visibility on the international stage, because it is in **undisciplined** studio settings that a practice can be explored and refined in such depth. This chapter will elucidate key terms before applying them to Karczag's work as a case study.

## 5.2 Spinoza's *Ethics*

According to Spinoza, people do not have free will (predominantly) because, as we saw earlier, the force of affects in circulation motivates us as **spiritual automata**. He describes affects as the first, and therefore the least trustworthy, type of knowledge progressing up to the first kind, which is knowledge of God. Therefore, part of Spinoza's philosophy is to develop a broader or more *rational* understanding of how we are motivated by affects and attempt, to some extent, to *moderate* their power. Importantly, Part IV of Spinoza's *Ethics* is intended as a way for people to understand how to be free from the "bondage" of passions or negative affections that passively reduce the body's activity.<sup>24</sup>

Man's lack of power to moderate and restrain the affects I call bondage. For the man who is subject to affects is under the control, not of himself, but of

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<sup>23</sup> This is particularly true in Australia following the \$114 million-dollar cut to the Australia Council budget by Senator George Brandis in 2015, whereby he diverted \$110 million into his initiative called the National Program for Excellence in the Arts. See Shalailah Medhora, "Brandis: Arts Initiative Plus Cuts to Australia Council Will End 'Monopoly'," *The Guardian*, May 14, 2015, accessed September 2, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/may/14/brandis-new-initiative-plus-cuts-to-australia-council-will-end-monopoly>.

<sup>24</sup> In some instances, the word *affectus* is translated from the Latin into English as *emotion*. For more detail see "Part I: Of Human Bondage, or The Powers of the Affects," in Spinoza, *Ethics*, 113.



fortune, in whose power he so greatly is that often, though he sees the better for himself, he is still forced to follow the worst.<sup>25</sup>

Spinoza argues that we assume that we have free will because we have conscious awareness, but actually we are unaware of the forces (beyond conscious awareness) that determine our choices. Therefore, a key purpose of *Ethics* is to bring to light the force of affects in order to better understand their effect on us. Spinoza argues that while we are blindly motivated by passions or (negative) affects, if we can understand how we are affected we may have the potential to follow *reason* (or the good) instead. Spinoza says: “A free man is one who lives under the guidance of reason, who is not led by [emotion] ... but who directly desires that which is good.”<sup>26</sup> In other words, rather than rely on the moral guidance (or judgement) of a transcendent God, an ethical way for people to live is to observe the empowering or disempowering nature of affects and choose a response based on reason. Spinoza argues, “each of us has – in parts, at least, if not absolutely – the power to understand himself and his affects, and consequently, the power to bring it about that he is less acted on by them.”<sup>27</sup>

Conceiving of improvisation as an activity determined by affective forces is another way of describing how improvisation might ethically decentre the author of a composition. As Deleuze explains:

There is an automatism of thinking (*Treatise on the intellect*, 85), just as there is a mechanism of the body capable of astonishing us (*Ethics*, III, 2, schol.). Each thing is at once body and mind, thing and idea; it is in this sense that all individuals are *animata* (II, 13, schol.).<sup>28</sup>

Therefore, it is when an improviser practices attuning their conscious awareness to their body’s mind that the force of the resonance of affects in animating their body-mind may potentially be perceived. In this sense the resonation of affects animates the automaton (or animata) of the body-mind, supporting the improviser’s corporeal agency.

Spinoza’s philosophy is useful for describing the feature of improvisation that *brings to light* how the forces of affects animate a body-mind, thereby bringing a conscious awareness to this potentially invisible process. However, while improvisation aligns with this philosophy in some respects, the practice actually goes against Spinoza’s

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 232.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>28</sup> Deleuze, *Spinoza*, 86.

suggestion to move towards a rational *moderation* of affects, because improvisers *amplify* their response to the affects instead. In submitting to the force of affect, the improviser knowingly becomes a open medium whose agency gives way to a play of forces and effects, thereby developing an understanding of the power of those forces to animate the body. However, rather than using this understanding to rationally *moderate* the power of affects, an improviser *amplifies* their physical response to this resonance through their dancing. Therefore, while these philosophical concepts are useful as a model for articulating some important aspects of practice, they cannot be necessarily embraced in every respect. In the same way, not all improvisation is necessarily therapeutic or spiritual despite the closeness of the practice to those intentions and practices. Ultimately, the central drive of improvisation is based on compositional ideas and aesthetic choices that best support the artistic sensibility of the performance, of which one is the practice of being composed by affective forces.

Recalling Chapter Four, it is important to remember that Spinoza's model of immanent evaluation is an alternative to the judgement of a transcendent God. Spinoza's model of immanence is one in which Nature/God is not anthropocentric, and therefore holds no moral agenda or interest in the fate of humans, but has an underlying pattern in terms of cause and effect. It follows that for Spinoza, ethics has less to do with a moral judgement of behaviour according to a predetermined agenda (such as a religious text or moral code), than a psycho-physical capacity to be aware of forces at play and to follow that which is rational and/or positively empowering. Spinoza asserts that while there is no free will, some extent of agency is increased through attention to *affections* of a body "by which the body's power of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained," and that these affections are the result of an encounter.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, Spinoza draws attention to the negative passions that affect people in order to reorient towards a position of choice, or towards a somewhat greater agency to choose, that which increases the power of the body to act.

That aspects of Spinoza's philosophy find illustration through dance is a position also shared with Rothfield, who adroitly applies a Spinozan lens in her proposition that "the activity of dancing affirms Spinoza's ethics."<sup>30</sup> Rothfield's application of Spinoza's theories are clearly reflected in the way improvisation is practiced in performance by

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<sup>29</sup> Spinoza, *Ethics*, 70.

<sup>30</sup> Rothfield ("Embracing the Unknown," 92) also refers to Karczag as a case study.

“*maximizing* the body’s affections,” in Rothfield words, or as I describe in this thesis, *amplifying* the resonance of affects.<sup>31</sup> This research is in agreement with many of Rothfield’s propositions, with small differences in some aspects of our interpretations. Similar to Deleuze’s description of Spinoza’s notion of spiritual automata, which was discussed in the previous chapter, Rothfield argues that creating space for *the unknown* in an improvisation occurs by “allow[ing] the body to come to the fore by way of backgrounding [a dancer’s] own sovereign subjectivity.”<sup>32</sup> She argues that for Spinoza what is *good*, or *ethical*, is that which increases *the body’s* power or agency. For Rothfield, the improvisational process of cultivating what she describes as corporeal agency is therefore ethical, because it is the practice of creating space for the unknown to occur and this may allow the dancer’s body to have greater agency in the dance. I agree that the language-based chatter of thoughts is subdued when improvising, however, the conscious attention of an improviser is especially heightened in an improvised performance, particularly in their sensorium. Therefore, while I agree that improvisation privileges the body’s desires, or corporeal agency, I argue that it is important to maintain the integrity of body-mind unity in language to prevent any supposition of dualism in reverse because an improviser foregrounds rather than backgrounds their conscious awareness. Therefore, I propose the notion of *the body’s mind* as a way to address the embodiment of conscious awareness, or a heightened awareness of the body’s consciousness.

Rothfield’s assertion that “the ethical moment in Spinoza’s thought arises as a distinction between *kinds* of becoming” is useful, particularly in her interpretation of *active* and *passive* encounters in relation to the kinds of becoming they may engender.<sup>33</sup> Rothfield pursues her argument by following Deleuze’s notion of the body’s power in relation to the body’s capacity “to be affected” that looks to the encounter between bodies to determine the shifting affections of the body.<sup>34</sup> She explains:

The encounter between bodies is an event. Something happens in the exchange between bodies, whereby each participating body expresses or undergoes a dynamic corporeal change. This is where the qualitative

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 97. Emphasis added.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 93. Italics in original.

<sup>34</sup> Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy*.

difference between active and passive affections arises depending upon whether a body acts or is acted upon (suffers action).<sup>35</sup>

Rothfield's discussion of Spinoza's notion that "power grows through the body's increasing ability to act" highlights the ethical dimension that occurs in relation to how "a body may become more or less powerful as a result of the encounter."<sup>36</sup> She goes on to explain that,

to actively participate in an encounter – to exhibit bodily agency – is to increase one's power inasmuch as a 'new' activity has been performed by this body. Conversely, an encounter that is wholly caused by another body is also an event but one which is not due to my body's activity. To that extent, it represents a diminishing power of activity on my part. The encounter is thus always conceived as expressing a qualitative difference: either a body acts for itself or it is acted upon.<sup>37</sup>

Where this research departs from Rothfield's interpretation in her distinction between *passive* or *active* encounters is in relation to notions of good or bad, following Spinoza. She explains that "when a body encounters another it can be affected one or two ways: actively or passively. Actions are a matter of bodily agency, whereas passions are external in origin."<sup>38</sup> For her, movement that is motivated by corporeal agency is *active* and therefore *good* because it originates from within, whereas *passions* that "act upon us" from the outside produce *passive affections*, as was explained by Spinoza.<sup>39</sup> However, as was established earlier, affective force is both external and internal in the sense that it does not belong to any particular body, but moves between and through bodies as other bodies and events affect them. Furthermore, affects are by their nature almost imperceptible. As Massumi explains, the only way to consciously perceive

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<sup>35</sup> Rothfield, "Embracing the Unknown," 92. Parentheses in original.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. Rothfield explains that Deleuze identifies that an activity should be new as it is the "real, positive and affirmative form of our capacity to be affected." Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy*, 225.

<sup>38</sup> Rothfield, "Embracing the Unknown," 93.

<sup>39</sup> She goes on to say, "Active and passive affections are relational and event-based. Whether a body is active or passive is not fixed for all time but depends upon the relation between what a body does and its particular powers. There is a sense in which this power is fixed: for everybody has a unique and unchanging essence. What changes is the body's expression of that essence, whether active or passive." Rothfield, "Embracing the Unknown," 92.

affects is via their effects that resonate the body-mind.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, it is unclear how it might be possible to determine whether affect originates from an internal or external source, as even (external) passions appear to drive the human automaton as a corporeal agent.

While Spinoza, and others such as Deleuze, Massumi, and Rothfield who interpret his philosophical ideas in a range of different ways have much to offer a theorisation of improvisation via the theorisation of the circulation of affects, I argue that the practice of improvisation is not necessarily or inherently good in the sense that Spinoza intended, in terms of its ability to *moderate* the power of negative affects. It is possible that improvisation may be practiced in ways that maximise the negative affections of external passions on the body as a methodological choice. Therefore, not only is improvisation not necessarily *good* it is also not always *ethical* in the way that Spinoza proposed, as a means of observing one's motivations and choosing to act rationally. Improvisers may be as susceptible to the bondage of negative affects as anyone else, without the insight that Spinoza promotes as ethical.

In this chapter, the ethical value of practice is discussed in relation to how it is possible to facilitate an awareness of the forces (or resonances) that animate a body-mind through an *encounter*. As will be explained in a moment, Karczag's ethical actions, such as touch, are an example of an ethical encounter because through touch she models a receptive approach to perceiving the resonance of affects animating a student's body-mind, via an extremely heightened and multi-directional awareness.<sup>41</sup> However, a pivotal point made here is that what is *ethical* about the ethical actions of touch is that they lack an agenda by inviting a response through a practice of *open-handedness*. Rather than signalling a pre-determined intention as to what the student's response *should be*, Karczag holds a space for the student to perceive *what it is*. Her open-handed encounter may appear to be physically external and passive, but is *actively* non-manipulative in the way that it heightens the somatic sensitivity of the recipient by extending the intention of the touch through the skin to their interiority.

Although my touch is coming from the outside, and it may seem like my

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<sup>40</sup> Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002).

<sup>41</sup> Karczag provided additional detail in email correspondence, 2019.

hand touches my student's skin, my intention and the energetic force of my touch, reach below their skin into the inner space of their body. When I touch, actively, with an open hand, I am touching muscle, bone, organ, tissue, fluid, etc. It is this reaching and deepening into my student's internal body-mind space that allows them to perceive themselves from the inside – a somatic experience.<sup>42</sup>

Therefore, the passive nature of tactile somatic (hands-on) work further complicates the notion of passive (external) and active (internal) affections as either bad or good respectively, because Karczag's unassertive touch is in fact an *active* and internal encounter despite appearing to be passive and external. It is also good in the sense that it facilitates an awareness of the resonance of affect, as will be discussed later in this chapter.

In determining what is *good* or *bad* in relation to an ethical reading of dance, Rothfield asserts that "joy is the mark of a dance done well," illustrating the affirming power of positive action that is definitely worthy of aspiration.<sup>43</sup> Does that mean, conversely, that dance has not been done well if joy is not felt? Or could the notion of joy be expanded in useful ways? Deleuze's description of joy as the experience of *cohesion* or *integration* as the result of an empowering encounter provides further possibilities for this idea. Deleuze explains:

When a body 'encounters' another body, or an idea another idea, it happens that the two relations sometimes combine to form a more powerful whole, and sometimes one decomposes the other, destroying the cohesion of its parts ... we experience *joy* when a body encounters ours and enters into composition with it, and *sadness* when, on the contrary, a body or an idea threatens our own coherence.<sup>44</sup>

Perhaps concepts of *good* or *bad* in relation to improvisation could be extended along a spectrum so that a practice need not be *inherently* good or bad in relation to the

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<sup>42</sup> Karczag, email correspondence, 2019.

<sup>43</sup> Rothfield, "Embracing the Unknown," 91.

<sup>44</sup> Deleuze, *Spinoza*, 19.

experience of joy, but *contingently* better or worse depending on how it increases or decreases a body's sense of integration as the result of encounters with others (whether mad, bad, sad, or beautiful), as well as the ability to perceive the body's mind. This locates the ethical dimension of improvisation according to one's capacity to *be aware of* how one is being *composed by* the resonation of affects as an corporeal agent, and a crystallisation of *coherence* via an encounter.

It is worth noting that while increasing or decreasing the power of the body to act holds ethical value for Spinoza, his concept of *good* and *bad* are *contingent* and are determined in relation to the context. He explains that good and bad are

... nothing other than modes of thinking, or notions we form because we compare things to one another. For one and the same thing can, at the same time, be good, and bad, and also indifferent. For example, music is good for one who is melancholy, bad for one who is mourning, and neither good nor bad to one who is deaf.<sup>45</sup>

As we will see, for Karczag improvisation is similarly operating outside transcendent notions of good or bad, instead placing value based on her *interest*. Perhaps, then, it is possible to broaden the spectrum of what is good to include the experience of heightened interest: that which creates an imperative or sense of coherence to the dance, or a need that makes the dance necessary or vital (which may certainly give rise to joy). The perception of the resonation of affects may produce a range of intensities in body-mind, from almost imperceptibly delicate to those that may be (perhaps briefly) intense or overwhelming.<sup>46</sup> It is not necessarily the volume or quality of the resonation that makes it available to an improviser to work with in composition, but that it is attended to with *interest*. Karczag's investment of interest in what I've attributed to the affects resonating in her body-mind gives value to those resonances, but that is only part of the process. The second part is what she does with that information. Karczag explains:

If you can really drop into your own interest and explore and discover from that interest, then there really isn't good and bad. There is what's emerging.

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<sup>45</sup> Spinoza, *Ethics*, 115.

<sup>46</sup> For an evocative description of the affective dimension in everyday life see Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affects* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2007).

If it's of interest to you, it has to hold value. Then what you do with it, the shaping of that, that's a whole other story. You learn how to shape it in more interesting ways.<sup>47</sup>

Composing in response to resonances of affect may take many forms such as amplification, suspension, delay, minimisation, or as a point of departure/resistance to. As noted earlier, in addition to observing the resonation of affects, improvisers may try to *amplify* the resonation of affects in order to be *played by them* as a corporeal agent or instrument; to be *composed by* the forces of affects. This is not to say that the resonances themselves are amplified but that the conscious mind is embodied so as to perceive them more strongly. Therefore, there are two ways in which the body is affected and therefore motivated to act: either *subconsciously*, as is the normal method, or with more *awareness*, as practiced by improvisers. The latter is determined by an improviser's capacity both to *perceive* the resonation of affects in the body-mind and potentially to compose, or more accurately participate in the being *composed by*, the resonances as they arise when, as Rothfield describes, we get "out of the way."<sup>48</sup>

This slippery, and yet very interesting, grey area at the nexus of improvisation and composition proposes a different model of improviser agency which is analysed further in Chapter Seven *Prohibitive and Emancipative Self-Surveillance*.<sup>49</sup> Specifically, Karczag's practice is described here as ethical because of her empowering and conscious approach to encounters with the self and others. She aims to emancipate her body's mind and increase its power of action through ease, finding her interest in the dance through a self-reflexive perception (emancipative self-surveillance) of the affective phase in movement. Importantly, her method of approaching an encounter is unpacked, revealing the subtleties of an ethics of being.

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<sup>47</sup> Karczag, interview.

<sup>48</sup> Rothfield, "Embracing the Unknown," 90.

<sup>49</sup> In Chapter Six *Cultivating Movement Systems*, my analysis will focus on how an improviser (Riley Watts) negotiates a performance while under the direction of a choreographer (William Forsythe), which entails different notions of dancer agency and specifically operating as a self-organising system.





Figure 3. Eva Karczag. Photo by Nienke Terpsma, 1986.<sup>50</sup>

### 5.3 Eva Karczag: Moving and allowing one's self to be moved

Karczag is an excellent case study for this research because her improvisation practice is easily observable as ethical in its transmission both through her movement and through her encounters with others. The subtlety and detail of her virtuosity is beguiling, as demonstrated in dance theorist Doran George's account:

In an erratic inconsistency of speed, small and subtle jerks and slides punctuate Karczag's melting and fracturing, all of which she weaves into a seamless movement tapestry. Her kinetic complexity hinders my attempts to archive *Wrapt Concurrence* in words, a problem with which dance writers are familiar. Yet Karczag basks in motility's elusiveness, as she bewilderingly vacillates, with her capricious use of tempo, between fine motor movement and change in her spatial configuration.<sup>51</sup>

Her practice of tuning her body-mind instrument has been refined over decades and therefore she tangibly embodies an ethics of being in the way she expresses the resonance of affects as the primary motivator of her movement. As a result of her

<sup>50</sup> Image accessed September 25, 2018, <https://integratedmovement-ideas.weebly.com/integrated-movement-ideas/ideokinesis-and-dance>.

<sup>51</sup> Doran George, "Unpredictable Manoeuvres: Eva Karczag's Improvised Strategies for Thwarting Institutional Agendas," in *The Oxford Handbook of Improvisation in Dance*, ed. Vida Midgelow (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019), 223.

expertise, Karczag has been the subject of work by dance theorists who are interested in the juncture between somatics, improvisation, and the new dance aesthetic.<sup>52</sup> In her professional career, Karczag has performed in prominent companies in the field of experimental dance such as Trisha Brown Dance Company (United States), Strider (United Kingdom), and Dance Exchange (Australia). She is also an influential teacher at Trisha Brown Dance Company Education Program, and Movement Research in New York and was on the faculty of the European Dance Development Centre (EDDC), which was at the time co-directed by Mary Fulkerson and Aat Hougée. She is currently guest teaching at the school, now known as ArtEZ Dansacademie, Arnhem, Netherlands, after merging with EDDC in 2000. She holds an MFA (Dance Research Fellow) from Bennington College in Vermont. She continues her practice from her home-bases in Arnhem and New York, but also maintains a “nomadic” relationship with collaborators in various European and Australian cities.<sup>53</sup>

Karczag’s work exemplifies the psycho-physical qualities privileged in an ethical practice, such as an emphasis on the use of *breath*, *weight* (gravity and its counterpoint lightness), a soft but full *tone*, a sense of *expansion* (emphasised by the practice of the Alexander Technique®), and an openness of *presence*. Furthermore, her dancing reveals the influence of somatics on her composition in terms of **style**, demonstrating how an approach to improvisation as an ethical life practice can shape the aesthetics of a performance. Dance theorist Elizabeth Dempster explains the challenges inherent in a somatic approach to composition:

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<sup>52</sup> Some of the research on Karczag’s practice in relation to the new dance aesthetic includes: Elizabeth Dempster, “Explorations within the New Dance Aesthetic: Eva Karczag Interview,” *Writings on Dance: Exploring the New Dance Aesthetic* 14 (1995/1996): 39–52; Eva Karczag, “Moving the Moving,” *Writings on Dance: Exploring the New Dance Aesthetic* 14 (1995/1996): 33–8, and “As Yet Untitled,” *Writings on Dance: Exploring the New Dance Aesthetic* 14 (1995/1996): 39. For more references on Karczag see Chapter One.

<sup>53</sup> Vida Midgelow describes Karczag’s practice as “nomadic” and “ethical” (Midgelow, “Nomadism and Ethics,” 1–8).

... the challenge of a choreographic process based on ideokinetic principles [or somatics more generally] lies in the successful development of a sufficiently articulate physical medium through which thoughts and images, and the intuitively understood connections between them, may be made manifest.<sup>54</sup>

For Dempster, Karczag is an important case study because she exemplifies a “sufficiently articulate physical medium” that meets the challenge described above.<sup>55</sup> Of course, the articulation of somatic-based improvisational knowledges is particularly challenging in a culture that privileges language-based knowledge, not only to describe but also to develop expertise. Therefore, it is essential that the details of expertise be recorded. Karczag’s style is the result of her cultivation of movement qualities imbued with *grace*, *effortlessness*, and *lightness* born through an integrated *connection to the earth*. These qualities are evident even when she is deliberately emphasising her weight or performing movements with attack. The cleanness of her movement is always evident through her somatic practice through which she erases any **prohibitive** holding of her neuro-musculature. The processes of corporeal thinking of the body’s mind through emancipative self-surveillance that was introduced in Chapter Three *Embodied Consciousness*, is an attempt at describing the kinds of methods that Karczag uses to compose from a somatic basis.

The first time I saw Karczag perform was in Perth in 1994 when she had been invited to teach a workshop at the West Australian Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA) and perform an improvised solo at Perth Institute of Contemporary Art. I had never seen anyone moving with that level of understated fluid grace. She was dressed in white cotton or linen for her barefoot performance on the polished wooden floorboards of the gallery. She used natural daylight and a tape recorder to play, rewind, and re-play her low-fi accompaniment. She seemed to need nothing other than gravity, momentum, and ease to captivate the audience, with an approach to lightness that was very different to the muscular uplift of a ballerina. Later, she transformed the WAAPA dance studio into a site of rich experience, as she revealed to us an awareness of our pelvises, the

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<sup>54</sup> I have added text in brackets. Elizabeth Dempster, “Imagery, Ideokinesis and Choreography,” *Writings on Dance: Ideokinesis and Dance Making* 1 (1985): 21.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

voluminous depth between our front and back surfaces, and a palpable experiential knowledge of our width. The aesthetic style of her composition, at the level of gesture, revealed her approach to practice in that her movements were imbued with a heightened sensitivity to micro-qualitative shifts in effort, weight, and breath.

When considering the aesthetics of an ethical approach to dance it is important to note that, in contrast to current trends, Karczag's refined movement quality was cultivated when she danced professionally during a small pocket of time when experimental companies were funded while they explored the links between somatics and composition. Karczag witnessed how this approach to performance practice challenged institutions and funding bodies. For example, while working with Strider in the United Kingdom, Karczag remembers encountering the pressures of professionalism:

There was one time when we were called into the Arts Council offices and they said, 'You can dance, why are you just rolling around on the floor?' I think that there are many situations where the money that you're getting dictates what you do.<sup>56</sup>

Karczag recalls fondly her early, experimental years dancing with Trisha Brown and Dancers before the company professionalised, when they worked improvisational material into choreography in a way that retained its improvisational qualities. Over time, Karczag became more interested in the somatic and improvisational work that she was exploring and chose to step away from the funding bodies and the associated pressure towards goal-oriented productive output.

Karczag explains how the shift towards improvisation was a natural progression for her, emerging as it did from her detailed work with Brown towards a practice of listening and responding to what arises in the space and her body-mind:

It's interesting because I've done a lot of the kind of work where one must be a little bit *headier* in terms of the choices that one makes; like the work with Trisha which involved improvising with set material and then setting

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<sup>56</sup> Eva Karczag, interview.

the improvisations. However, there's a point when the piece has been set and its complexities have been embodied, where you must give up anyway. In running it, the information comes so quickly that you have to respond instinctively, in the moment, to whatever is happening. There isn't time to figure it out intellectually. After leaving Trisha, my own practice shifted into a more improvisatory mode where *listening* is key. It happens very much on a physical level, but of course, there's the mind-body connection, and the process of composing while dancing, so my mind has to be very engaged. But it's engaged in another way.<sup>57</sup>

For Karczag, this shift in interest coincided with a deeper interest in somatics, in particular the Alexander Technique and T'ai Chi Ch'uan, displacing the traditional aesthetic imperatives that had guided her foundational practice of ballet. She explains:

In many traditional techniques there's a lot of extension. At the beginning [of somatic training with Mary Fulkerson during the time of dancing with Strider], I had to learn how to fold and how to soften. By the end of those six weeks, I was folding easily. My joints were very differently used. I didn't want to go back into that extended patterning again.<sup>58</sup>

Karczag continued to deepen her practice by researching and incorporating what she had learned into her teaching, while primarily identifying as a dancer. Her central interest in performing is in improvisational contexts to offer insight into the states of being that she can access through her deep and ongoing practice, by either working solo or collaborating with others.

Watching her in the dance film *Horizon* (1996, d. Michelle Mahrer), it is clear that Karczag inhabits a world of imaginative sensation while improvising.<sup>59</sup> Her dancing is

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid. With changes made via email correspondence in 2019.

<sup>58</sup> Karczag explains her initial, deep encounter with somatics in Eva Karczag, interview: "During the summer of 1974, Mary [Fulkerson] and the dancers in her company, *Tropical Fruit Company*, taught members of *Strider* for 6 weeks. That was my first really intensive experience with somatic release work. Changes began to happen in my body as a result of doing it day after day. I remember talking with Nanette [Hassall] and saying, 'I don't know how to go back into a ballet class after this.' Nanette's suggestion was don't do it. That's probably the last time I went into a ballet or Cunningham class." bid. With changes made via email correspondence in 2019.

<sup>59</sup> *Horizon* (1996), d. Michelle Mahrer.

dynamically unpredictable in a way that suggests she is enacting the impulses that arise via a resonance of affects. The energetic build of the dance embodies the time, rhythm, and focus it takes to become, not only aware of the impulses that arise, but to be moved by them. Karczag's voice overlays the moving image with poetic words that can only point to the experience of the dancing.<sup>60</sup> In the collage of text, Karczag herself notes that "English is my second language," suggesting that movement is her first.<sup>61</sup> The inherent self-reflexivity of her practice also comes through in the text as she asks, "where is the end of the inside of us?" Her lines of text are repeated and overlaid, losing their semiotic charge to become a rhythmic texture. Through these words she describes something elusive that she says is "too fast to see."

Karczag explains how she enters a specific state through her practice, whether dancing or teaching, through which she encounters *a field of information* that guides her. This idea builds on the concept of affective forces in circulation which one may tune into via specific brain-wave frequencies, or become receptive to by listening to the body's mind, opening a field of somatic intelligence that may be collected through a body-mind instrument. As she elucidates:

Certainly, I find that when I teach, it's like ... the alpha state that you just open to and then all the information comes. I often find when I am teaching that what I have to do is just to be very receptive to what's happening in the studio, in the space between people, to the air in the space. If that listening practice is tuned, then what I need to say will just come out generally in poetic, well-formed statements that I wouldn't be able to formulate quite that way if I had to work at it ... Actually, the practice of teaching and

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<sup>60</sup> Karczag provides further context by describing the process of making the work in email correspondence, 2019. She explains, "the video, *Horizon* (1996), and the solo performance, were a re-working of a group piece I made with 6 EDDC students. Part of the process was hands on, into moving, into writing. I then asked each person to pick 2 phrases from their writing. In the group piece, these generated movement that eventually was combined into a set phrase. When I reworked the piece into a solo, I used some of the set material that had the written phrases as their starting point, and my memories of each person's solo as resource for 7 improvised sections - one for each of the 6 of them and one for myself. When Warren Burt composed the sound, I gave him the written phrases we had collected to work with. It is true that a number of them held resonance for me - for instance, yes, English is definitely my second language, Hungarian being my first, but that statement was written by a woman who is German."

<sup>61</sup> Karczag was born in Hungary and then moved to Sydney as a child, which provides a double layer of meaning in the text.

speaking is very much like the practice of moving and allowing one's self to be moved.<sup>62</sup>

Karczag goes on to explain that when basing an improvisation on a “deep source,” such as a somatic exploration, the material or compositional interest can become “highly complex.”<sup>63</sup>

Karczag invited me into her practice in her studio in Arnhem through a series of improvisational explorations based on the refinement of movement tasks, as a way of warming up the body-mind's self-reflexive dialogue by (what I describe as) thinking-through-the-body. A profound effect on the quality of movement is achieved through the simplicity of actions performed with a specific quality of attention. Some of the actions she suggested included:

Toes fanning, streaming away, the heel dropping down and away, creating space in the back of the foot; in the lower leg, the fibula is connected to the tibia and as the tibia moves, it carries the fibula with it.

The hip socket softens, allowing the leg to drop back, underneath the pelvis and torso.

Same with the arms, fingers leading away from the shoulder, shoulder dropping back, arm dropping deep into its socket.  
Everything moving away from everything.

The ribs, twelve fingers, un-hugging the spine, curving around the torso to meet the sternum in front. The sternum is softening.  
Spine moving up, legs hanging underneath as hanging supports.

The sit bones are like two shoulder straps of a backpack, hanging downward, while the backpack (whole torso including the pelvis), is raised upward.

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<sup>62</sup> Eva Karczag, interview. With changes made via email correspondence in 2019.

<sup>63</sup> Dempster, “Explorations within the New,” 43.

Imagine a bicycle chain – as it moves up the front of the thigh, it simultaneously moves down the back of the thigh.

Imagine a figure eight, flowing down the back of the leg and up the front of the torso, up the back of the head and down the front of the face. This facilitates the letting go in the front of the body and makes the action from the back of the thigh possible. The whole back of the leg can support standing, and the easy folding of the knees in walking.<sup>64</sup>

This is a dance language that communicates directly to the experience of the viscera – the heart, the lung – inviting organs to soften in tone, and allowing the space to be present in the here and now of this moment. Karczag achieves this through the quality of her voice and touch, and her sense of pace and presence with hands-on work.

In particular, Karczag uses *hands-on work* as a way into a shared experiential terrain for those she dances with. She explains:

Chris [Crickmay], Miranda [Tufnell] and I do a lot of hands-on work. With Miranda because she is also is an Alexander Technique teacher and craniosacral practitioner that's a big part of what we do together. I do find that the hands-on work is extraordinary. [It contributes to] the fact that I have such detail and certainty in my moving.<sup>65</sup>

Touching is a vital method of imparting corporeal knowledges and in particular communicating the experience of an ethical action through an *encounter* that integrates and supports the perception of the body's mind. Therefore, the specificity with which one can refine their sense of touch cannot be underestimated.

The “sufficiently articulate medium” described earlier by Dempster in reference to Karczag resonates with the concept of natural movement proposed by H'Doubler, a kind of movement cultivated through a practice of self-reflexivity and self-

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<sup>64</sup> Audio recordings of practice with Karczag in Arnhem, the Netherlands, June 2014. With changes made via email correspondence in 2019.

<sup>65</sup> Eva Karczag, interview. Miranda Tufnell and Chris Crickmay have also published books on their work: *Body, Space, Image: Notes Towards Improvisation and Performance* (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1993); and *A Widening Field: Journeys in Body and Imagination* (Southwold: Dance Books, 2015).



responsibility, rather than what is inherent.<sup>66</sup> For example, when watching Karczag dance it becomes apparent that on a psycho-physical level she takes complete responsibility for her weight through her deep understanding of efficient alignment via the anatomical support of her structure. She describes this as “a practice of arriving in one’s weight.”<sup>67</sup> This means that she does not succumb to habitual musculoskeletal **holding patterns** that might cause her weight to spill or be unbalanced in ways that will ultimately cause her body to wear down and physically or energetically become depleted. Her whole system appears to be supported, and therefore regenerated, by her relationship to gravity and her axis. Similarly, during encounters with others she continues to be psycho-physically balanced, without spilling or drawing psychic support from those around her, because she supports herself holistically through her dynamic relationship with the earth.

When observing Karczag’s use of weight, it is clear that through the quality of her training her anatomy is aligned so that her weight falls directly through her most efficient lines of support. The counterthrust of her weight is directed back up through the central axis of her body, creating an effect of *lightness* and *effortlessness*. These dual lines of action are the primary feature impacting the aesthetics of a dancer’s body-schema, as Hubert Godard explains:

The quality, the richness, the clarity of gesture will be a reflection of this first support system ... The quality of perception and relationship with these two fields is our foundation; it creates our autonomy.<sup>68</sup>

Not everyone has the benefit of being held in the sufficiently supportive way a baby is held to develop the foundational autonomy that Godard describes in his article “Reading the Body in Dance.” However, through the re-education of the neuro-muscular system, somatics aims to redress any deficit of nourishing touch, or gaps in the process of infant developmental movement patterns.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> H’Doubler’s description of natural movement is discussed in detail in Chapter Two *Dewey and the Pre-history of Western Improvisation*.

<sup>67</sup> Eva Karczag, interview.

<sup>68</sup> Hubert Godard, “Reading the Body in Dance,” *Rolf Lines* October (1994): 37.

<sup>69</sup> This process is described as *emancipative self-surveillance* in Chapter Seven *Prohibitive and Emancipative Self-Surveillance*. There is considerable literature on developmental patterns and dance, most notably the work of Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, *Sensing, Feeling, and Action: The Experimental*

Karczag also embodies what is so particular about the release aesthetic: the combination of both the technical alignment described by Godard and what Joan Skinner describes as the “livingness on a cellular level,” which is a sense of vitality cultivated through the practice of release.<sup>70</sup> It is proposed here that Skinner’s notion of **cellular vitality** can also be cultivated through the ethical actions of encounter in somatics, such as the hands-on work, which is why ethics is essential to somatic practices in any academic study of dance. Therefore, to consider somatics as only useful in its application to erase the stylistic tropes of codified movement and/or in order to increase the aesthetic versatility of a dancer, is to engage with only half of the practice. Such an understanding privileges the aesthetics rather than the ethics of somatics, without the awareness that the aesthetics of practice are grounded in its ethics.



Figure 4. This Way.<sup>71</sup>

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*Anatomy of Body-Mind Centering*, third edition (North Hampton, MA: Contact Editions, 2012).

<sup>70</sup> For more on the releasing aesthetic, see Elizabeth Dempster, “The Releasing Aesthetic: An Interview with Joan Skinner,” *Writings on Dance: Exploring the New Dance Aesthetic* 14 (1995/1996), 12.

<sup>71</sup> Karczag shared this image of a sign pointing in two directions at the same time, and likened it to the way the torso moves in one direction while simultaneously, the legs release in another, when talking though her practice with me in Arnhem, June 2014 and expanded on in email correspondence, 2019.

## 5.4 Ethical actions

In observing Karczag's class I noticed that her pedagogical *ethical actions* are as much a part of the lesson as the exercises themselves because they are imbued with the ethical quality of her dancing and her approach to life.<sup>72</sup> Her approach to touch has been described by Dempster as having a "desirelessness."<sup>73</sup> The tone of Karczag's voice is similarly open as she offers specific tasks to the dance students in the room. To be more precise, Karczag is ethical in the way she encounters the students through her touch or her way of offering a task, while also allowing a student the opportunity to take responsibility for their own journey, creating space for them to engage with the task at their own pace and in their own way. She explains "when I touch with an open hand ... [I am] holding space for someone, in order to enable them to perceive what is happening inside them."<sup>74</sup> The key to the Spinozan ethics of this encounter is the subtle yet powerful combination of an aware presence that is *supportive* but also *unassertive* in that it does not manipulate the other toward an outcome. It is the student who is an active agent in the exploratory process and learning experience.<sup>75</sup> Therefore, to borrow Deleuze's explanation, Karczag doesn't threaten the *coherence* of her students' ideas or bodies in an encounter, but "the two relations combine to form a more powerful whole."<sup>76</sup> This more powerful whole is experienced in the unification at the level of the individual body-mind of the student, increasing their capacity to perceive the resonance of affects in circulation, and leading to a greater sense of connectivity between bodies. In this encounter, Karczag remains encouraging while also appearing to have no underlying agenda concerning the student's response, thus allowing the student space to experience and explore their own impulse or desire in response to the task or the touch. However, she does this in "order to enable them to eventually internalize and be able to use their insights regarding breath, weight and lightness, internal space and alignment

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<sup>72</sup> The following is an account of my observations while watching Karczag teach a class at ArtEZ Dansacademie, Arnhem June 2014. Karczag herself would describe this process differently, as she would not use the affect theory concepts that I have mobilised here.

<sup>73</sup> Elizabeth Dempster, "An Interview with Eva Karczag," *Writings on Dance: Ideokinesis and Dance Making* 14 (1995/96), 50.

<sup>74</sup> Karczag, email correspondence, 2019.

<sup>75</sup> This method aligns with Dewey's proposition that students require an active experience in order to learn, or experiences through which they must actively engage with the learning content. It also follows Godard's proposition concerning the foundational support of parental touch, in which touch may be imparted for its own sake rather than for the purpose of stimulating reciprocity. Godard, "Reading the Body," 36–41.

<sup>76</sup> Deleuze, *Spinoza*, 19.

while moving and being.”<sup>77</sup> In this sense, she supports her student to firstly perceive, and then ultimately to move from, the resonation of affects sensed via the mind of the body rather than be motivated by the pointed focus of language-based thought.

Demonstrating the value of this process of learning within a goal-oriented institutional environment is challenging, particularly as the learning process may potentially unfold slowly and not reveal its full potential until well beyond the scheduled syllabus. Furthermore, it can be difficult for a student to adjust to working without a clearly defined image to imitate, as is the method of traditional dance training. The efficacy of this method is dependent on a student’s authentic desire to explore and their willingness to traverse the gap in knowledge between what they know and don’t yet know. Therefore, it is possible that a student may or may not have the willingness or maturity for this process as it is far more receptively *open-handed* than traditional goal-oriented teaching methods, in that it is motivated by the student’s interest in exploration and their desire to move. Fortunately, as was discussed in Chapters Three and Four, when connecting to the state of embodied consciousness that emphasises the body’s mind, and if there is *no judgement* on the movement that is produced, only a sense of *immanent evaluation*, then there is an unlimited source of *desire* to move or express that can be sensed in the flesh as the resonation of affects.

The pedagogical act of attentive kinaesthetic witnessing (through touch) supports the receiver’s connection to (and ultimately increases the *agency* of) their body’s mind, making it possible for the receiver of the touch to also become sensitised in observing the resonation of affects as motivating their desire towards action. As this practice progresses, the perception of resonation can build to such an extent that (and so long as there is no residual resistance) a body-mind is propelled by the potency of forces, effectively enacting the dance of an affect-driven *corporeal agent*.<sup>78</sup> The practitioner initially simply observes the impulses for movement: in their own body-mind, in the body-mind of their partner, and between bodies in the space. One must, at least initially, become familiar with the perception of the resonation without producing a movement

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<sup>77</sup> Karczag, email correspondence, 2019.

<sup>78</sup> Rothfield’s *corporeal agent* is used here rather than *automaton*, to emphasise “the active engagement of the individual in the act of *inhibiting* what could emerge as pre-determined or idea-led action. The Alexander Technique speaks of inhibition as an active, and positive state to be cultivated, in order to shift response to stimulus from pre-programmed to [more expansively expressed] movement.” Karczag in email correspondence, 2019.

response, because the initial responses may be inauthentic in that they are not actually a direct physicalisation of affective resonance (the body's mind) but a pre-determined or idea-led (rather than sensation-led) decision to move in response to a stimulus (such as thinking-through-the-body). The subtlety in making a distinction between these two responses is profoundly nuanced and requires extensive training in emancipative self-surveillance to achieve, which is why this practice can maintain life-long interest, although it is challenging and changing in nature. It is also what makes this method ethical in the Spinozan sense. This is an *unassertive* approach to composition in which the improviser doesn't predetermine the action that will transpire in the space, but is receptive (without an agenda) to the not-yet formed action already in circulation as affective forces and allowing those forces to find amplified action through their dancing body.

The power of this practice impacts the practitioner on several levels. An understanding of the invisible forces that motivate a body-mind and the capacity to observe the resonance of these affects requires a lack of attachment to the dominance of language-based thoughts. Karczag doesn't think of her practice in Spinozist terms as she, along with many artists who came to prominence at the end of the twentieth century, aligns her practice with a Western interpretation of *Eastern philosophy*, and (in relation to this discussion) to the Buddhist notion of (detached) observation. Nonetheless, it is important to her that the ethical and embodied information explored and understood through dance informs and enriches her students' lives as it has done for her. She says:

The fact is that in approaching students you are teaching them more than just dancing, however it's through dancing that you're teaching them this. The hope is that they'll become a better dancer and performer, and human being.<sup>79</sup>

Those who have studied with Karczag will agree that they have been educated (or affected) as much by the quality of her touch and the timbre of her voice, as by what she has to say.<sup>80</sup> It is her ethical approach to the pedagogical encounter through touch that

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<sup>79</sup> Eva Karczag, interview.

<sup>80</sup> Bethany Good uses Karczag as a case study in her master's thesis for similar reasons. See Good, "Somatic Value System."

draws a student's attention to their cellular vitality.

When Karczag practices or performs with other people she does so with a curiosity about how an encounter with their movement will shift her own kinaesthetic processes, but she does so with the same intent as the ethical action of touch, in that she does not seek to engulf the other with her presence but to meet through the act of open-handed listening. Her approach resonates with Deleuze's description given earlier, that through an encounter with another body or idea, the relationship may "form a more powerful whole."<sup>81</sup> Through this approach to practice, she has developed the power to be more deeply affected (more aware of the resonance of affects) which offers a potential for deeper integration for her students as well as for herself. Spinoza's notion of the psycho-physical coherence that can occur through an encounter also nudges up against Dewey's pragmatic model in which the acquisition of knowledge *evolves* through two-way interactions within the social milieu.<sup>82</sup> For Karczag, the relational aspect of dancing with other people is an essential part of her ongoing life practice of dance. I quote her at length on the topic of shared practice:

I find it brings up other qualities or patterns in my body, so I really enjoy meeting up with someone different, or someone I haven't danced with for quite a while. Just tasting the particular qualities in my own body and seeing what comes out. One of the things that I'm involved in at the moment is collaborating on duets with a number of different people. They all feel really different to me.

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<sup>81</sup> Deleuze, *Spinoza*, 19.

<sup>82</sup> John Dewey, "The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology," *Psychological Review* 3 (1896): 356–70.

Working with Gaby Agis [Skinner Releasing Technique™ (SRT) teacher] who is based in London, is very open-ended. We perform an improvised duet, *Slapping Legs and Striding Out*, whenever we meet and have the opportunity to show the piece. The score is super simple. We sometimes make small adjustments to it when we rehearse that is then carried into the performance. Gaby is more animal-like. When I dance with her we make sounds, we use the floor, we make physical contact.

I also work with Bettina Neuhaus, who is based in Amsterdam and Berlin. She too is a Skinner Releasing Technique™ (SRT) teacher but is very different from Gaby. Bettina and I have been performing *Vapour Sketches*, an improvised duet. We also give a performance/lecture, *Along the Lines*, where we share personal narratives of encounters and experiences that have shaped our individual dance histories, and speak about concepts that define our dance practices. In *Vapour Sketches*, our score is a set of known image-based tasks that we combine freely in performance of our piece. Our choices are based on listening to each other and to what is happening in the space, and we respond according to what we feel is needed in order to answer the requests of each moment. There's a great clarity about Bettina's movement ... She's very spatially aware, in the composition and location of her movement material. When I work with her, I find I have a lot more consideration of what the movement is and where it's placed in space. I'm fascinated by Bettina's physical choices, and her presence. I want to learn from her, to be able to make those kinds of choices.

I'm also collaborating with an Italian dancer/choreographer, Daniele Albanese, on a duet *Elsewhere*. The piece is a structured improvisation. We meet on a very physical, energetic level, and move from one task into another through a process of listening to each other, to the music, and to our environment while following the score. The dancing is very free, full and open: moving and swirling through the space – energy moving through our bodies, moving in the space between us, moving us. Daniele propels me into movement in a way that's very different from Bettina.

Vicky Shick and I are in the process of making a duet, *your blue is my purple*. We've performed work-in-progress versions of the piece at Cathy Weis' Sundays on Broadway, NY. Vicky and I danced together in the Trisha Brown Dance Company and share a remarkably similar personal history. She's not as comfortable as I am with performing improvisation. She sets her pieces meticulously. When we work, we often need more time to understand how to combine our interests.<sup>83</sup>

Through "tasting the particular qualities" of another dancer in her own body, Karczag finds another kind of ethical action in an encounter through a field of information.<sup>84</sup> This activity is ethical in that it is primarily based on becoming aware of the circulation of affects between bodies and sensed as a resonance in body-mind. While Karczag's nomadic practice affords her the possibility of a variety of encounters with other bodies, performing improvisation in the context of a professional dance company requires another set of processes that might offer a different perspective for the improvising practitioner, as is explored in the chapter that follows.

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<sup>83</sup> Eva Karczag, interview. With changes made in email correspondence, 2019.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.



## Chapter Six

### *Cultivating Movement Situations*

#### 6.1 Introduction

As has been established, the models and terms for improvisation practice described here apply easily within an **undisciplined**, experimental, or somatic milieu. This chapter mobilises these concepts to demonstrate how they are also applicable to case studies working in a highly visible, disciplined, and professional context. As noted, one of the most powerful repercussions of a somatic approach to dance pedagogy and training has been the development of dancer agency as part of the labour of dancing. Similarly, by embracing improvisation in a professional context, choreographers such as William Forsythe have made the radical move of returning dancer agency to the dancer on the world stage.<sup>1</sup> As we have seen, since the turn of the twentieth century, one of the central projects of contemporary theatre dance has been to diversify the movement qualities and pathways of choreographic vocabularies via the fostering of dancer agency. The trend towards unorthodoxy in contemporary choreography critiques a traditional (or commercial) impetus to showcase a dancer's technical skill in mastering a codified form (e.g., the production of exact unison used commonly by a *corps de ballet*), and instead privileges individual artists' voices; not only that of the choreographer, but also the idiosyncratic qualities of each dancer. This is true of the highly visible work over the past thirty years that could be considered avant-garde or progressive, made by choreographers of the *Belgian new wave* and prominent companies in Europe since the 1990s such as Alain Platel's Les Ballets C de la B, Meg Stuart's Damaged Goods, Ohad Naharin's Batsheva, and choreographers Hofesh Shechter and Forsythe.<sup>2</sup>

A growing interest in subjectively oriented, somatic, and improvisational practices has been integral in the move away from objectively oriented, codified movement as the

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<sup>1</sup> Forsythe became famous for his innovative work using this approach while directing the Ballet Frankfurt (1984–2004) and The Forsythe Company (2005–2016). He is best known for deconstructing or re-orienting ballet, which he describes as a “dynamic 21st century art form” and embraces the performance of improvisation as a choreographic tool for his work. William Forsythe, *Improvisation Technologies: A Tool for the Analytical Dance Eye*, CD-ROM (Berlin and Stuttgart: Hatje Cantz, 2012), 44. For more analysis on Forsythe's deconstruction of ballet, see Jennifer Jackson, “Dancing Latin: William Forsythe's Challenge to the Balletic Text,” in *Dancing Texts*, ed. Janet Adshead-Lansdale (London: Dance Books, 1999), 104–29.

<sup>2</sup> For example, Les Ballets C de la B's *Touberbach* (2014) by Alain Platel, Damaged Goods' *Alibi* (2001 film) by Meg Stuart, Batsheva's *Three* (2005) by Ohad Naharin, Hofesh Shechter's *Grand Finale* (2017), and The Forsythe Company's *Decreation* (2003) and *Yes We Can't* (2008/2010).

primary method of developing choreographic vocabulary, especially the branches of contemporary dance that align with contemporary arts practice. This trend has, in some institutions, put into question how useful the codified lexicons of ballet and formalist contemporary choreographers are in preparing a dancer with the skills required to be a contemporary dance artist.<sup>3</sup> The reason for this is that dancers trained in codified forms can struggle to relinquish the deportment and stylistic nuances of their training when embodying alternative aesthetic sensibilities. This is due to the way that specific movement pathways or muscular tensioning (usually extension) can become embedded in muscle memory, as is habitually associated with the *correct* sensation of dancing.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, without extensive experience in improvisation practices, dancers can struggle to capitalise on the agency they are now afforded as creative collaborators in the choreographic process when attempting to produce innovative or idiosyncratic material. The aesthetic shift towards un-codified movement vocabularies is particularly challenging for a dance artist endeavouring to maintain or develop their training, as it requires the construction of a personalised or “eclectic” program to develop the multidimensional skills now in demand within the form.<sup>5</sup> For example, choreographers such as Forsythe and Naharin have developed movement systems, such as *Improvisation Technologies* and *Gaga*, respectively, which focus on the action of a movement vocabulary in relation to imagery and/or sensation rather than the replication of form. Also impacting dance training is the turn towards theory which has precipitated a push to reject the rigour of codified training altogether, as in the work of Xavier Le Roy and Jérôme Bel, in order to embrace an *untrained* or **post-dance** aesthetic.<sup>6</sup> While

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<sup>3</sup> For example, SARMA reject codified systems outside ballet and instead focus on somatics. See <http://sarma.be/pages/Index>.

<sup>4</sup> This is discussed in more detail in Chapter Seven *Prohibitive and Emancipative Self-Surveillance*.

<sup>5</sup> The term *eclectic* is in reference to Melanie Bales and Rebecca Nettle-Fiol’s description of current training methods in *The Body Eclectic: Evolving Practices in Dance Training* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2008). Chapter Two of this thesis, *Dewey and the Pre-history of Western Improvisation*, discusses in detail the version of somatics that was integrated into North American university education when H’Doubler developed a highly original academic approach to dance training in 1927. In the United Kingdom, Graham-based pedagogy was replaced with release via Mary Fulkerson, according to Henrietta Bannerman in “A Question of Somatics: The Search for a Common Framework for Twenty-First Century Contemporary Dance Pedagogy: Graham and Release-Based Techniques,” *Journal of Dance and Somatic Practices* 2, no. 1 (2010): 5–19. In Australia, Dance Exchange, Human Veins, and Dance Works were influential dance companies from the early 1970s onwards as directors Nanette Hassall and Russell Dumas returned from New York with knowledges of somatic practices and went on to influence university education at VCA and WAAPA. For more information see Sally Gardner, “Minimal Resources,” *Writings on Dance* 18/19 (1999): 34–45. For a broader discussion about somatics in dance institutions, see Martha Eddy, “A Brief History of Somatic Practices and Dance: Historical Development of the Field of Somatic Education and Its Relationship to Dance,” *Journal of Dance and Somatic Practices* 1, no. 1 (2009): 5–27.

<sup>6</sup> Bojana Cvejić describes *postdance* aesthetics in Bojana Cvejić, *Choreographing Problems: Expressive*

*undoing* the stylistic tropes of codified training is a desired aesthetic in contemporary performance, in an institutional context a rejection of imitative training neglects the discipline specificity of tertiary study and may produce graduates unable to meet a broad variety of choreographers' demands.<sup>7</sup> A composite approach made by conservatoire-style institutions, such as the Juilliard School, asserts the importance of imitative training while also leveraging somatics as a way to extend the multifaceted skills of what I describe here as an **über** dancer.<sup>8</sup>

An über dancer is a dance artist with a capacity for **global availability** who can attend to and access an extremely diverse range of movement qualities and pathways with the clarity and precision of a highly trained technician, and who is also a capable improviser adept at producing innovative material in real time. They may be working without or within an ensemble working as a *self-organising system*. Forsythe is an example of a choreographer whose work both cultivated, and required the skills of, an über dancer during his tenure at The Forsythe Company (2005–2015) and beyond. While Forsythe has engaged with theory, his primary interests are embedded in the labour of dancing as he affirms, “the purpose of improvisation is to defeat the choreography, to get back to what is primarily dancing.”<sup>9</sup> Forsythe has been the subject of considerable research due to the innovative nature of his approach to choreography and improvisation, some of which reflects an interest in philosophy, critical theory, and experimentations with movement notation and research.<sup>10</sup> His interest in the nexus of improvisation and

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*Concepts in Contemporary Dance and Performance* (New York, NY and London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

<sup>7</sup> There has been some debate about the impact of a declining interest in codified forms on the capacity of dancers to meet the technical rigour that mainstream, world-class choreographers require, particularly in the United Kingdom. See Judith Mackrell, “Are British Dancers Really Outclassed on the World Stage?,” *The Guardian* (2015), accessed June 18, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/stage/dance-blog/2015/apr/13/are-british-dancers-outclassed-on-the-world-stage-akram-khan-hofesh-schechter-lloyd-newson>.

<sup>8</sup> This issue of institutions leveraging somatics to produce über dancers is discussed further in Chapter Five *The Aesthetics of an Ethics of Being*. Sydney Dance Company Pre-Professional Year, under Linda Gamblin, is an Australian example that holistically combines technical, somatic, and improvisational training.

<sup>9</sup> See the of slipcover notes in Forsythe, *Improvisation Technologies*, 21.

<sup>10</sup> Some major contributions are: Louise Neri and Eva Respini, *William Forsythe: Choreographic Objects* (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2018); William Forsythe, Susanne Gaensheimer, and Mario Kramer, *William Forsythe: The Fact of Matter* (Berlin: Kerber, 2016); Steven Spier, ed., *William Forsythe and the Practices of the Choreography: It Starts from Any Point* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 2011); William Forsythe, Markus Weisback, and Daniel Birnbaum, *William Forsythe: Suspense* (Zürich: JRP Ringier, 2008); and William Forsythe and Paul Kaiser, “Dance Geometry,” *Performance Research* 4, no. 2 (1999): 64–71. Particularly relevant to this thesis is Erin Manning and Brian Massumi, *Thought in the Act: Passages in the Ecology of Experience* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2014a);

choreography informed his approach to the internal dynamics of his company, in which his dancers had a level of creative agency as co-creators of his works. Essentially, he aimed to choreograph some of his works as self-organising systems using a method that dance theorist Annie Kloppenberg describes as “post-control” choreography.<sup>11</sup> What has not been explored to the same extent academically is how über dancers such as those working with Forsythe were developing their improvisation practices at the level of the body, which is the original contribution of this chapter to literature on Forsythe.

The following utilises the conceptual tools and terminology established in earlier chapters to identify and elucidate the specific processes and capacities of an improvising über dancer, in particular, how an über dancer negotiates the collusion of technical virtuosity and improvisational experimentalism. Having mobilised specific terminology for the purpose of describing improvisation methodologies in earlier chapters as they relate to a somatic-based practice, it is pivotal to the robustness of this thesis that these terms also be tested within the context of über dancing. Mobilising this terminology to understand the performance of improvisation as it operates within an internationally renowned company on the world stage, the work of The Forsythe Company also brings the subtle knowledges of somatics into a broader discussion of improvisation as a more commonly used methodology. Comparing the-processes of somatic-based and über improvisers is also an original contribution to knowledge, because these approaches appear to operate in unrelated realms regarding aesthetics, ideology, and visibility. Forsythe’s embrace of improvisation within the sub-genre of neo-classicism is especially poignant given the historical divergence between classical and somatic methods, as was discussed in Chapter Two. Gathering primary research data in the form of interviews with former The Forsythe Company members Riley Watts and Nicole Peisl reveals the labour of an improvising über dancer working within a post-control choreographic situation. It illuminates how they negotiate the various forces at play while mobilising compositional and improvisational tools specific to this

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and William Forsythe and Alva Noë, “Consciousness as a Kind of Dance,” *Dance on Camera Journal* 13, no. 4 (2010): 5–6.

<sup>11</sup> Kloppenberg explains that *post-control* “is a process in which choreographers work collaboratively with dancers to generate fixed choreography out of improvisational explorations.” Annie Kloppenberg, “Improvisation in Process: ‘Post-control’ Choreography,” *Dance Chronicle* 33, no. 2 (2010): 189.

variation of the form.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, this chapter relies heavily on primary research data of first-person accounts of performance practice, and as a result contains unusually long interview excerpts.<sup>13</sup>

The primary data in this chapter are important to flesh out an image of what an improvising über dancer is capable of, the breadth of interests that can be explored through these methods, and how they are experienced as a combination of somatic and technical practices. Watts developed a deeply engaged awareness of action as *embodied cognition* during his tenure with The Forsythe Company (2010–2015).<sup>14</sup> Peisl, who was a member of the Ballet Frankfurt (2000–2004) and The Forsythe Company (2005–2014), is a dance researcher interested in the nexus of consciousness and decision-making during composition.<sup>15</sup> She has collaborated with philosopher Alva Noë on “the ways fundamental facts about perceptual consciousness enable, and also constrain, the practice of composition.”<sup>16</sup>

Watts’ childhood obsession with gymnastics and later ballet became an early avenue for exploring improvisation and primed him for his first encounter with Forsythe’s

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<sup>12</sup> Former Forsythe dancer and current wife of Forsythe, Dana Caspersen, has also been extensively interviewed on her methods of working and will be referred to in this chapter. See Guy Cools, *Body Language #6: Dana Caspersen* (London: Sadler’s Wells, 2012).

<sup>13</sup> Observing Watts’ *Dance Thinking* research workshops at STRUT Dance (Perth) and at the Sydney Dance Company in 2014 was part of the fieldwork research for this thesis.

<sup>14</sup> Watts’ current interests are working interdisciplinarily with dance improvisation, video art, sculpture, music, and live installations. His interests are the “interactions of dance, psychology, specializing in embodied thinking practice and the examination of consciousness through movement,” accessed October 7, 2019, <http://www.rileywatts.com/bio/>. While dancing in The Forsythe Company he was a Dance Engaging Science Associate Researcher with *Motion Bank* (2011–2014), which involved collaboration with neuroscientists on the experimental design of motion and data capture, as well as the presentation of findings internationally. He is a co-author on Elizabeth Waterhouse, Riley Watts, and Bettina Bläsing, “Doing Duo: A Case Study of Entrainment in William Forsythe’s Choreography *Duo*,” *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 8 (2014): 1–16. Since leaving Europe in 2016, Watts has been an artist-in-residence at SPACE, Bates Dance Festival, and Hewn Oaks Artist Colony. He also co-founded Portland Dance Month, and will be a 2019–2020 Studio Resident for the Ellis Beauregard Foundation in Rockland, Maine.

<sup>15</sup> Dr Nicole Peisl PhD is a dance artist and lecturer in Dance at University of California, Davis. As a freelance collaborator she has worked with Anouk van Dijk, Joseph Tmim, the Episode Collective (with Richard Siegal und Prue Lang), and Daghdha Dance Company (with Michael Klien). Her choreographic works include *Vielfalt*, *Ueberblick*, and *Spiefeld I & II*, which have been presented in Frankfurt, Dresden, and Vienna. She has taught dance at Impulstanz (Vienna), Anton Bruckner Private University of Linz (Austria), Justus Liebig University of Giessen (Germany), University of Limerick (Ireland), and has guest lectured at University of Dance and Circus (Stockholm). She is a certified craniosacral therapist (Milne Institute) and trained in Somatic Experiencing with Peter Levine. For more information on Somatic Experiencing see <https://traumahealing.org/> and for more information on craniosacral therapy see <http://milneinstitute.com/>, accessed July 30, 2018.

<sup>16</sup> Peisl and Noë collaborated on the research project *Being Present/Making Present* at Impulstanz (August 2–6, 2010), accessed July 30, 2018, <https://www.impulstanz.com/en/archive/2010/research/id1692/>.

choreography. He describes witnessing the Boston Ballet performing *In the Middle, Somewhat Elevated* (1987) as a “bolt of lightning,” explaining that “I had no idea that there was dance like that, but when I saw it, it made sense to me.”<sup>17</sup> He then completed rigorous training at the Juilliard School in the codified modern techniques of Martha Graham, José Limón, Paul Taylor, Lester Horton, and Merce Cunningham, as well as extensive ballet training. The Alexander Technique was also a big part of his tertiary education, particularly in the first two years when he participated in both private lessons and a group session once a week.<sup>18</sup> However, he qualifies this by saying “I wouldn’t say that somatic practice is at the center of Juilliard training. It’s really a technique-based school.”<sup>19</sup> Therefore, training an über dancer may require both a rigorous, technical curriculum and education in somatic pedagogical methods.

This chapter draws on much of the earlier work of the thesis, applying it to a dancer’s process within an improvised performance context on the world stage. In particular, it mobilises the terms proposed or discussed in previous chapters, such as: **somatic intelligence**, **embodied consciousness**, **thinking-through-the-body**, and **the body’s mind**.<sup>20</sup> It also introduces and applies a model of post-control choreography through the work of Forsythe and an image of an über dancer. Finally, this chapter is a bridge to ideas about training in improvisation that are discussed further in Chapter Seven.

## 6.2 The “Forsythe Aesthetic”

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to review the abundance of literature engaging with Forsythe’s artistic vision and the methods he developed while he was artistic director of Ballet Frankfurt and The Forsythe Company. Most important to this thesis is the way in which Forsythe has presented improvised performance on the world stage by mobilising the qualities of immediacy and dancer agency that improvisation engenders into

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<sup>17</sup> Riley Watts, interview by author, Perth, Australia, 2014.

<sup>18</sup> Watts explained that at the Juilliard School, “they like to say that they train you to be able to do anything.” Watts, interview.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. Watts had a keen interest in the Alexander Technique and, as a student, appeared in the DVD *The Alexander Technique For Dancers* (2005) by Juilliard Alexander teacher and former soloist with the Paul Taylor Company, Jane Kosminsky. Watts had continued involvement in research at the juncture of dance and neuroscience, for example, co-developing a workshop at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign as part of the 2016 research project, “Choreography of Platform-Invariant Motion Primitives.” See Amy La Viers et al., “Choreographic and Somatic Approaches for the Development of Expressive Robotic Systems,” *Arts* 7, no. 2 (2018): 1–21.

<sup>20</sup> To a lesser extent this chapter mentions a discussion from Chapter Four *Resonance of Affects and Immanent Evaluation* about the motivating power of *affects* in circulation. See the glossary for definitions of these terms.

dialogue with ballet, so that ballet might be re-configured as a classical approach to corporeal relationships (between bodies and space) rather than a limited lexicon of the codified forms. In an early improvised work, *Die Befragung des Robert Scott* (1986), Forsythe explains that his aim was to

present ‘the experience of dancing.’ Rather than existing as a medium for a narrative, a musical analogy, or the vehicle of ‘meaning,’ the movement – and the way it had been (or was being) engendered – was itself the subject of the work.<sup>21</sup>

To have an improvised work exploring dancers’ subjectivity presented by what was then known as a ballet company, performed by elite dancers trained in codified forms, seemingly represents a *coming together* of previously antithetical ideological viewpoints.

Dance theorist Mark Franko interrogates the link between Forsythe’s interest in the subjectivity of the dancing body and his study of Foucault, quoting him as saying, “I see ballet ... as a point of departure – it’s a body of knowledge, not an ideology.”<sup>22</sup> Franko explains:

Part of the effort on Forsythe’s part was to counteract the very authority of the choreographer, which he re-visioned as curating the dancer’s collaborative freedom on stage. ‘Choreography,’ said Forsythe, ‘should serve as a channel for the desire to dance.’<sup>23</sup>

In that sense improvisation allows for the dancers’ “authentic impulses” which, according to dance theorist Steven Spier, are especially important for ballet as its “canonic status poses a danger of the desiccation for the dancers and the loss of the purpose of choreography.”<sup>24</sup> Forsythe’s disassociation of ballet’s corporeal knowledge

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<sup>21</sup> Forsythe, *Improvisation Technologies*, 27.

<sup>22</sup> Quote from an interview with Roslyn Sulcas in “Kinetic Isometries: William Forsythe on His ‘Continuous Rethinking of the Ways in Which Movement Can Be Engendered and Composed’,” *Dance International* (1995), 9; Mark Franko, “Archaeological Choreographic Practices: Foucault and Forsythe,” *History of the Human Sciences* 24, no. 4 (2011): 98.

<sup>23</sup> Forsythe quote from Roslyn Sulcas, “Kinetic Isometries, 1995, 8. Franko, “Archaeological Choreographic Practices,” 98.

<sup>24</sup> Spier described proprioception and entrainment as “relying on a dancer’s authentic impulse” rather than improvisation per se; however, improvisation is the vehicle that supports the engagement of these aspects of practice. See Steven Spier, “Engendering and Composing Movement: William Forsythe and the Ballet

from its ideological roots allows him to experiment with a fusion of divergent methodologies that is at the core of his innovative aesthetic.

Forsythe's works continue to have an identifiable qualitative aesthetic despite the possibility for idiosyncratic movement pathways that a lexicon of improvisation technologies might engender.<sup>25</sup> In dance theorist Ann Nugent's intertextual critical analysis of Forsythe's *Eidos: Telos* (1995), she identifies elements of the performance as belonging to the "Forsythe Aesthetic."<sup>26</sup> She says that "the dance in *Govern* is rooted in classical form, but a form that has been taken apart, and what is recognisable is largely through relationship with what is missing."<sup>27</sup> Forsythe's critical engagement with the ballet aesthetic, described by choreographer and author Johannes Birringer as "Postclassical analysis," is "informed by eclectic scientific theories ranging from chaos theory, theoretical mathematics and fractal geometry, linguistics (alphabet structures, language games) to theoretical architecture and to *drawings* of lines, planes, polygons, and volumes."<sup>28</sup> Forsythe's model for *Improvisation Technologies* also clearly builds on Laban Movement Analysis and the concepts of Labanotation but not Laban's spiritual ideas of space harmony and sacred geometry or links to expressionism via *Tanztheatre* due, according to Birringer, to "his obvious distaste for utopianism and the spiritual in art."<sup>29</sup> Instead Forsythe's process is philosophically aligned with theories of post-structuralism, embodied cognition, and a model of consciousness as action proposed by Noë.<sup>30</sup>

When beginning the creative process for a new work, Forsythe's dramaturge Heidi Gilpin amassed and distributed to the company a

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Frankfurt," *Journal of Architecture* 3 (1998): 143.

<sup>25</sup> Forsythe, *Improvisation Technologies*.

<sup>26</sup> Ann Nugent, "William Forsythe, *Eidos: Telos*, and Intertextual Criticism," *Dance Research Journal* 39, no. 1 (2007): 39. *Eidos: Telos* (1995) was the first part of the work *Self Meant to Govern*, the result of working with the processes developed for *Improvisation Technologies* (1995).

<sup>27</sup> Nugent, "William Forsythe," 34.

<sup>28</sup> Johannes Birringer, *Media and Performance: Along the Border* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 98. Italics in original.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>30</sup> Forsythe and Noë, "Consciousness," 5–6. For more of Noë's work, see Alva Noë, *Out of Our Heads: Why You Are Not Your Brain, and Other Lessons from the Biology of Consciousness* (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 2009). Noë was a research associate on *Motion Bank* and a member of the Dance Engaging Science project. See also an interview with Forsythe and Noë, William Forsythe and Alva Noë, *Transcript: Celest Bartos Forum, Live from the New York Public Library*, 2009, accessed October 7, 2019, <https://www.nypl.org/node/63270?nref=121031>.



whole slew of theoretical material, scientific information, mathematical theory, literary and linguistic theory ... architectural models, drawings, and principles as a way of imaging the body in space, and ways to embody ideas, literally, to manifest them in some way.<sup>31</sup>

Forsythe's experiments in manipulating the ballet lexicon by reconfiguring the traditional movement pathways serves to awaken the dancer's attention to extending the possibilities of movement creation. He says,

in dance, suddenly accelerating a limb, breaking off a movement, 'going against the logic of the movement,' as a dancer once described one of my improvisation techniques, or introducing a new element in a sequence of recurring movements, will draw the observer's attention and raise overall awareness by differing from the anticipated continuation as built up by preceding movements.<sup>32</sup>

Forsythe's genius is that he recognises what is essential to both somatic and traditional approaches: that ideas and concepts can be processed in real time when attending to movement as a form of *thinking*. The terminology proposed in earlier chapters is therefore utilised here to elucidate the ways in which The Forsythe Company dancers process the information through a negotiation of embodied consciousness. Predominantly, the kind of embodied consciousness The Forsythe Company dancers engage in is *thinking-through-the-body* as they are most commonly transforming conceptual information into *tasks* to be embodied, challenging both their physicality and imagination. However, this chapter will also examine the role of *the body's mind* in this approach.

Forsythe is a pioneer of innovative methods of movement generation and documentation, and he and his collaborators have produced a plethora of resources for this purpose, most notably *Improvisation Technologies* and *Synchronous Objects* as a part of *Motion Bank*.<sup>33</sup> As a way of notating movement tasks, Forsythe's *Improvisation*

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<sup>31</sup> Birringer, *Media and Performance*, 97.

<sup>32</sup> Ivar Hagendoorn, "Dance Perception and the Brain," in *Thinking in Four Dimensions: Creativity and Cognition in Contemporary Dance*, eds. Robin Grove, Catherine Stevens, and Shirley McKechnie (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2005), 141. See also Ivar Hagendoorn, "Emergent Patterns in Dance Improvisation and Choreography," *Unifying Themes in Complex Systems Vol. IV*, eds. Ali Minai and Yaneer Bar-Yam (Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 2002): 183–95.

<sup>33</sup> Forsythe, *Improvisation Technologies*; <https://synchronousobjects.osu.edu/>; <http://motionbank.org/>.

*Technologies* was a breakthrough tool in the systemisation of improvisation and compositional thought. Berringer explains that

we wanted to record a more accurate picture of the systems of movement composition used in Frankfurt, and there is not just one system but many different systems Forsythe and the company developed over all these years. It's like access to a mind-set, it's not a training tool; a little access point to the kind of work that happens there and how the research proceeds: What is movement research? How can it empower us?<sup>34</sup>

In terms of the use of specific tasks in his work, Forsythe has developed compositional strategies related to principles of orchestration, counterpoint, polycentrism, "decreation," and activities that challenge the sensory and vestibular system such as "disfocus," to name only a few.<sup>35</sup>

In order to process the plethora of movement possibilities that may be generated through the use of such an extensive range of information, an über dancer would need to have developed considerable *somatic intelligence*. Following psychologist Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, an über dancer would have a heightened capacity for body-kinaesthetic intelligence via their skill in producing specific movements as required, and an adroit kinaesthetic response to negotiating their environment.<sup>36</sup> However, in the context of Forsythe's working methods, which involve an accumulation of shared resources and systemised tasks used by dancers to think through movement, theorist Jane Goodall's description of the capacity for gathering somatic intelligence is also applicable. For Goodall, as noted earlier, gathering somatic

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<sup>34</sup> Berringer, *Media and Performance*, 97.

<sup>35</sup> Forsythe describes *counterpoint* as "a field of action in which the intermittent and irregular coincidence of attributes between organisational elements produces an ordered interplay." William Forsythe, "Commentary," *Synchronous Objects*, April 2009, accessed Month, day, year, <http://synchronousobjects.osu.edu/2009>. See also Erin Manning, "Choreography as Mobile Architecture [1]," *Performance Paradigm* 9 (2013): 1–11. Peter Boenisch describes Forsythe's "strategies of 'decreation'" in "Decreation Inc.: William Forsythe's Equations of 'Bodies Before the Name'," *Contemporary Theatre Review* 17, no. 1 (2011): 15–27. "Disfocus" is part of Forsythe's collection of resources which, as Spier explains, "challenge ballet's central organising principles and aesthetic assumptions ... provoking an investigation of such fundamental issues as balance and gravity in a context where solutions to those issues had been highly developed" (Spier, "Engendering and Composing Movement," 139). See also Hilary Ruth Elliot's description of the use of the eyes in Forsythe's method in "'The Fifth Appendage': Investigating the Role of Vision in Solo Improvisational Dance Training," *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training* 5, no. 1 (2014): 31–44.

<sup>36</sup> Howard Gardner, *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1983).

intelligence involves collecting and embodying information from others and the environment as might occur in an espionage situation, or in this case through corporeal mimesis.<sup>37</sup> Importantly, an über dancer gathers somatic intelligence through the process that Goodall describes both through a) imitation while training in codified techniques and b) the collection of conceptual ideas or movement systems that transformed the body schema of a dancer through experimental practice. Furthermore, Goodall proffers that the process of experimenting with movement itself, in relation to a specific task, shows a heightened capacity for the collection and utilisation of somatic intelligence, particularly when the purpose of exploratory movement is the negotiation and production of aesthetics, in contrast to movements made for functional or communicative purposes.<sup>38</sup>

An example of a heightened capacity for somatic intelligence is demonstrated in Watts and Brigel Gjoka's performance of *Duo* (2012), in which the dancers use entrainment as a way of collecting somatic intelligence within the choreographic structure. According to cognitive scientists Elizabeth Waterhouse, Bettina Bläsing, and co-author Watts, entrainment theory

focuses on processes in which interacting (i.e., coupled) rhythmic systems stabilize producing synchronization in the ideal sense, and forms of phase related rhythmic coordination in complex cases. In human action, entrainment involves a spatiotemporal and social aspect, characterizing the meaningful activities of music dance and communication.<sup>39</sup>

The interaction studied in this case is between Watts and Gjoka who each negotiate their choreography in real time through decision-making processes that determine how each dancer's material will unfold in relation to the other.<sup>40</sup> While this work was not strictly improvised, the potential for decision-making within the compositional structure provides the performers with opportunities to re-configure their approach to the material

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<sup>37</sup> Jane Goodall, "Knowing What You Are Doing," *The Performance Space Quarterly* no. 14 (1997): 20–3.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Waterhouse, Watts, and Bläsing, "Doing Duo," 1.

<sup>40</sup> I saw Watts and Gjoka perform *DUO2015* at the Sydney Opera House alongside Sylvie Guillem's farewell tour of *Life in Progress* (2015). Their performance won a Positano Prize for *Contemporary Dancers of the Year* 2015.

in each performance, demonstrating a refined capacity for both somatic intelligence gathering (particularly in terms of entrainment) and embodied consciousness.

### 6.3 Post-control choreography

The model of “post-control” choreography, as described by Kloppenberg, is a method of choreographing whereby the choreographer facilitates the development of the work collaboratively rather than as a production of a singular inscription. This results in a multiplicity of artists’ voices within one work, curated by the choreographer according to a collectively generated (or as it aligns to the choreographer’s) vision.<sup>41</sup> This process occurs primarily through the cultivation of dancer agency as co-creators, particularly with the inclusion of dancer-generated set material and/or working within improvisational parameters. Kloppenberg argues that this approach opens the work to a multiplicity of viewpoints that assist choreographers to extend their work beyond the limitation of a singular movement vocabulary or compositional method. She explains that

contemporary dance artists continue to seek ways of communicating through the body that respond to cultural shifts, that examine and re-frame aesthetic values, and keep them engaged in the process. Improvisational methods galvanise that pursuit. Clearly improvisation is not a new idea, but it is a way of assuring that new ways of framing ideas in and through movement continue to emerge.<sup>42</sup>

While Forsythe’s über dancers clearly have a strong relationship to form, creating a situation of dancer agency allows for the inclusion of **affective formlessness** to seep between the edges of the investigation through the feelings or desires resonating in the body’s mind.

Kloppenberg also describes two “schools of thought” about improvisation that, it is argued here, align with the dual processes I describe as *thinking-through-the-body* and *the body’s mind*:

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<sup>41</sup> Kloppenberg, “Improvisation in Process,” 186.

<sup>42</sup> Idem.

One considers improvisation to be the act of freeing the unconscious mind, channelling a deep, internal source to ‘speak’ through the improvised form without submitting what emerges to the imperious control of the conscious mind. The other sees it as the ultimate act of consciousness, one of expanding awareness and making careful and often immediate compositional choices that carve and follow an emergent trajectory.<sup>43</sup>

A post-control approach, therefore, maintains a relationship to *control* via the oscillation between thinking-through-the-body and the body’s mind, and between a focus on the relational (others) and the singular (the self). An ability to shift between these positions along a spectrum is facilitated by an emphasis on both the openness of the dancers’ perception, and the space available in the process for dancer agency.

Forythe’s interest in facilitating dancer agency is evident in the social structure of The Forsythe Company. Watts describes his presence in the studio as a “magnetizing central point” or “nucleus” rather than holding a position at the top of a hierarchy.<sup>44</sup> He explains that Forsythe

moves in a constellation; people move around him. He’s travelling and there are point systems around him that are oscillating towards him and away, as he moves around the space. Wherever he feels he needs to go we’re collecting around him, but never in the same organization.<sup>45</sup>

Watts explains that this constellational structure supports a two-way flow of information between dancer and choreographer:

... as much as he can pull the group in a certain direction, he’s also affected by us. You’ll be moving in the studio and he’ll come to you and ask what you’re doing. You tell him and he’s interested in it and he learns from it, as well. What he ultimately wants is to be surprised. Based on his information, he wants to see how it can be translated into something that he doesn’t know yet. He wants to find out things that he doesn’t know.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Kloppenborg, “Improvisation in Process,” 186.

<sup>44</sup> Watts, interview.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

Working with the unknown is pivotal in order for Forsythe to see what is actually there, in the visual sense. As affect theorists Erin Manning and Brian Massumi explain, Forsythe “wants to see what is happening, and to choreograph with the present ... No ideas in advance – let the process show you its own evolution.”<sup>47</sup>

By focusing on observing the evolution of the process, a space is created within the work that supports a sense of *transparency* of a body within the dancing. Forsythe says:

The more you can let go of your control, and give it over to a kind of transparency in the body, a feeling of disappearance, the more you will be able to grasp differentiated form, and differentiated dynamics ... You can move with tremendous acceleration provided you know where to leave the movement – not where you put the movement, but where you leave it. You try to divest your body of movement, as opposed to thinking that you are producing movements. So it would not be like pushing forward into space and invading space – it would be like leaving your body in space. Dissolution, letting yourself evaporate. Movement is a factor of the fact that you are actually evaporating ... Use the surface of the body with your imagination; the less substantial your body becomes – in your own sense of your body; in other words, if you think of your body as very transparent, as permeable – the more sensitive you will be to a very complex shape.<sup>48</sup>

The transparency of the body that Forsythe describes suggests the trances of *affective formlessness* the dancer produces, not through their form (shapes made by the body) but through their state of being in the dancing. Therefore, Forsythe is working with not only a post-control compositional process, but also a post-control movement practice whereby thinking-through-the-body gives way to the body’s mind; the body’s movement is no longer controlled or mediated by language-based thoughts but is motivated, without resistance (or the *lag* of conscious thought), by affective forces. He explains, “in a truly successful dance,” the body “takes over at the point where you” have “no more idea” ... It is the “body that dances you around.”<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Manning and Massumi, *Thought in the Act*, 46.

<sup>48</sup> Forsythe quoted in Birringer, *Media and Performance*, 100.

<sup>49</sup> John Tusa, “Transcript of Interview with William Forsythe on BBC Radio 3,” *Ballet.co Magazine* (2003): 24, 26.

Dance theorist Ann Nugent says of Forsythe's dancers that their "transparency comes out of the surrendering of the self by each dancer to the moment of delivery."<sup>50</sup> She attributes this quality to the fact that

Forsythe's dancers do not project their thoughts toward an idea of perfected form but, instead, envisage the tasks with which they are charged. To achieve these tasks their muscle memories have been turned into databases stocked with investigative knowledge about weight, shape, dynamic, trajectory, and plane, to which they apply proprioceptive awareness. Their approach is likened to that of physicists searching for a veracity of form that is dependent on achieving a precise union between muscular memory and discrete processing practices.<sup>51</sup>

Although the way in which the work is generated is collaborative in the sense that the dancers have agency over their responses to the set tasks, Nugent gives an account of how, in *Eidos: Telos*, unbeknownst to the audience, Forsythe and (his composer) Thom Willems would give instructions to the dancers and lighting technicians via headphones during the performance.<sup>52</sup> It is understandable that giving the dancers cues from an outside perspective would be helpful when the dancers have so much to negotiate internally in such a demanding practice. This is because exposing a sense of transparency of the body's mind, while expressing the technical prowess of an über dancer, is a highly complex negotiation of forces and form. Forsythe dancer Dana Caspersen explains that

dancers need to be very specific and at the same time let the specific emerge from a broader set of conditions or categorical decisions that they take part in or create, so that specificity is an accurate manifestation of the complex forces at work in any one moment.<sup>53</sup>

Gilpin too says that "the dancers become agents of their own compositional strategies."<sup>54</sup> In the following chapter I posit that an über dancer's capacity for

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<sup>50</sup> Nugent, "William Forsythe," 41.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>53</sup> Caspersen quoted in Cools, *Body Language* #6, 12–13.

<sup>54</sup> Birringer, *Media and Performance*, 99.

specificity is the result of the *emancipative self-surveillance* produced at the nexus of codified and somatic training.

In post-control choreographic situations such as those devised by Forsythe, there is an emphasis on the generation of behavioural states, the use of improvisational tasks that require thinking-through-the-body, and a reliance on the dancers' capacity for somatic intelligence gathering and decision making.<sup>55</sup> However, the kinds of somatic intelligence collected through *abstracted* movement processes, for example, utilising mathematics, philosophy, architecture, or critical theory, will also reveal sense associations, memories, images, and emotional impulses in response to the task, because the abstract concepts related to each of these fields are processed through the body-mind. Therefore, the individual dancer's psychophysical response to the influx of information is inevitably part of the embodied consciousness that an *über* dancer is engaged with. As was established earlier, physically and imaginatively engaging with abstract information can stimulate the desire of the body's mind to move. This is important to mention because a key premise for supposing a distinction between somatic and *über* improvisers is the space and agency afforded to the desires of the body's mind within the aesthetic. This comparison is identified here not in order to suggest that one method is preferred over the other, but simply to identify the slight difference in aesthetic priorities each method engenders along a spectrum of potentialities.

While the dancing of The Forsythe Company shows great diversity in its tonal and dynamic variations, Nugent explains that "there is always something meticulous about the execution, no matter how rapidly forms are reconfigured."<sup>56</sup> This quality suggests that despite the extreme effort to produce unorthodox movement, including through the use of tasks that attempt to scramble and confuse a body's systems, there exists an undeniable control over the clarity and performativity of the movement aesthetic that an *über* dancer produces due to the embodied history of their imitative training. However, from an external perspective, a connection to the internal world is also evident in this work, as Nugent explains:

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<sup>55</sup> Caspersen quoted in Cools, *Body Language* #6, 12.

<sup>56</sup> Nugent, "William Forsythe," 32.



Often a dancer's gaze is averted or the eyes seem to look inward, rather than beyond the line of the movement, as if thinking is honed to an inner awareness. Indeed, the muscular knowledge, or proprioception necessary in improvised passages, requires concentration and mental acuity, and the making of instant decisions that connect mind to body, or muscle memory to spatial organisation. Then coordination and articulation are clear, throwing the emphasis on to the dance itself and the trust between dancers – and their willingness to take risks.<sup>57</sup>

In this sense, for an über dancer the desire to express sensations in movement is utilised *in service* of the composition, rather than the composition *acting as a frame* for the expression of a sensory state, as often occurs with somatic-based improvisation. Somatic-based improvisation may also be shaped by the inclusion of tasks and a self-reflexive practice of thinking-through-the-body. However, the *desires of the body's mind are privileged* and determine the aesthetic of form. The edge on which this apparent binary converges and dissolves into a spectrum is an interesting space for any kind of improvisation practice to occupy, as it is the space where risks can be taken. In this space an über dancer may potentially relinquish their professional demeanour in order to connect to and reveal their authentic sensations, exposing their frailty, humanity, or humility. Conversely, this space can support a somatic-based improviser to embody movements with clarity and precision of form, while similarly imbuing it with their personal history of practice. This thesis seeks to investigate the qualities of this in-between space of an embodied consciousness practice through case studies of highly refined practitioners, asking the dancers themselves what approaches they take to engage somatic intelligence while negotiating a variety of forces.

#### **6.4 Riley Watts: Pattern-seeking**

As a dancer, Watts personifies the “Forsythe Aesthetic” not only in the extensive, rigorous training of his “hyper-articulate body,” but also in his clarity of attention and engagement with the concepts with which the company works, which are evident in his movement choices. He says “in Bill’s choreography the body is fragmented, with *jointy* movements in isolation from each other, which were always more natural for me.”<sup>58</sup> Watts’ hyper-articulation is evident throughout his

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Watts, interview.

solo in Forsythe's *Whole in the Head* (2011), particularly in the ease with which he transitions from movement into stillness; sudden yet crisp arrival reveals the clarity of attention of his body-mind, delicately posed, yet clearly listening to the impulses in his body and in circulation within the space (resonances of affect in circulation).<sup>59</sup> Then suddenly leaping, he springs and suspends in the air with a kind of non-human buoyancy, suggesting an imaginative connection to an idea that ignores the limits of gravity. His refined ability to manipulate the tonal qualities of his movements as if he were stretching a musical note with a flute, accelerating and decelerating through space and time, is beguiling. He then simultaneously unfurls and re-wrings his limbs in multi-directional pathways, revealing the immediacy of his thought-to-action as he and I (as audience) appear to witness the translucent unfolding of his movement together. Then, suddenly, he makes lightning quick changes of direction that throw him into seemingly impossible trajectories, again ignoring the forces of gravity and inertia. He explains, "we're taught to think extremely quickly."<sup>60</sup> Yet, I suggest the kind of *thinking* that Watts describes, particularly in his *Dance Thinking* research workshops I observed at STRUT Dance (Perth) and at the Sydney Dance Company, is a highly sophisticated practice of collecting somatic intelligence from the resonation of affects in the body's mind and thinking this resonance through the body as tasks. To describe this as a process of embodied consciousness is a demonstration of thinking-through-the-body with tasks that emerge from the body's mind.

When asked if there are kinds of movement qualities or aesthetics that are privileged when working with Forsythe, Watts explains that the movement qualities are the result of an approach rather than adapting the approach to cultivate a particular movement quality. He explains that generating movement in The Forsythe Company requires

[a] complex, multimodal cognitive demand as a dancer, which then brings the movement quality. The idea is that you put yourself in a situation, or he puts you in a situation as a choreographer, where you have a lot to accomplish. It's often very difficult. From that difficulty a movement quality arises. Instead of deciding ahead

<sup>59</sup> This description is in reference to the video recording of *Whole in the Head* recorded on September 15, 2012, accessed month, day, year, <https://vimeo.com/51602439>.

<sup>60</sup> Watts, interview.

of time what the movement quality is because you know that you like flowing movement, for example, you put yourself into a task and then watch what kind of movement quality comes out.<sup>61</sup>

If the movement quality is determined by the situation, the compositional focus is not on the movement quality itself but on constructing the situation. In this case the situation acts as a frame in which to witness an über dancer engaged in the practice of embodied consciousness, similar to the way in which an ongoing somatic-based improvisation practice is framed by a performance event. In this case the situation is designed to challenge Watts' psychophysical capacity for collecting and processing somatic intelligence; the quickness of his thoughts as well as his movement facility. Watts' capacity for negotiating this somatic intelligence with processes of embodied consciousness is increased through both the challenging nature of the situation and the motivating force of the choreographic vision of the work.<sup>62</sup>

Forsythe and Watts are both interested in the growing field of *embodied cognition* and how research in this area can articulate methods of dance-making.<sup>63</sup> In particular, Watts describes the creative value of "being in the place of the unknown" through improvisation, as a vehicle for exposing the pattern and meaning-making processes of embodied cognition:

The reason why I think not knowing where you are, or not knowing what you're doing, or sometimes even who you are is productive, is that the brain is naturally a pattern-seeking thing. When you are going into an unknown space, or if you find yourself in an unknown pattern, let's say, it actually doesn't appear at first like a pattern. But the longer you look at a situation, the more you will always find some kind of meaning or pattern. Maybe meaning and pattern is the same thing, in this case. So, if you find yourself in that place of not knowing, you just have to keep your perceptive qualities open because you'll figure it out. That's why I've always found it really important to find yourself in uncomfortable situations where you

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> *Embodied cognition* is the name of a field of philosophy that Forsythe is interested in. For more detail see Lawrence Shapiro, *Embodied Cognition: New Problems of Philosophy* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 2010); and Jonathan Owen Clark and Taku Ando, "Geometry, Embodied Cognition and Choreographic Praxis," *International Journal of Performance Arts and Digital Media* 10, no. 2 (2014): 179–92.

don't know what you're doing, because you're really trying to engage with it, or at least just being there and noticing what's around you. Then something happens and you realize it's your relationship to where you are. You realize your relationship to ideas, or to people or situations; they're not always pleasant, but eventually you figure out where you are. Your body and mind is self-locating. You only see where you are based on what you perceive around you.<sup>64</sup>

Working within a space of the unknown is central to the process of creating choreography using post-control methods. As Watts describes above, attending to perception as a method of pattern and/or meaning-making, focuses the work on a dancer's relationship to the situation they are in and how they are negotiating it. This is a process of cultivating dancer agency and embodied cognition within a specified context. Furthermore, rather than pre-determining the specificities of the context, Forsythe works in relationship with his dancers to determine and select the set of working parameters in order to see how they give rise to specified contexts, and therefore the kinds of material produced by the dancers that interest him. This two-way flow of information and dancer agency is central to the post-control ethic and aesthetic.

#### *6.4.1 Complex relational situation*

Through the process that informed *Improvisation Technologies*, Caspersen describes how Forsythe extended her understanding of the balletic lexicon as a "field of information" rather than as a series of movements.<sup>65</sup> To do this he proposed an improvised task as a movement puzzle or activity, rather than a collection of steps, for example, folding, bridging, connecting points in the body with points in space. The intention behind using directives that are tasks rather than pre-formed steps is to provoke a multitude of responses and generate new movement pathways. As the self-reflexive process of embodied consciousness shows, even if the tasks appear to only suggest a singular response, through the self-reflexive dialogue this and any other assumption is questioned so that a variety of possibilities is created rather than finding one *ideal* or pre-determined outcome. Watts suggests that even though Forsythe sets particular tasks, he most enjoys the responses that were not what he expected, even if it means that the

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<sup>64</sup> Watts, interview.

<sup>65</sup> Caspersen quoted in Cools, *Body Language* #6, 5.

task is ultimately disregarded.<sup>66</sup> The purpose of the task is to provoke creativity, rather than to be inexorably obeyed. Therefore, the body-mind of the improviser must become proficient at producing diverse and articulate responses to tasks or questions, because it is not a process of *getting it right* but of finding creative ways to engage with dance as an ever-changing inquiry.

When the tasks have been embedded into the body-schema on the sub-cortical level, there is less need to think through the self-reflexive, language-based dialogue as they become integrated into the habitually inquisitive approach of the body-mind. For example, Caspersen describes how *épaulement* was understood to be not a dynamic position, but a complex relational situation:<sup>67</sup>

You begin to understand that a complex relational situation, as opposed to a complex form, can be altered while still maintaining the integrity of its nature. The relationship itself is like a thought-object. I learn how to feel it so I can let the thing change through the room, but it can stay the same in my mind as an idea.<sup>68</sup>

Here Caspersen is describing how the dynamic relationship (or torque) between the gaze, head, shoulders, fingertips, hips, and feet that is understood as *épaulement*, can be thought of as a “pattern of relationships.”<sup>69</sup> Thought of in this way *épaulement* can be inverted, transposed to different body parts, turned inside out, expanded into space, or replicated in terms of dynamic spatial relations between people. It is transformed from a *step* that can either be included in an improvisation or not, to a *method of inquiry*, a task for generating potentially very diverse movement that will have a commonality with all other movements in the terrain of material that shares this task. However, to use this task or “complex relational situation” effectively, it must be consciously and specifically embodied with exceptional self-reflexive detail so that it is not generic or easily confused with material produced by another task.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Watts, interview.

<sup>67</sup> *Épaulement*, from the ballet lexicon, is a stance where one shoulder is brought forward and the other back, with the head turned to face the forward shoulder. This stylistic spiral of the torso (from the waist up) can accompany many different feet positions including the square (front-facing) hips of first position or above a leg extension such as an arabesque (the working leg extended to the back).

<sup>68</sup> Caspersen quoted in Cools, *Body Language* #6, 7–8.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

It is the specificity with which improvisers can interrogate a task that enables improvisation to be a virtuosic compositional method. Far from the haphazard combination of arbitrary movements often associated with improvisation, the refinement of improvisation in this way supports practices that can innovate the form. The practices described here aim to achieve a sense of freedom within the limitation of a rigorous interrogation of specific tasks. Caspersen says the following in relation to her detailed analytical practice:

I've discovered that this obsessive interest in detail doesn't get in the way of freedom ... I have learned that through diving into these details, allowing them to remain clearly differentiated and yet connected, the larger whole can emerge with power.<sup>71</sup>

Just as Caspersen has described how working with Forsythe's complex relational situation, or field, as an improvisation technology (or task) allowed her the freedom to invent physical responses, Karczag also maintains that a cohesion among the material that arises is beneficial to the refinement of improvisation. She says of her process:

First comes following emerging impulse to see where it takes me. Then I get to know the territory by playing the journey over and over so I can later 'manipulate' by ordering, shaping, and refining the material into a performance piece. Eventually, when I share it with an audience, they become 'witnesses' of the external expression of an interior but now transformed process.<sup>72</sup>

Therefore, rather than arising spontaneously, sophisticated improvisation is produced through an extensively rigorous practice and considerably technical methods.<sup>73</sup> In this sense, improvisational expertise should be valued as a technical, and potentially virtuosic, methodology alongside codified systems of movement training. Dancers actively and inventively attending to the creation and innovation of the movement they make as they are performing is compelling for audiences to watch, and is a core feature of improvisational expertise.

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<sup>71</sup> Caspersen quoted in Cools, *Body Language* #6, 6.

<sup>72</sup> Aileen Crow and Paula Sager, "These Dances Rise Up: An Interview with Eva Karczag," *A Moving Journal* (2006): 7–12.

<sup>73</sup> Here I extend the use of the term *technique*, which is commonly used among dancers to mean codified movement learned mimetically, to include highly sophisticated improvisational methodologies.

### 6.5 Nicole Peisl: Polarities supporting a field of tension

As has been established, this thesis proposes that improvisers engage with tasks to think-through-the-body, and also reverse body-mind hierarchy (of mentally determining what the body should do in response to tasks) by observing what emerges when listening to the body's mind. Furthermore, through observation of the body's mind the material that emerges can then be recalled and reconfigured as a task to be thought-through-the-body. Peisl also describes the experience of listening to bodily impulses:

I have a strong image of myself doing *I Don't Believe in Outer Space* (2008), which was improvised and had a certain structure in the sense that I had physical material that I worked with and then let go. When the task is embodied there's a memory, and then it becomes available as points of reference. Or I like to call it in my own research, 'polarity' or 'the poles.' There are certain forces or structures that hold up a field of tension. Within that field of tension something rises up and then there's a potential; you can follow it, or you don't. It's up to you. The impulse rises up within a field of tension, and within that fulcrum – which is a place the movement is organized around – if there's enough potency in the fulcrum, then you can go with it and follow it. Each pole keeps informing each other. This is one polarity and the other pole is craftsmanship; knowing how aware you are about how you've been using the space: 'Have I been more active, or have I been more deactivating now? What does the composition need now?' Sometimes I would go against my impulses in order to make the composition more interesting. But it's very complex because sometimes it wraps itself around and the most interesting compositional moments came out of an impulse. For example, you've been working in a certain dynamic and flow and then there's this impulse where you just – boom! You let yourself go completely into another part of the stage or another focus, which then directs the attention of the audience very differently. It comes from an embodied impulse or the accumulation of points of reference.<sup>74</sup>

Peisl's description of a polarity as supporting a "field of tension" is a vivid articulation of how an improviser negotiates two kinds of embodied

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<sup>74</sup> Nicole Peisl, interview by the author, Frankfurt, Germany, 2014.

consciousness along a spectrum within the *refrain* of a performance.<sup>75</sup> In applying the terminology that has been developed in this thesis to her description, the “craftsmanship” is the self-reflexive dialogue of thinking-through-the-body and the “impulses” are the desires of the body’s mind (the resonation of affects in circulation).<sup>76</sup> The capacity to be hyperaware of these *polarities* and to cultivate a creatively productive field of tension through their negotiation requires and develops heightened somatic intelligence in the sense that Goodall and Gardner describe.

As is evident, the difficulty of becoming a highly somatically intelligent über dancer is considerable. Peisl recalls developing the “real craftsmanship of improvisation” during her tenure at The Forsythe Company:

Doing pieces like *Self Meant to Govern* (1994) was extremely difficult. It took me a long time until I was actually able to accomplish it. On the one hand, you have the task; the real, cognitive approach to it. Then on the other hand, you have this part of you that just needs to let go; the part of not knowing.<sup>77</sup>

She describes collecting sensory resonance of affects as somatic intelligence, particularly in *Heterotopia* (2006) and *Angoloscuro* (2007), and the therapeutic dimension that occurred as a result in the work. In a work commissioned by the Ballet Frankfurt called *EINEM Twelve Minutes of her mind* (2002), Michael Klein along with computer programmer Nick Rothwell, worked on a “dynamic choreographic structure in which communication with the dancer Nicole Peisl, tracks fundamental mental

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<sup>75</sup> Dereck McCormack utilises Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s term *refrain* while writing about Forsythe’s work to describe “how atmospheres can be understood as affective spacetimes sustained and transmitted across and between bodies at a distance.” He uses refrain to describe “the durational mattering of which affective spacetimes are composed. Refrains have a territorializing function: that is, they draw out and draw together blocks of spacetime from the chaos of the world, generating certain expressive consistency through the repetition of practices, techniques and habits.” Derek McCormack, *Refrains for Moving Bodies: Experience and Experiment in Affective Spaces* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2013), 7.

<sup>76</sup> Peisl, interview. In Chapter Seven I describe different combinations of *poles* along a spectrum that are creatively productive for me, which are similar to how Peisl describes her work, such as the *known* and the *unknown*.

<sup>77</sup> Peisl, interview.



processes.”<sup>78</sup> Peisl explains how her personal memories fed into the compositional process,

First we worked with a computer program. I had to choose certain elements from my life as material, for example, spiritual, emotional, family, and feed them into the computer. Information came through the process and through the practice from my body, its implicit and explicit memory. But as I was doing it (which was the interesting and very healing part of it), it changed. For example, if I had a certain issue that I was working with by embodying and physicalising it, it changed my emotional attitude towards it. I believe even on a cellular, physical level that things healed. I had a big knee injury at the time and it was a very healing process for that also. This is because everything had a structure, but the movement itself came from my body and it was those impulses that I followed.<sup>79</sup>

As Peisl explains, the practice of listening to the body’s mind is also inherently therapeutic on a cellular level. Therefore, the dimension of *ethical action* can endure when moving with a somatic awareness, despite the context of the performance having little to do with creating a therapeutic situation.

Current research shows that while peptide-processing pathways are believed to be responsible for the production of thought through the transmission of protein molecules between neurons and their receptors, they are not exclusive to neurons (as they are in neuropeptides) but function identically in the endocrine system (peptide hormones), the immune system, and the viscera.<sup>80</sup> Therefore, at some level, bodily *thoughts* are not only processed through the visual and lingual/aural systems of the central nervous system but may occur outside our normal range of conscious attention, nonetheless giving rise to our feelings, impulses, or *gut instincts*. Body-mind (or *mindfulness*) practices attend to these feelings/sensations to bring them into conscious awareness, allowing the body to express the state of what is occurring on a biological, cellular level.

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<sup>78</sup> Sourced from [http://tq000006.host.inode.at/Content.Node/en/stage/repertoire/stage\\_detail\\_e.php?ver\\_id=195](http://tq000006.host.inode.at/Content.Node/en/stage/repertoire/stage_detail_e.php?ver_id=195) on 4<sup>th</sup> November 2019.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid. With additions made in email correspondence, 2019.

<sup>80</sup> Lloyd Fricker, *Neuropeptides and Other Bioactive Peptides: From Discovery to Function* (San Rafael, CA: Morgan & Claypool, 2012). See also A. Ian Smith, ed., *Peptides and Neuropeptide Processing* (Cambridge, MA and London: Academic Press, 1995); and Charles George Yopst, “Choreographing Compassion: A Clinical Adventure of Rhythms,” *Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling* 69, no. 2 (2015): 60–7.

While it may not be his intention, Forsythe's methods of revealing the transparency of a dancer's body-mind put the therapeutic aspect of somatics in dialogue with technical directives. This is an aspect of his innovation that suggests the creative potential of emancipative self-surveillance, as ethical actions benefit transparency as a technical approach improvisation. Peisl observes a negotiation of this polarity within the context of re-conceiving a codified form (such as ballet), through improvisation, in order to innovate choreographic methods:

In Forsythe's work somatics is very present, but there's also a potential for destruction as well. I think it holds both. It definitely heals the ego because if you get physically overwhelmed, you can face it. He always gives the space to allow that process of healing when recovering from sickness. In improvisation and in repertoire, the process is always emphasised. Part of this procedural quality holds the strengths and weaknesses of the body, in a way that it becomes material to work with. Therefore, what could be seen as a failure or a weakness, is turned into a curiosity to explore different approaches. This mode of working moves away from the reproduction of a fixed form and moves towards engaging in actions that are solving an embodied riddle or problem. The dance is not a position; but an action. Reorganising, actually, the thinking about dance, especially classical ballet.<sup>81</sup>

This follows what has been established in earlier chapters; that through embodied consciousness improvisation cultivates an awareness of the impact (through resonation) of affect on the body-mind. Given that affects in circulation resonate in everyone, whether we are aware of them or not, bringing this awareness to the surface through dancing may precipitate a response from an audience member who could sympathetically become more aware of their own resonance. Sometimes we can see this in relation to the audience's response to the performance, but timately there is an uncontain-ability of affects that impacts the tone of the space through and between bodies.

## **6.6 Circulation of affective forces**

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<sup>81</sup> Peisl, interview. With additions made in email correspondence, 2019.

Part of the ethical dimension of the work, if one is to follow Spinoza's *Ethics*, is to cultivate a space of equanimity, or an *unassertive* observation of the body-mind in relation to the affective forces in circulation. This is important to improvisation that preferences the embodiment of compositional choices, as Peisl explains:

Usually, I try to be as neutral as possible, so that I'm really able to hold the idea of the mid-line [gestures to her axis]. I'm more in an awareness of the polarity, but my attitude towards the polarities or the poles is neutral; so that something can surface that is not necessarily a decision from my mind. Just seeing it unfold rather than ... doing it. Even when I say (gasp) with my facial expressions, even that is just like allowing it into the face or allowing it into the breath. I allow the sensation of feeling, rather than a true emotion.<sup>82</sup>

Holding the *space* of openness is part of the *transparency* that can potentially make the dance incredibly affecting, especially in combination with the extreme nature of the physicality. This is particularly important in a performance context where needing to conjure emotions would detract from the authenticity of revealing the translucence of the body-mind simply responding to the situation.

Über dancers performing improvisation participate in not only absorbing, or perceiving, the resonances of affects, but also contribute to their circulation via their amplification. A core feature of Watts' performances is his extreme physicality; he relays feedback from audience members who said they were "profoundly affected by it in their body" after watching *Decreation*.<sup>83</sup> Watts explains that the work is so affecting "due to the physical actions of the dancers," in part as a result of the way in which the fascia of the dancer's body is mobilised in the action of *shearing*.<sup>84</sup> Shearing involves rotating the shoulders horizontally in one direction, while moving the hips against the direction of the shoulders twisting the fascia. Watts elaborates that the fascia

is the postural shell where a lot of our habits lie. It's how we've been holding ourselves our whole life. When I'm twisting it I'm trying to break it down, or trying to disorganise it for a while. It's not a particularly comfortable movement to

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Watts, interview.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

do. When witnessing the twisting motion of the fascia the audience may also be uncomfortable.<sup>85</sup>

While a somatic dancer may approach a movement such as shearing with a sense of ease underneath the action, the extra tensility of ballet training (through which each limb appears to extend beyond its physical limits) imbues the motion with a directed effort that suggests taking the body to an extreme. This extreme effort quality creates specific dancer-performer experiences when put into play with the potentially unsettling coordination of de-controlled corporeality. Therefore, the hyper-flexibility of an über dancer such as Watts enacting extreme movement may potentially precipitate a highly affecting charge through the activation of peptide pathways of the soma of an audience member, stimulated by their mirror neurons.

While an audience might feel discombobulated in response to watching, Watts explains that working with extreme flexibility or “compromising balance situations,” to see how his body will “resolve” them, is fun.<sup>86</sup>

I really enjoy going to those places in my dancing, because if I don’t, I feel like I’m not finding my limits ... My back, my hips and my joints are all very loose. That never hurts me, but it looks extreme to other people.<sup>87</sup>

Watts notices that he is more often affected by the demands of a situation, or the task he is negotiating, than when performing feats of extremes of flexibility. For example, when performing in *Clouds After Cranagh*, Parts I and II of *Free Atmospheric Studies* (2005–2006), which is a work about war, he says:

At the very end of the piece I have one tiny little solo. My friend saw it and she said, ‘It makes me so uncomfortable to watch you because it looks dangerous, it looks painful.’ It doesn’t feel painful or dangerous, but it feels big. It just feels like I do *something*; I fall on the ground and I have to hit the ground really hard. I’m moving as if I don’t have arms and I fall on the ground really, really fast. She said it makes her worry to watch that, but it’s my choice to do it and I sort of enjoy it.

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Watts says, “I enjoy using my flexibility. Sometimes it gets distracting because then it becomes about that and you don’t always want to be that colour.” Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

Sometimes you do want to push yourself that far, and to be able to push yourself as a dancer to these places that actually might be painful, or almost painful, or might be dangerous or almost dangerous, that's that kind of place that you are able to push yourself into, which is different to having someone else push you to it.<sup>88</sup>

While the embodied consciousness practice of body's mind is not foregrounded in the work of Forsythe, it emerges via the dancer's experience of negotiating and enacting a task, through the field of tension activated in the negotiation of polarities.

Peisl's description of Forsythe's open-handed approach to dancer injury suggests an ethical relationship to virtuosity and extreme physicality, coinciding with the development of processes of improvised composition. By balancing agency and the demands of professionalism, Forsythe's über dancers are afforded a rare position in dance history at the tip of an axis of colliding economies of value. The hybrid aspect of combining somatic and technical training can produce a rare interstitial space of creativity but also raises questions and complexities, which will be discussed in the following chapter. Specifically, Chapter Seven examines how emancipative self-surveillance serves to cultivate the transparency and autonomy of an über dancer, and the potential of this process to innovate practice and pedagogy.

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

*Nothing of this free, non-determined body would have been possible without the corporeal knowledges institutionalised at the beginning of the century – without the observation of different tissue states, different insertions of the musculature, without the teaching of Feldenkrais learned by Halprin and others. That is without the signposts along innumerable possible paths through which an errant awareness explores in depth its organic circuits the better to extract from them a promise of freedom, not submission. The body is firstly what one thinks of it, what it itself thinks, and where we accept it will lead us.*<sup>89</sup>

## Chapter Seven

### *Prohibitive and Emancipative Self-Surveillance*

#### 7.1 Introduction

As has been established, the innovation of contemporary dance through somatic-based improvisation has occurred through the exploration of un-codified or idiosyncratic movement and a broadening of the range of tissue states and tonic qualities.<sup>90</sup> Yet, as was explained earlier, historically the university system has struggled to negotiate a seemingly incongruous binary whereby somatic practices divest notions of hierarchical power, while elitist imitative training methods endorse them.<sup>91</sup> Currently both methods co-exist in the academy and are considered essential prerequisite skills for professional dance artists, but determining how to productively conflate these ideologically divergent methods in order to develop improvisational expertise can be challenging.<sup>92</sup> This chapter returns to debates in 1990s dance theory by Elizabeth Dempster, Jill Green, and others, who argued for a Foucauldian analysis of imitative dance pedagogy to address

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<sup>89</sup> Laurence Louppe, *Poetics of Contemporary Dance*, trans. Sally Gardner (Southwold: Dance Books, 2010), 52.

<sup>90</sup> Parts of this chapter have been published in Nalina Wait and Erin Brannigan, “Non-competitive Body States: Corporeal Freedom and Innovation in Contemporary Dance,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Dance and Competition*, ed. Sherril Dodds (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018), 283–304.

<sup>91</sup> Examples of literature that addresses the issues of divergent goals between these practices include: Rebecca Webber, “Integrating Semi-structured Somatic Practices and Contemporary Dance Technique Training,” *Journal of Dance and Somatic Practices* 1 no. 2 (2009): 237–54; and Henrietta Bannerman, “A Question of Somatics: The Search for a Common Framework for Twenty-First Century Contemporary Dance Pedagogy: Graham and Release-Based Techniques,” *Journal of Dance and Somatic Practices* 2, no. 1 (2010): 5–19.

<sup>92</sup> An account of the difficulty of negotiating improvisation techniques, in this case Gaga, is discussed in Meghan Quinlan, “Gaga as Metatechnique: Negotiating Choreography, Improvisation, and Technique in Neoliberal Dance Market,” *Dance Research Journal* 49, no. 2 (2017): 26–43.

the site(s) of authority in dance, body-subject formation, and personal autonomy.<sup>93</sup> Philosopher Michel Foucault's notion of "surveillance" was extended and applied to dance by Green as a practice of self-surveillance.<sup>94</sup> This thesis makes an original contribution through a bifurcation of Green's term to include *prohibitive* or *emancipative* self-surveillance associated with traditional and somatic pedagogies, respectively. This bifurcation allows for a clearer understanding of how these methods can co-exist in a way that supports the development of improvisational practice and expertise, and is followed by examples of practice that support the claim for the innovation of improvisation via emancipative self-surveillance. In addition, I discuss how crossing the threshold between being *passive* or *active* heightens a perception of both the resonance of affect and the subtle distinction between language-based thoughts and the mind of the body, and how the tone of performing can be revealed through the non-performative practice of Authentic Movement. I return to formative arguments to re-conceptualise a model for how the confluence of different training methods productively dissolves this binary and supports greater expertise in improvisational corporeal knowledges. By observing how systems of power impact a dancer at the level of the body tissues, and the effect that different kinds of somatic and imitative methods of self-observation have on performance outcomes, this chapter aims to theorise the softening of the somatic/imitative pedagogy binary, arguing that certain elements of traditional approaches to dance pedagogy can contribute to expertise in improvisation when they are approached from a somatic perspective. The concept of innovating and

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<sup>93</sup> Foucauldian analysis in dance theory is extensive, particularly in relation to Foucault's chapter "Docile Bodies" in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Shendan (London: Penguin Books, 1977). The following is a sample of articles that are relevant to this chapter: Jill Green, "Somatic Authority and the Myth of the Ideal Body in Dance Education," *Dance Research Journal* 31, no. 2 (1999): 80–100, "Emancipatory Pedagogy?: Women's Bodies and the Creative Process in Dance," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 21, no. 3 (2000): 124–40, "Foucault and the Training of Docile Bodies in Dance Education," *Arts and Learning Research Journal* 19, no. 1 (2002/2003): 99–126; Burt Ramsay, "Genealogy and Dance History: Foucault, Rainer, Bausch, and de Keersmaeker," in *Reading Dancing: Bodies and Subjects in Contemporary American Dance*, ed. Susan Leigh Foster (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986); Mark Franko, "Body-Language and Language-Body in William Forsythe's Choreography: Michel Foucault and Louis Marin on the Baroque Body," *ARS AETERNA—Unfolding the Baroque: Cultures and Concepts* 2, no. 1 (2010): 84–101, "Archeological Choreographic Practices: Foucault and Forsythe," *History of Human Sciences* 24, no. 4 (2011): 97–112. For a recent survey of the use of Foucault in dance theory see Wait and Brannigan, 2018.

<sup>94</sup> The choice of these terms builds on Green's description of a dancer's "self surveillance" as an extension of Foucault's notion of *surveillance* established in Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (Green ("Somatic Authority," 89 and "Foucault and the Training," 100, 112, 119). In her discussion of the issues she encountered while facilitating a non-authoritarian, feminist, creative-practice project, Green also describes somatic pedagogy as "emancipatory" (Green, "Women's Bodies").

expanding the possibilities of improvised performance through the development of methods of practice is key to describing how the form has evolved.

The terminology developed earlier in this thesis has been used primarily to describe somatic approaches to improvisation. However, the previous chapter mobilised this language to describe the working process of practitioners who have also trained extensively in imitative pedagogy and found it to be applicable. This is an important test of the proposed language, but it also raises further questions about the differences or similarities between these practices at the level of the body tissues and the capacities each approach develops. Observing practice at the level of the body tissues is essential to the way in which dancers diversify movement qualities or textures in contemporary dance. Therefore, while this research aims to incorporate the value of both approaches, it preferences somatics by advocating for the value of *unprofessionalism* to innovation, following Dempster, against the dominant narrative that casts somatics as the less-productive alternative to imitative methods.<sup>95</sup> As Laurence Louppe suggests in the opening quote, corporeal knowledges are developed through the kinaesthetic observation of “different tissue states.”<sup>96</sup> Louppe, along with Dempster, Susan Leigh Foster, and others, argues that by focusing on the observation of different tissue states – on the shifting of weight, sensation, and breath – somatics adds another dimension to kinaesthetic perception and the corporeal knowledges of dance. In this way, somatics has innovated pedagogy as well as improvisational practice.<sup>97</sup> Therefore, while kinaesthetic perception is at the core of all forms of dance, it is well known that the ideological orientation towards the *observation* of kinaesthesia in somatic practices is radically different to the method of observation used in imitative practice. Ideokinesis is the somatic case study for this thesis due to its contribution of applied anatomy and imagery in combination, which creates highly functional and anatomically efficient

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<sup>95</sup> Elizabeth Dempster argues for the importance of unprofessionalism regarding innovation in her paper, “Undisciplined Subjects, Unregulated Practices: Dancing in the Academy,” paper presented at Dance Rebooted: Initializing the Grid, Melbourne, 2005: 1–11.

<sup>96</sup> Louppe, *Poetics of Contemporary Dance*, 52.

<sup>97</sup> Some examples of this research include: Susan Leigh Foster, *Dances That Describe Themselves: The Improvised Choreography of Richard Bull* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2002) and *Reading Dancing: Bodies and Subjects in Contemporary American Dance* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986); Dempster, “Undisciplined Subjects”; and “Explorations within the New Dance Aesthetic: Eva Karczag Interview,” *Writings on Dance: Exploring the New Dance Aesthetic* 14 (1995/1996): 39–52.



body schemata and underscores an alternative notion of the body–mind relationship that is so important to this research.

Imitative and somatic approaches to dance pedagogy utilise different practices of self-observation and therefore assist an improviser to access different kinds of kinaesthetic perception. Imitative dance pedagogy has traditionally valued the precise replication of form, utilising sensation, proprioception, and self-observation to achieve this. In contrast, the defining feature of somatic practices (despite the *soma* bias in the name) is not necessarily form but developing the mental capacity for embodied consciousness and an attunement to the affective resonances that motivate a desire to move.<sup>98</sup> As is well known, dance artists who were central to the development of Western improvised performance practice in North America in the 1960s were exploring traditional dance performance through a critical or subversive approach, rather than a rejection of it entirely.<sup>99</sup> While this exploration included an appreciation of movement outside codified forms, such as experiments with untrained dancers, many of the founding members had trained and danced in professional companies, which afforded them the prerequisite corporeal knowledge to challenge the aesthetics of the form.<sup>100</sup> Similarly, many notable improvisers today would not be able to achieve the level of rigour involved in their work had they received no imitative traditional training at all.

## 7.2 Self-Observation

Learning to imitate codified techniques from a young age is a foundational corporeal education that can support the observational practice of rigorously attending to one's kinaesthetic awareness while moving. As is well known, traditional dance training uses the faculty of imitation to develop the highly complex, discipline-specific, kinaesthetic perception that a dancer needs to recreate the technical form of a specific style of dance, including correct placement, musicality, timing, and performance quality. Dancers who

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<sup>98</sup> Eva Karczag identified the *soma* bias in *somatics* as being contrary to the practice itself, which emphasises *mental* engagement that is always in relation to the body. See Eva Karczag, interview by the author, Arnhem, Netherlands, 2014.

<sup>99</sup> Sally Banes, "Democracy's Body: Judson Dance Theater and Its Legacy," *Performing Arts Journal* 5 no. 2 (1981): 98–107.

<sup>100</sup> The founding members of the Judson Dance Theater had experience with traditional dance pedagogy. For example, Trisha Brown studied at Mills College (1958) and with Lois Horst. Lucinda Childs studied with Hanya Holm, Helen Tamiris, Judith Dunn, Bessie Schonburg, and Merce Cunningham. Steve Paxton studied gymnastics and Aikido, and later worked with Cunningham and José Limón. Yvonne Rainer came late to dance after acting and trained with Cunningham where she met Childs.

have trained in traditional methods of dance pedagogy from a young age create a detailed body-schema map, informed by the repetition of routinely using their kinaesthetic senses to imitate another's movements. This corporeal knowledge can benefit the specificity of improvisation practice because a detailed kinaesthetic body-schema aids the learning of unfamiliar movement pathways and muscle tonalities. This foundational knowledge makes the rigour of self-reflexive dialogue far more detailed, as the dancer is more mentally and physically able to detect and adjust micro-shifts of position, quality, or tone. However, the limitation of imitative training is that codified techniques tend to habitually access a very specific range of movement pathways and muscle tonalities, which are then reinforced through the repetition of rote learning. Embedding this foundational learning into muscle memory can therefore make it more difficult to deviate from what is familiar, particularly when it comes to diversifying the *tonic* state of the tissues, as awareness of muscle tone is so deeply embedded in the body-schema that it is often beneath the conscious awareness of a dancer.

In many cases, the first training in a codified style that a dancer undergoes (e.g., ballet or hip hop) is etched most deeply in their muscle memory and can therefore be a difficult habitus to *undo* when attempting to explore other movement possibilities. For example, the basic movement of tracing the foot along the floor to pointed extension known as a *tendu* translates from French as tight, tense, or strained.<sup>101</sup> The pointed foot of the *tendu* is widely understood to epitomise the embodiment of balletic corporeal tonality, and therefore extension via excessive tensioning is a common feature of ballet training. If it is predominantly through tension that a dancer comes to understand how to maintain corporeal control while producing (mostly) extensional, codified movement, then excessive muscularity will be assumed as the *correct* kinaesthetic sensation (and muscle tone) associated with achieving technical rigour. A habitual embodiment of tone can be particularly difficult to undo because it is so closely linked to the construction of self as a body subject, as will be shown in the following.

As was explained in Chapter Five *The Aesthetics of an Ethics of Being*, tactile somatic observation of tissue states (usually taught through *hands-on* work) with the support of the breath is important for contemporary dance and especially improvisation training

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<sup>101</sup> Collins Dictionaries, *Collins Robert French Dictionary* (Sydney: HarperCollins, 2016), 1541.

because it facilitates a far more detailed understanding of the breadth of the gradients of tone that the tissues can produce. As Louppe elucidates, “form is not given from the outside by a structure but by an inner tensional organisation that distributes matter,” explaining that it is tissue tensility (or tonic state) that produces the form of the movement.<sup>102</sup> Therefore, in order to have access to a more diverse range of muscle tones, the student needs to unlearn the habitus of excessive tensility through somatic practices via the observation of their tissues’ tonic state. The activity of passively disengaging the musculature requires considerable self-awareness, which is a form of undisciplined discipline, and is a vital component of an improvising contemporary dancer’s specialist corporeal knowledge. Ideally, all dance pedagogy should aim for the student to have substantial experience with deep relaxation and the soft end of the muscle-tone spectrum, because softness increases the capacity for perception through the sensorium and therefore may increase a dancer’s ability to access and refine a broader and more precise range of tissue states.<sup>103</sup>

To clarify, it is not that there is one preferred or ideal tonality of contemporary dance, although there are certainly identifiable tonalities attributed to different artists’ aesthetics, but a preference for dancers with the capacity to access a spectrum of muscle “tensilities.”<sup>104</sup> As Louppe explains:

Passage from the one to the other of those tensional states is more necessary than is a mode of ‘ease’ imposed as the only register, without its inverse and its source, namely tension, having been explored not as a rigid holding in the body but as the variation of textures and the shifting of tensilities.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Louppe’s description of the “tensional organisation” of the muscles produces what I call the “tone” of the movement. Louppe, *Poetics of Contemporary Dance*, 118.

<sup>103</sup> Feldenkrais teacher Bruce Holmes explains that “the more effort you use the less sensitivity you’ll have,” and he cites the Weber-Fechner law. Bruce Holmes, *The Feldenkrais Lessons: Awareness through Movement, Volumes I and II*, CD ROM (Bruce Holmes, 1980). The Weber-Fechner law was developed by psycho-physicist Gustav Theodor Fechner (1801–1887) to theorise the recorded differences in sensory perception of actual and/or perceived changes in magnitudes of a physical stimulus. For example, if a subject is lifting a heavy weight, a small addition to the weight will not be as noticeable to the subject as it would be if only the additional weight was lifted. Gustav Fechner, *Elements of Psychophysics*, trans. Helmut E. Adler, eds. David Howes and Edwin Boring (New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966). Similarly, Todd explains that ideokinesis should be practiced in stillness so as to not overload the nervous system with information during the process of neuromuscular re-education.

<sup>104</sup> Louppe, *Poetics of Contemporary Dance*, 117.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

In dance, a completely released body is not necessarily desired as an end in itself but assists increasing the capacity for the dancer to both sense and shift tonally along a spectrum of gradients. To do this, dancers must have the “errant awareness” that somatics fosters in order to both observe and embody a spectrum of tissue states; accessing a specific tonal quality by shifting along and selecting from a diverse palette of available options.<sup>106</sup> Imitative pedagogy also promotes the observation of tissue states, but for the purposes of identifying and replicating the codified form. However, if codified movement is treated as a task to be explored rather than an ideal to be simply replicated, the scope for creative possibilities opens.<sup>107</sup>

One of the ways in which somatic pedagogical methods is at odds with goal-oriented institutions is that the act of imitation is fundamentally a manipulation of the body towards a perception of *how it should be*, according to the codified form. In contrast, the somatic state of receptivity or observing the body *as it is* is antithetical to the intention of producing specific form-based outcomes.<sup>108</sup> This is because, as Dempster explains, a body more readily absorbs the image-based practice of ideokinesis when the will to change oneself is relinquished:

The transformation of anatomical information into bodily experience through the imaging process cannot be willed or forced. The emphasis is on ‘non-doing’, and on allowing ‘the innate wisdom of the central nervous system’ to act without interference. It is transformation at the neuromuscular level, which leads to perceptible changes in skeletal balance and to increased ease in movement.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 52. See also Martha Eddy, “Somatic Practices and Dance: Global Influences,” *Dance Research Journal* 34 (2002b): 46–62.

<sup>107</sup> As was discussed in Chapter Six *Cultivating Movement Situations*, one example is former Forsythe dancer Dana Caspersen’s reconfiguring of the codified classical movement *épaulement* (shouldering) as an action-based relationship between body parts that can be transferred onto any body part or position in the room. Guy Cools, *Body Language #6: Dana Caspersen* (London: Sadler’s Wells, 2012).

<sup>108</sup> André Bernard explains that while practicing ideokinesis “you should not be evaluating the process while you are in it. Because if you do, you are not feeding the image message into the nervous system, but you are feeding extraneous information, which has no relation to what you want to accomplish. Like debris, clustering up the process. After, you can evaluate it or whatever, but it’s just that while you are in the process, you shouldn’t do that.” André Bernard, Wolfgang Steinmuller, and Ursula Stricker, *Ideokinesis: A Creative Approach to Human Movement and Body Alignment* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2006), 27.

<sup>109</sup> Elizabeth Dempster, “Image-Based Movement Education,” *Writings on Dance: Ideokinesis and Dancemaking* 1 (1985): 13–5.

It is this (originally) therapeutic aspect of “non-doing” that is so at odds with an institutional learning context and traditional notions of the production of performance.<sup>110</sup> For example, stillness, particularly for an extended period of time, can appear to be the antithesis of the definition of dancing, which is synonymous with movement.

### 7.3 Ideokinesis

As was established earlier, Mabel Elsworth Todd’s pivotal book, *The Thinking Body*, outlines a kinesthetic, image-based approach to balancing the dynamic forces of vertical posture in humans described as ideokinesis.<sup>111</sup> Her approach rejected fashionable militaristic postural practices of the time, which asserted that only by exercising weakened muscles could correct alignment be achieved. Instead her work was based on the ideation of simple engineering principles as image/actions that are structurally supportive of efficient body alignment. For example, recall that she suggests the following image for assisting the distribution of the load of the shoulder girdle:

The position of the shoulder girdle is similar to that of the yoke by which the Hollanders carry their water pails: the arms swing freely in their sockets in line with the crest of the ilia.<sup>112</sup>

This specific feature of ideokinetic practice, which was a radical departure from its contemporary biomechanical theory, is the use of mental imagery alone (rather than muscular effort) to train anatomical alignment.

Lulu Sweigard asserts that “subcortical patterning cannot be changed through voluntary effort.”<sup>113</sup> Moreover,

the most effective procedure for changing the upright alignment is concentration of imagined movement in the body without exerting any physical effort. This is the ideokinetic process in which ideation results in movement of various parts of the

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Mabel Elsworth Todd, *The Thinking Body* (New York, NY: Princeton Book Company, 1937) and *The Hidden You: What You Are and What To Do About It* (New York, NY: Dance Horizons, 1953).

<sup>112</sup> Todd, *The Thinking Body*, 156.

<sup>113</sup> Lulu Sweigard, *Human Movement Potential: Its Ideokinetic Function* (London: Harper & Row, 1974), 224.

skeletal framework; it does this only if *no* physical effort is put forth, because voluntary movement would interfere with the subcortical planning of muscle coordination in response to ideation.<sup>114</sup>

Bernard explains how the re-education of muscle patterns can occur by first identifying movement as a neuro-musculo-skeletal event.<sup>115</sup> The nervous system not only communicates between the body (in this case muscles and bones) and the brain, it also organises the muscle pattern for the movement on a subcortical level: the level below conscious awareness. Therefore, if an attempt is made to organise a muscle pattern via physical labour, with a disregard for the primacy of the body's own subcortical patterning, this effort directly interferes with the re-organisational process because it results in conflicting neural signals. Bernard explains that physically enacting alignment principles creates "a tug-of-war between the established muscle pattern and the new one that's trying to be established. And the established message or muscle pattern is usually going to win out over the new image."<sup>116</sup> Bernard says, quite simply, "Don't *do* the image, let the image *do* you."<sup>117</sup> This discovery, made through ideokinetic praxis, is possibly one of the most pivotal corporeal knowledges of twentieth-century dance because it completely changes the Western paradigm for understanding the relationship of the body-mind through/in movement.

Understanding that the actual labour of neuromuscular organisation occurs on a subcortical level (below conscious awareness) and can be refined through mental imagery rather than muscular effort, or what Sweigard calls "neuromuscular re-education," is now *de rigueur* among high-level athletes wanting to improve their performance.<sup>118</sup> What makes this discovery so radical is the sophisticated understanding of the functional integrity of body-mind that makes the need for deliberate muscular effort to correct anatomic alignment not only redundant, but also *prohibitive*, as will be discussed in this chapter. In addition to addressing neuromuscular re-education at the

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<sup>114</sup> Sweigard, *Human Movement Potential*, 221. To support her argument, Sweigard referenced J. A. V. Butler, "Pictures in the Mind," *Science News* 22 (1951): 26–35.

<sup>115</sup> Bernard, Steinmuller, and Stricker, *Ideokinesis*, 5.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>117</sup> Accessed March 25, 2014, <http://www.ideokinesis.com/dancegen/bernard/bernard.htm>.

<sup>118</sup> Lulu Sweigard developed this terminology for teaching following her doctoral thesis, "Bilateral Asymmetry in the Alignment of the Human Body," Unpublished PhD thesis, New York University, 1939. For an overview of the use of imagery to improve athletic performance see Anees Sheikh and Errol Korn, *Imagery in Sports and Physical Performance: Imagery and Human Development Series* (Amityville, NY: Baywood, 1994).

subcortical level, the practice of sensing images while ideating, also known as somatisation, is a method that can enhance a capacity to perceive the *resonation of affects*. This is because it also develops sensitivity towards noticing (listening to) how affects motivate movement via the desire of *the body's mind*. It is in this sense that somatics is *emancipative*. This capacity facilitates a somatic awareness of the *forces* affecting the body's movements that are, in many cases, the source of improvised material. As has been explained earlier, improvisation can be performed as a way to make the affective forces in circulation more visible because they appear to manipulate a dancer like an *automaton* and thereby reveal the effect of forces through the moving body, as the dance unfolds. However, this can only occur if the body is emancipated enough to allow those forces to flow through the body without neuromuscular resistance.

#### 7.4 Emancipative and prohibitive self-surveillance

One of the ways in which dance theorists such as Dempster, Green, and others have interrogated the dichotomy between traditional and somatic approaches to dance pedagogy is to look at traditional dance training through the lens of Foucault's theory of surveillance.<sup>119</sup> Foucault describes how power is enacted upon individuals by the state, and traces the shift in disciplinary technologies throughout history from brutal, public spectacle towards the emergence of less visible yet highly pervasive methods in the eighteenth century. He proposed that modern disciplinary methods of surveillance produce a self-disciplining or *docile body*, which is made docile in that it "may be subjected, used, transformed and improved."<sup>120</sup> Foucault applied his theory to military training as a striking example of subject formation through physical practice that is designed to produce disciplined (and therefore) *docile* bodies. He argues that military body-subjects are disciplined through a process of surveillance via hierarchical systems of power and structures (including buildings) designed to observe and monitor behaviour. Foucault describes a docile body as one that engages in a practice in which a kind of self-surveillance occurs where an individual is

exercising upon it [their own corpus] a subtle coercion, of obtaining holds upon it at the level of the mechanism itself – movements, gesture, attitudes, rapidity: an

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<sup>119</sup> This theory is proposed in Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 1977.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

infinitesimal power over the active body.<sup>121</sup>

In Foucault's account of how bodies are made docile, he describes the ways in which "a policy of coercions" acts upon the body so that individuals submit themselves to a "manipulation of its elements, its gestures, its behaviour."<sup>122</sup> Despite there being no mention of dance training in Foucault's writing, dance scholars have embraced this Foucauldian model as a method for analysing the power relations of the dancing body-subject in codified training, due to the parallels that can be made between the hierarchical structures and surveillance methods of both military training and codified dance pedagogy. Disciplinary actions of military training resemble those of imitative dance techniques in that they similarly impose an internalised process of self-discipline. Dancers sublimate their physical actions according to the aesthetic ideals that are monitored and measured by teachers, choreographers, and audience members as external sites of power and authority.

While dance theory's use of Foucault has been extensive, it is also contentious, not only because of the absence of a reference to dance in Foucault's writing but also because he would have rejected the phenomenological methods commonly employed by dance studies and somatic theory. Green points out that, in the early stages of his career, Foucault would "not be fond of the idea of bodily experience and would be suspicious of the practice of working pedagogically through the body."<sup>123</sup> Moreover, "Foucault does not claim that the body can provide us with a grounded truth or that education through the body can free people from oppressive social policies and authoritarian regimes."<sup>124</sup> However, in her argument for using a Foucauldian lens on dance, Green cites the example that "modern dance and ballet are called 'technique classes'," explaining that Foucault also used this term as a way of "identifying 'technologies of the self' as part of regimes of power that society requires of people to discipline themselves."<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 137.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>123</sup> Green, "Foucault and the Training," 103.

<sup>124</sup> Idem.

<sup>125</sup> Green, "Foucault and the Training," 100.



Central to Foucault's theory is his description of how eighteenth-century body-subjects were made docile via a process of surveillance:

The human body was entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it. A 'political anatomy,' which was also a 'mechanics of power,' was being born; it defined how one may have a hold over others' bodies, not only so that they may do what one wishes, but so they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed and the efficiency that one determines.<sup>126</sup>

Foucault describes the ways in which surveillance causes an individual to control, or discipline, their actions to meet societal codes of behaviour that have been internalised. Through the development of somatics, we have come to understand that this habitual process occurs in the subcortical organisation of the tonus of the flesh. Therefore, as tonic habits are wired in at the outer edge of conscious awareness they are less visible to the self, and therefore require the development of specific skills in order to observe.

In mobilising Foucault's theory, Green suggests that the surveillance of sites of authority (or of *the state*, according to Foucault) on a dancer produces an internalised "self-surveillance."<sup>127</sup> Through the process of self-surveillance a dancer may achieve the idealised aesthetic of the codified technique, not only in terms of form, but also in quality of action. In that sense, dancers use their sensory perception not only to embody the movement pathways but also the perceived muscular tonality of the dance. For example, in the case of the strained action of the balletic pointed foot, the sense of muscular effort used to achieve a *pointe* can be subconsciously transferred across the whole body until the subcortical embodied sense association is that dancing requires being in a state of heightened muscular tension. Of course this is problematic because movement of joints requires some muscles to activate while others deactivate, and attempting to mobilise a joint using muscles that are always partially active creates unnecessary resistance, as the body sub-cortically works against the desired action. This is why having a sensory understanding of *yielding* facilitates a dancer to know,

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<sup>126</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 138.

<sup>127</sup> Green, "Foucault and the Training," 100.

corporeally, how to achieve a spectrum of tensilities because it resets the baseline sensation of the level of muscular effort needed when dancing.<sup>128</sup>

Green argues that there are political and creative ramifications for sublimating one's experiential subjectivity to comply with codes of behaviour that are determined by external sites of authority. She explains that self-surveillance is an effective method for "training docile dance performers, but not so effective in producing dance artists who take ownership of their bodies and artistic processes."<sup>129</sup> She identifies that the process of making docile bodies is specific to a conservatoire method of dance pedagogy whereby "teachers do not necessarily attempt to help students find meaning in their dance experiences and empower them to own their own bodies."<sup>130</sup> Precision in replicating the codified form is a highly valued attribute of imitative dance, and may require the student to sublimate their desire for any movement pathways that deviate from those prescribed in terms of direction, tone, or timing. For example, the classical second position of the arms must have a gentle arc in the curvature of the arm, which requires a lift of the elbows while also drawing the shoulder girdle downwards, with the thumb aligning with the rest of the hand shape. What may look like an arm simply held away from the body is actually produced through a combination of highly active directional forces through which the dancer constantly manipulates their whole body, and which ultimately becomes a habituated way of embodying movement. Any deviations from the form are identified as corrections, which are given to assist the dancer to apply more control over their body for the discipline required to enact the form.

Like Green, Dempster engages with a Foucauldian discourse to articulate how the external gaze of the dance teacher, choreographer, or audience can replicate the process whereby individuals are made docile through a process of surveillance.<sup>131</sup> She proffers that it is via undisciplined and unregulated practices, such as ideokinesis, that a site of resistance against such docility within controlled power structures can be made,

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<sup>128</sup> For more detail see, Glenna Batson, "The Somatic Practices of Intentional Rest in Dance Education: Preliminary Steps Towards a Method of Study." *Journal of Dance and Somatic Practices* 1, no. 2 (2009): 177–97.

<sup>129</sup> Green, "Foucault and the Training."

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>131</sup> Dempster, "Undisciplined Subjects." See also Elizabeth Dempster, "An Embodied Politics: Radical Pedagogies of Contemporary Dance," Unpublished PhD thesis, Centre for Drama and Theatre Studies, Monash University, 2002.

suggesting that contemporary dance has always been innovated through such unregulated practices. Dempster's argument can thus be applied to somatics and non-codified practices of dance more generally, including the alternative sciences of contemporary dance and Margaret H'Doubler's **unprofessional** approach.<sup>132</sup> However, Dempster's contribution, which is especially pertinent to this thesis, describes how dancers use ideokinesis to refine their sense of self-observation and the exploration of undisciplined movement and how this activity might tug at the edges of the disciplined subjectification proposed by Foucault.<sup>133</sup>

Somatic practices such as ideokinesis are *undisciplined* in the traditional sense, in that they are not bound by a codified aesthetic that is monitored or regulated by external sites of power or hierarchical systems. Ideokinesis does aim to improve the refinement of bodily movement through the development of self-observation and reflexivity, which suggests an ideal of sorts. However, dancers who practice somatics or improvisation often do so by engaging in another kind of self-surveillance in order to relinquish or unlearn the habituated, sub-conscious, self-disciplining of their bodies; this is a liberating kind of self-surveillance which operates in almost direct opposition to the process of surveillance that Foucault described. Therefore, in place of the binary suggested by Foucault's notion of surveillance or Green's self-surveillance, a description of observational practices such as somatics or improvisation should involve a bifurcation of self-surveillance to include that which is both prohibitive and emancipative.<sup>134</sup> Bifurcating the kinds of self-surveillance used in somatics and improvisation shows how an *undisciplined* practice is a way of observing the body-mind that also offers a site of resistance to the process of becoming docile, because it aims to undo the habits that Foucault described as a "subtle coercion" and relinquish the hold upon one's own body "at the level of the mechanism itself."<sup>135</sup> To make the difference between these types of self-surveillance clearer, the "infinitesimal power" of

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<sup>132</sup> As was explained in Chapter Four *Dewey and the Pre-history of Western Improvisation*, H'Doubler rejected the aesthetics and philosophy of choreographers of her time, such as Martha Graham, describing her dance performance as "too professional." Janice Ross, *Moving Lessons: Margaret H'Doubler and the Beginning of Dance in American Education* (Madison, WI and London: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), 6. For further discussion on this debate in dance pedagogy, see Green, "Somatic Authority."

<sup>133</sup> Wait and Brannigan suggest that Dempster's notion of "un"disciplining dance is "providing a model where the power of surveillance and artistic choice is returned to the dancer" by offering a site of resistance (Wait and Brannigan, 2018, 295).

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 137.

the habitual holding that Foucault describes as acting upon the docile body should be understood as *prohibitive* because it is the activity of self-disciplining one's own body in order to make it a compliant tool.<sup>136</sup> In contrast, the somatic practice of experiencing one's **anatomical truth** (and in that process also becoming aware of the subtle, prohibitive tensions accumulated as a docile body and actively releasing them) shall be described here as *emancipative* self-surveillance.

To suggest that it might be possible to sense one's anatomical truth is not to say that through somatics a body-subject could become completely free of cultural codes and somehow *return* to a *pure*, pre-coded form. Even before conception, cultural influences are informing the state of the body-mind, including the cultural and behavioural inheritance passed on via DNA.<sup>137</sup> Furthermore, cultural codes are always in a constant flux, they replenish and reform, and can never be erased. There are, of course, cultural codes specific to those who practice somatics and improvisation that become new (sometimes subconscious) habits, because the body-subject can never be without cultural context. While acknowledging that prohibitive self-surveillance will always be present in one form or another, through undisciplined practices, existing codes can be observed, and questioned, and new possibilities can be explored. The terms *prohibitive* and *emancipative* are used here not only because they describe the sensorial experience of these different kinds of self-surveillance at the level of the mechanism (flesh) itself, but also, following Foucault, they determine how each kind of practice either limits or increases bodily power in relation to the site of authority. At the level of the tissues, somatics works towards the liberation of bodily movement by increasing the bodily power and autonomy of the individual in relation to dominant societal codes and sites of authority. A dancer in the contemporary academy occupies a very volatile and philosophically challenging state because current dance pedagogy is situated between two different kinds of self-surveillance, between obedience and resistance (via liberation).

## 7.5 Anatomical truth

As was discussed earlier, a docile dancing body will enact self-control through a

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Including the possibility of trauma affecting epigenetic information. Nadine Provencal and Elisabeth Binder, "The Effects of Early Life Stress on the Epigenome: From the Womb to Adulthood and Even Before," *Experimental Neurology* 268 (2015): 10–2.

process of prohibitive self-surveillance. This involves adhering to the internalised image of an *ideal* dancing body-schema, not only in form but also in quality of action. This form of self-surveillance is described as prohibitive because, in many cases, the idealised schema of a traditional dance form does not match the capacities of the actual, individual body trying to perform it. A very common example is that very few dancers have the turnout required to achieve a correct *fifth position* in classical ballet. In an attempt to replicate the foot position, many students will try to rotate the lower leg from the knee, which is a hinge joint and does not rotate, to make up for the lack of mobility in the ball and socket joint at the hip.<sup>138</sup> The consequence of this disparity between the idealised schema of the form and the dancer's anatomical truth, impacts the body-mind integrity of the dancer because it causes a sublimation of the somatic awareness of one's own physical capacities in order to replicate what is ideal.

Therefore, rather than suggesting that there is a singular or universally applicable anatomical truth, the concept of *truth* used here refers to the ways in which somatic practices familiarise a dancer with the experiential form and function of their own body at the specific moment of performance, rather than working to manipulate their body towards the ideal to which they aspire.<sup>139</sup> This practice involves bringing observational awareness to one's own psychosomatic experience *as it is* (in terms of sensing physiological mass, weight, volume, movement effort, and texture) rather than obfuscating the physical reality with ideas about *how it should be* that are socially prescribed. Prioritising an awareness of one's anatomical truth is a process of emancipative self-surveillance; one where it is no longer possible to identify a position of rank according to a *standard* because there is no way to benchmark the unique experience of one's physiological anatomy *as it is*. Furthermore, anatomical truth requires keeping one's attention on *what is*, thereby honouring and empowering the self, which is a catalyst for the divergence between kinds of self-surveillance. Once *what is* becomes clear through self-surveillance, it is possible to temporarily emancipate the body by yielding releasing habitual tension. Permanent emancipation requires neuro-

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<sup>138</sup> These training issues have been well documented through considerable research in safe dance practice. See, for example, Edel Quin, Sonia Rafferty, and Charlotte Tomlinson, *Safe Dance Practice* (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 2015).

<sup>139</sup> Wait and Brannigan explain that anatomical truth "is affected by any number of social and cultural codes, along with any psychosomatic idiosyncrasies. Together, such forces produce an individual's uniquely personal experience of her physical anatomy and, therefore, resist any competitive notion in which individuals could be ranked against an ideal form" (Wait and Brannigan, "Non-competitive Body States," 293).

musculature re-education at the sub-cortical level, such as occurs through regular practice of ideokinesis. As was said earlier, because of the profound effect that somatic practices can have on reconfiguring one's philosophical body-subjectification, the practices can feel like a universal panacea that could facilitate the erasure of cultural codes. However, somatics can only loosen the dominance of existing codes through observation of them, and can assist in making space to shift between possibilities. Cultural codes are continually replenished by the cultural context that a body-subject finds itself in, including when practicing somatics.

Like anatomical truth, prohibitive self-surveillance is also a process of rigorous self-observation, but one whereby power is transferred to an external site of authority through obedience. Using a military example, Foucault describes how the disciplined obedience of soldiers dissociates power from their bodies, which become subjected to sites of authority:

Discipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these forces (in political terms of obedience). In short, it dissociates power from the body; on the one hand, it turns into an 'aptitude', a 'capacity', which it seeks to increase; on the other hand, it reverses the course of the energy, the power that might result from it, and turns it into a relation of strict subjection.<sup>140</sup>

In the case of dance, this form of subjection via discipline directs and contains the dancer's proprioceptive experience by privileging a codified ideal over what is anatomically true. A Foucauldian analysis of dance would argue that through a process of sublimation, imitative forms of training may subject a dancer's body to external sources of force or power, causing the disintegration of the body-mind integrity that is necessary to experience anatomical truth. Somatic practices also involve a process of disciplined self-surveillance, but in contrast to imitative methods, there is an attempt to counter the disempowering effects of prohibitive subjection and replace it with an emancipatory approach to self-surveillance that empowers the subject through self-affirming attention and permission *to be as you are*.

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<sup>140</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 138.

Somatic self-surveillance can be emancipatory in that it privileges a) the anatomical function of movement, b) a sense of ease which increases proprioception, and c) movement that is motivated by self-expression, rather than for the purpose of conforming to expectations or the replication of an ideal form. Somatic theory, via Todd, explains how social concepts commonly influence the self-formation of the body-subject:

[A] familiar response is determined by our conditional reflexes. That is, the sensory-motor chain of reactions in our nerves and muscles has been gradually modified through association of ideas derived, not from mechanical or physical considerations of what balance means or how a really straight back looks, but from moral, that is social concepts.<sup>141</sup>

Todd argues that developing a greater kinaesthetic sense of the body, and retraining the conditional reflexes of habitual and biomechanical muscular effort, gives greater insight into how the form of anatomy supports its function. This provides an alternative to inefficient and habitually constructed body postures based on aesthetic, moral, or social values. Todd explains that self-observation is integral to this process: “to do this we must make use of the kinaesthetic sensations coming to the central nervous system from every bone and joint, every ligament and muscle, just as surely as and more constantly than the peripheral sensations of touch, sight or sound.”<sup>142</sup> Through rigorous self-surveillance, the practitioner can be trained to move with better structural support by coordinating movement according to the principles of physics, thereby increasing the body’s power. In this sense, the labour of ideokinesis affirms the anatomical truth of the body through practice.

As was explained in Chapter Three *Embodied Consciousness*, transmogrifying the body-schema through the use of imagery is a method used in both improvisation practices and ideokinesis. While this might appear to be a case of replacing one ideal or docile body with another, Foucault’s theory of how (aesthetic, moral, or social) forces became internalised is founded on the political understanding that prohibitive self-surveillance ultimately benefits powers external to the body. In contrast, emancipative

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<sup>141</sup> Todd, *The Thinking Body*, 35.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 35–6.

self-surveillance practices such as somatics benefit each individual's anatomical (and emotional) functioning, which is self-empowering. The dancer can develop a deeper experiential understanding of how anatomical form and function can be impacted by either divesting attention from, or investing attention to it, supported by the use of imagery. Therefore, while ideokinesis and image-based improvisation are not identical processes, there are similarities.

As was explained by Sweigard earlier, a key feature of ideokinesis, which is different to image-based improvisation, is that ideokinesis is practiced in stillness.<sup>143</sup> This is because movement requires neural signals to be sent between the brain and the muscles via the nervous system. Ideokinesis works to optimise neuromuscular functionality by imaging the action more efficiently, which can only happen without the interference of the signals required to complete the action.<sup>144</sup> Therefore, it is important to the effectiveness of ideokinesis in retraining the nervous system that imagery is used without the conflicting nervous signals of voluntary muscular effort. This is how it is possible for ideokinesis to *undo* unconscious neuromuscular habits that inhibit a body-mind from experiencing its anatomical truth. However, as was explained in greater detail in Chapter Five *The Aesthetics of an Ethics of Being*, kinaesthetic and proprioceptive information is felt more clearly when a) a body is in motion, b) it is in relation to the touch of another, or c) the tone of body tissues, in particular muscle tension, is relaxed. Therefore, in order to benefit from experiencing one's own anatomical truth while in motion, the improviser must do less by mentally emancipating the tonus of their body tissues, habitually and continually, so that this can become a habit of self-formation. A refinement of this can occur through a process of crossing the *threshold* between stillness and action. In addition to the stillness of ideokinetic imagery, an extended use of emancipative ideation of the body's tonus (through self-surveillance) can facilitate a moving form of imagery that can also extend the qualitative palette of available muscular tone. Using the principles of re-training the neuromuscular system in stillness is a way of re-educating the body to approach movement pathways with a habitus of *ease*, thereby also increasing the kinaesthetic perception of anatomical truth while in motion.

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<sup>143</sup> Sweigard, *Human Movement Potential*, 221. To support her argument, Sweigard referenced Butler, "Pictures in the Mind."

<sup>144</sup> Bernard, Steinmuller, and Stricker, *Ideokinesis*, 27.



For example, very few people experience the actual weight of their arms because they subtly hold their arms up, away from the pull of gravity. It is only by relinquishing this habitual holding of the arms that their *true weight* can be felt, giving a dancer a greater sense of their anatomical truth. Furthermore, in order to feel the true weight of the arms, the muscle tone in the arms and shoulders must soften, allowing the neural pathways to receive more sensory information. True weight can be experienced through an exercise whereby a partner gently manipulates the completely passive arm so that any tension or resistance to this involuntary movement can be felt by both partners and released. This is a kind of re-education of the neuromuscular system because the image of weighted softness in movement is not in conflict with the nervous signals of voluntary action. However, it is important to maintain this sense of weight and ease while also engaging the muscles when transitioning to voluntary movement.

The work that dancers have done to experience their anatomical truth, through the practice of somatics such as ideokinesis, has opened up the range of potential tonal states that the bodily tissues can be in, and this produces a kind of *freedom* via emancipating the tone of the tissues. The tonal state of tissues can shift the weight, texture, and quality of movement, and as a consequence of this, can also alter the way movement appears in terms of speed and scale. As Louppe suggests in the opening quote, the freedom of a “non-determined body” has led to innovation in movement that escapes standards of codified movement practices.<sup>145</sup> The use of weight is particularly important to the sense of movement itself. In fact, Todd describes kinaesthesia as “the feeling of movement and of weight.”<sup>146</sup> Therefore, in addition to the use of imagery, the importance of feeling the true weight of the body is an integral factor when developing greater efficiency and therefore a greater range of possibilities in movement.

Proprioception informs kinaesthetic sense by collecting information concerning the positioning of the limbs in space, and the intensity of the effort the muscles are using, from proprioceptors that exist in the skeletal muscle fibres and are connected to the brain. If the body is subtly and habitually held *up* or *in*, as is often the case with prohibitive self-surveillance, then the effort of holding the body directly interferes with the subcortical organisation of a body by overloading information through the pathways

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<sup>145</sup> Louppe, *Poetics of Contemporary Dance*, 52.

<sup>146</sup> Todd, *The Thinking Body*, 33.

of the nervous system, thereby effectively reducing the capacity for information to flow through the nerves. This reduces the capacity for proprioception, and therefore also reduces the capacity for a sense of seamless flow in movement pathways. Todd's theory points to the evolution of the human skeleton as functioning best without the conditioning of prohibitive self-surveillance. Todd asks, "Why hold the parts of our body when we can let them hang or sit?"<sup>147</sup> The necessity of allowing body parts to *hang* or *yield* towards gravity is particularly important in the case of the erect spine, as the weight of the ischial tuberosity or *sit bones* at the bottom of the pelvis must counterbalance the spine by hanging down, allowing the spine and skull to *fall up*, creating balance posture without requiring an effortful uplift.

The use of weight was also integral to the work of formalist choreographers, such as Martha Graham, Horton, and Hanya Holm, who developed codified techniques. However, many of their techniques are approached with an effortful uplift in other parts of the musculature, which imbues much of the tonus of their vocabulary with tension, most notably in Graham's movements such as her core *contractions*. These mid-twentieth-century techniques balance the sense of uplift with a more grounded use of floor, and feature *fall and recovery* as a key principle of movement. In contrast, traditional ballet techniques require a full-body uplift away from the floor for the ballerina to create the illusion of ethereal lightness. It is, of course, also very difficult to teach dancers (or anyone) to appreciate the true weight of the body while in motion without an experience of the very rigorous process of subject-reformation that emancipative self-surveillance practices such as somatics afford. Furthermore, the releasing of weight produces a very specific aesthetic quality, which may not be desired by a choreographer or improviser who wishes to communicate ideas via a tensile corporeality. Therefore, the exceptionally soft quality of what is described as the *release* approach in contemporary dance, developed by dancers and students of Barbara Clark and Lulu Sweigard such as Joan Skinner, Pamela Matt, and others, is fundamentally based on corporeal freedom in recognition of the "human body as a weight-bearing and weight-moving structure."<sup>148</sup> Ultimately, the purpose of experiencing anatomical truth is

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid. Joan Skinner took lessons with Barbara Clark before developing her Skinner Releasing Technique®. Skinner also worked with Matt, the creator of Mindful Movement®, to develop an Interdisciplinary Bachelor's Degree (Dance) for the University of Washington in 1970, accessed January 4, 2019, <http://www.mindful-movement.org/about.html>. As was explained earlier, an increased interest by

to broaden one's capacity for a spectrum of tensilities and to diversify the available palette of tonalities that one has to choose from.

As is well documented, the influence of emancipative self-surveillance revolutionised new dance practices and related embodied knowledges. The combination of an image-based reconceptualisation of the body and an efficient use of weight has produced the movement quality of liquid softness through which the body can be *poured* when moving into and out of the floor, often demonstrated in Contact Improvisation and release practice.<sup>149</sup> Experiencing and embodying the pouring of weight as a potential quality of movement is central to the transformation of a contemporary dancer's conception of the moving body. Most importantly, the kinaesthetic experience of pouring weight reorients the focus of a dancer from the shape or form of the body in space and time (a configuring of limbs that produces positive and negative space) towards the perception of the fluid potential of the body-schema, as the effect of gravity causes the mass of the body to be poured into and through its underneath surfaces.<sup>150</sup> Pouring weight is just one example of re-conceptualisation of a released body that demonstrates how ideokinesis has provided alternative conceptualisations of *what the body is* through the kinaesthetic experience of somatisation.

## 7.6 Dissolving binaries to innovate improvisation

As is clear from the description above, training in dance and especially improvisation in the twenty-first century can require a complex negotiation between different processes of subject formation. While somatic practices are extremely important, for an improviser to reject imitative training completely would mean missing out on a whole host of important dance knowledges and developmental expertise. This includes a capacity to configure their corporeality to match a specific form and thereby add detail to their body-schema map through proprioception, which can be very useful when thinking-through-the-body. Arguably, it may be more useful to go through the process of learning the discipline of prohibitive self-surveillance and then unlearn it through

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Western dancers in Eastern practices such as T'ai Chi Ch'üan, Aikido, and yoga also contributed significantly to the non-dualistic reformation of the contemporary dancing body-subject.

<sup>149</sup> The quality of *pouring weight* has become a key principle for Contact Improvisation.

<sup>150</sup> Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen highlights the difference between a *collapsed* and *yielding* tone of the underneath surface of the body when in contact with another surface, for example, the floor when rolling. She explains that contact with the other surface is increased through the softness of yielding, as collapsing does not offer the expanded and engaged tone through which contact is supported, accessed January 4, 2019, <https://www.bodymindcentering.com/yield-verse-collapse/>.

emancipative self-surveillance, than to have never been subjected to external sites of authority at all. This is because each approach provides a corporeal understanding of the dimensions of both ends of the spectrum; the gradients between obedience (to a task, for example) and self-affirmation (of the body's mind) that are in flux during the constant (re)formation of the body-subject in relation to cultural codes. Therefore, rather than assert one approach over another, one of the major innovations of improvisation has been a thoughtful dissolution of the binary that divides disciplined and un-disciplined approaches to pedagogy.

It is important that such dissolution is not used as a shortcut to subsume somatic methods into a traditionally disciplined paradigm for the purpose of leveraging a more professionally productive, docile subject in the academy. Instead, imitative pedagogy should also be brought closer to somatics, not only practically but also philosophically, so that the self-surveillance inherent in the disciplined forms also facilitates the emancipative power of anatomical truth. Furthermore, in order to refine the sensitivity required to perceive the resonance of affects in circulation, an improviser must be self-reflexive and aware of the shifting sites of power while dancing, and avoid the tendency to become docile in relation to power structures. In that way, both somatic and traditional methods can enhance the observation of the tissue states, an essential element of developing improvisational expertise.

Different ways of thinking-through-the-body can be used depending on the intentions and aesthetic concerns of dance, demonstrating how the practice of improvisation can be innovated through the dissolution of binaries. At one end of the spectrum are traditional systems of imitative dance training, particularly techniques where proprioception is developed and used to inform a dancer's mimetic, self-regulation: refining the body quality and position in relation to their replication of the ideal form, effectively becoming docile. At the other end of the spectrum are therapeutic somatics where thinking-through-the-body is used for the purposes of physical, mental, and spiritual integration and self-affirmation, including the holistic healing work of identifying past traumas and tensions held in the body as physical/emotional/mental limitations, and through a process of acknowledgement, acceptance, and compassion releasing them. Owing to the influence of somatics on dance training, and the proliferation of idiosyncratic and diversified aims of contemporary dance artists, the

aesthetics of improvised contemporary dance are situated along the spectrum between these two ends. Imitative training teaches the dancer *what* they are doing in space, and cultivates an extended range of movement facility. Somatics has assisted dancers in identifying *why* the movement is unfolding in the way it is, and as a method for unlearning habitual movement to make the body more available to a diverse range of movements. Once there is corporeal knowing of *why* and *how* movements unfold, there is a possibility of creating a new space where it is possible to discover *what else* may occur, particularly once any adherence to a specific ideal is relinquished. The simplicity of this description falsely suggests that the processes of thinking-through-the-body occurs along a neat and ordered trajectory, when in practice these distinctions in the body-mind range in gradients of awareness, jumping, and shifting along the spectrum and potentially defying categorisation at any given moment.

The space that furthers the project of somatics within the aesthetics of contemporary dance is that which deepens the notion of *what else* can be done through improvisation practice, by inquiring into how a decisive and creatively emancipated (non-docile) body-mind can produce innovative movement territories. As was discussed in previous chapters, in addition to dissolving the hierarchy among participants, expertise in improvisation requires reconfiguring the site of authority from the tradition of the choreographer/teacher directing the dancer from outside the dance, to the dancers directing themselves from within the dance and in response to each other.<sup>151</sup> On the micro level, therefore, there is also the possibility of dissolving the hierarchy between body-mind, so that the compositional decisions are determined by bodily sensations rather than language-based thoughts. As was mentioned earlier, this is how an improviser can be moved by the resonance of affects in circulation and be automated by those forces. Dissolving the mind-over-body hierarchy is also what the practice of *Authentic Movement* addresses, which will be discussed in a moment.<sup>152</sup> This process is

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<sup>151</sup> Dissolving the hierarchy by working collaboratively as a *constellation* is discussed in Chapter Six in relation to Forsythe's interest in creating improvised dance works as self-organising systems. For a detailed account of the *democratic* performance work of the Judson Dance Theater in the early 1960s in New York, which owed much to Halprin and H'Doubler, including the emergence of improvisation as a performance form, see Sally Banes, *Democracy's Body: Judson Dance Theater, 1962–1964* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1980).

<sup>152</sup> *Authentic Movement* is a method of dance therapy developed by Mary Starks Whitehouse in the 1950s that will be discussed in greater detail in the following. See also Patrizia Pallaro, ed., *Authentic Movement Essays by Mary Starks Whitehouse, Janet Alder and Joan Chodorow* (Philadelphia, PA and London: Jessica Kingsley, 1999); Janet Adler, *Offering from the Conscious Body: The Discipline of Authentic Movement* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2002); and Fernandes Ciane, "Aesthetics and Healing:

a cornerstone of improvisation as it provides a situation where a deeper level of embodied consciousness might emerge. The point of difference emphasised here is the intention of the artist to cultivate body-mind agency within the composition as an artistic voice rather than as an avenue for personal therapeutic expression, though there may be crossovers between these roles in the process.

### 7.7 Listening to body-mind and composing improvisation

While it is commonly understood that improvised and somatic practices both emphasise listening to/sensing the body-mind in order to approach movement as a question to be discovered, what that actually means in terms of a process that can be practiced and refined can be difficult to articulate. As has been established in this thesis, accepting the integration of the body-mind is central to the proposal that the body has a mind of its own if *mind* is the source of intensions and desires. If one can relinquish the distraction of language-based thoughts so that it is possible to focus on somatic listening-sensing, any part of one's body-mind can reveal very subtle qualitative corporeal sensations and the resonance of affects in circulation, which seem to seek expression through movement.<sup>153</sup> The body's mind is not heard internally as the familiar, relatively loud and specific (or in-focus), predominantly language-based thoughts that are commonly associated with the mind, but as a far more diffuse sensation that is in a state of constant flux.

For example, it is possible to sense the pull of intention and desire felt within the foot or sit bones, experience it in the relationship between these landmarks of the corpus felt along the length of the leg while standing; the relaxed, weighted effort of reaching-into, balancing-on, and falling-towards gravity simultaneously. This is particularly true when there is a history of working with images that brings attention to a kinaesthetic relationship between anatomical landmarks, such as in the practice of ideokinesis. Therefore, an important corporeal knowledge for improvisation is understanding the difference between consciously moving from a) the *voice* of the thinking brain that has a habit of proposing an image of how things *should be* rather than noticing them *as they are*, and/or b) the mind of the body. In other words, it is clear that cognitive thoughts

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Authentic Movement in Dance-Theatre Composition," *Dance* 7 (2009): 3–36.

<sup>153</sup> The desire of the body-mind in relation to affect is addressed in detail in Chapter Four *Resonance of Affect and Immanent Evaluation*.

instigate actions according to an image of how a body-subject should behave, which may subtly obfuscate the integration of body-mind through the dominance of thought. Receptivity to the mind of the body in order to sense what the desires of the body are, and moving from this desire, allows a more *authentic* expression of the body-mind in that moment.<sup>154</sup> Perceiving the subtle difference between these approaches, which are in reality never so clearly distinct, is difficult but important for identifying the assumed or habituated set of fundamental principles (subjectification) that improvising artists are working with.

Firstly, *listening-sensing* is important because it doesn't just pay lip service to the notion of the integration of body-mind; it offers a way to perceptibly enhance an awareness of its integration by reducing the obfuscating dominance of language-based thought. For example, traditional methods of dance that position the mind as the site of authority begin by mentally determining what a specific action should be before enacting it, and then replicating the action that was thought of. This might happen very quickly or beneath conscious awareness, but it commonly happens even during an improvised performance. In contrast, when an improviser listens-senses for the desire of their body-mind there may potentially be no preconceived outcome, but moment-by-moment sensing and noticing how the body's mind is responding to the situation of the improvisation as it unfolds. In one sense, this activity might seem very simple: doing something without cognitively thinking about it first. However, performing improvisation with only a simple understanding of this generally produces a habituated response in terms of movement over time. This, in turn, does not offer an improviser a tangible method of generating and refining movement in a creatively productive way as an ongoing compositional practice. In actuality, working with the agency of the body's mind in performance requires a state that can be incredibly difficult to maintain without a considerable investment in the rigorous practice of embodied consciousness that was described earlier. It is not that it necessarily requires *hard* work, but that it requires a very delicate approach so that the subtlety of the experience can be felt. This is an experience that reforms one's philosophical subject-formation through emancipative self-surveillance. As Spinoza said, "all things excellent are as difficult as

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<sup>154</sup> The term *authentic* will be qualified in greater detail in a moment. See also Halprin's replacement for technique, which she called "the authentic self." Ninotchka Bennahum, Wendy Perron, and Bruce Robertson, *Radical Bodies: Anna Halprin, Simone Forti, and Yvonne Rainer in California and New York, 1955–1972* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2017), 73.

they are rare.’<sup>155</sup>

In order to examine the labour of this practice specifically, it is important to describe an exercise that supports the labour. It is also necessary to know that this kind of listening-sensing (and the experience of giving form to the somatisation of qualities through movement) is an altogether different experience to hearing the voice in your mind reading this text which gives an account of it. Therefore, I invite you to try the exercise in the following paragraph in order to understand it physically as well as intellectually. The example that best reveals the body’s mind for me is an exercise that deals with crossing the threshold from *passive* to *active*; or in other words, *how to let the image dance the body*. This is a key practice that has been developed in release work that can facilitate a connection between the image work of ideokinesis that occurs in stillness and taking imagery into movement via sensation, which is referred to here as somatisation. In my experience, some of the most potent corporeal knowledge can be experienced at the threshold between being *passive* and *active*, at the juncture of ideokinesis and improvisation, when a somatisation transitions from stillness to movement. If the traversal of this threshold is motivated by the desire of the body’s mind and negotiated through sensation, rather than *willed into being* through language-based thought, then it is possible to experience how ideation can activate the body’s mind to dance the body. In this sense, somatic practices may also produce an image of the body that is ideal, but what is ideal about this body image is always in relation to the anatomical truth of body, dissolving any disparity between what is ideal and what is physically real. How an improviser can take the intention of imagery into movement, and is supported by the most efficient use of their anatomy, is understood experientially through somatic corporeal knowledge.

The dancer begins by spending a substantial amount of time completely and actively passive: lying on the floor, breathing and yielding the full weight of their body to gravity. Learning how to achieve complete passivity is also a process that can be experientially enhanced with a partner via the weighted arm exercise that was mentioned earlier, and developed over time. When a dancer is completely passive, movement cannot occur because it requires muscles to initiate an action. From this

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<sup>155</sup> This is the last sentence in *Ethics*. Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. Edwin Curley (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1996), 181.



place, the dancer somatises an image-based action, for example, *reaching through the ends*. For some time the dancer simply imagines the sensation of reaching through their ends, while remaining completely passive. This somatisation does not need to be forced but allowed to feel *as it does*; it may not produce sensation at first but gradually builds towards something like a playful delight, a tickle, a buzzing/vibrating sensation, or a need or desire to reach that is growing in the fingertips. A gentle self-reflexive process of thinking-through-the-body invites the build-up of sensation in the tissues: Which ends can I reach through? What would it mean to reach through those ends? What is the sensation of reach? By focusing on the ends (e.g., the fingertips of one hand) as the site of initiation for this image, the sensation of *desire* begins to be expressed by the body's mind as an intention to *reach* through the fingertips. It could be a budding, gently growing kind of a reach with a sense of expanding the body-schema into the space beyond the fingertips. Key to the process is sensing and replenishing the active intention of the image through a specific bodily site for long enough, and without force, so that the image becomes a tangible sensation.

At this delicate stage, it is important not to voluntarily *enact the image*, but to continue to yield completely while extending the body-schema imaginatively through somatisation. Just as with ideokinesis, the image is then (temporarily) embedded on the subcortical level without the interference (to the nervous system) of voluntary action. With time and focus, the fingertips eventually become so sensitised with a desire or intention to reach that to stop them would require resistance so they begin to move. Of course the muscles must make this action, but the action itself is initiated by the body's desire to reach that has arisen from a somatisation of the reaching image. At the micro level, the dancer may perceive how embodying an image in this way affects the desires of the body's mind. The fingertips become imbued with the desire to reach, and even as the entire body is completely at rest, the mind of the fingertips begins to reach through the yielding action of the fingers. In order to establish this connection, it might be necessary to let go of the image intermittently and yield body-mind completely for a moment before beginning again with somatisation, in order to notice the delicacy of tone that is most productive for the somatisation process. At some stage through this process the intention of the body's mind may cause an actual movement to occur, while maintaining a very passive quality in the bodily tissues. This should not be forced in any way as it is far too easy to skip past the threshold between passive and active and begin

moving without giving enough time for the integration of the image into sensation, and into movement. In the transition from passive to active, each moment can be self-reflexively attended to by noticing: which muscles are switching on for this action to happen, in what way do they switch on, and with what force, tone, or quality?

If this activity is explored without the compulsion to produce movement too soon, then the *threshold* between being passive and being active can be extended, allowing all the miniscule detail of this transition to be experienced as a vast journey. In a similar way, bodily tonality and therefore movement qualities or textures, can be extended through ideating while at rest (sometimes using non-anatomical images such as a *waterbag* or infusing imagery with the anatomy such as a *melting* of the flesh, for example) and then allowing the body's mind to initiate movement in response to what it has absorbed of that texture-image.<sup>156</sup> Using somatisation to feel, and then embody, a qualitative image in the flesh is a highly sophisticated practice that allows for greater acuity of corporeal knowledges, especially if it is preceded by some time spent observing, accepting, and connecting to the body-mind *as it is* before beginning the ideation process.

Somatisation exercises enrich improvisation practice in three ways. Firstly, they can enable an improviser to come to understand how to embody an image as a sensation and as a question. Secondly, they are a tangible method of understanding what the body's mind is, and what its desire feels like. Thirdly, they facilitate a greater understating of how to move with softness and ease by allowing the image to support the movement. Then, when improvising, the dancer can *listen* to the sensations of desire and intention that are the mind of the body and follow those, rather than grasp the image with the much louder language-based thoughts that tend to overlay the body's mind with intentions or narration.<sup>157</sup> That the intention of the body's mind can be felt as a sensation is a curious aspect to the refinement of sensitivity that can be developed through this practice. Some martial arts training, such as Aikido, which has inspired many of the principles of Contact Improvisation, involves developing a sensitive

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<sup>156</sup> For examples of imagery taken into practice see Karczag's collaborators, Miranda Tufnell and Chris Crickmay, *Body, Space, Image: Notes Towards Improvisation and Performance* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993). See also Daniel Nagrin, *Dance and the Specific Image: Improvisation* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1994); and Andrea Olsen and Caryn McHose, *The Place of Dance: A Somatic Guide to Dancing and Dance Making* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2014).

<sup>157</sup> Observational or meditation practices such as Zazen, which practice relinquishing the grasping mind of the brain and observing the present moment as it is, have had a strong influence on improvisation.

awareness of the intentions of others at the body-to-body level.<sup>158</sup> This skill assists a practitioner in predicting an attack from an opponent by sensing their intentions by noticing how sensations resonate in one's own body-mind, and therefore increasing the capacity to respond to the other in the moment without the need for pre-thought. While a sensation of the intention of another is a very subjective experience that is difficult to prove, it is a fascinating example of how intentions can be made visible and subtly impact the material world.<sup>159</sup>

For improvisers the practice of listening to the body's mind, and by extension the resonation of affects, including those that arise from the intentions of others, extends both the palate of movement textures (as was discussed earlier in terms of weight and flow) but also the nature of compositional decisions, particularly in terms of relationship to others, space, time, rates of change, and impulse. Innovations can be made, following this practice, in terms of a body-subject formation that arises in response to the cultural codes of that specific moment in time. The formation of body subjectification can therefore be flexible and potentially malleable, shaped through an undisciplined response to the forces in circulation. Therefore, rather than innovating dance through *new* content, improvisation is a way of *innovating the process of content formation* through which the content itself arises in response to the contemporaneous moment.

The desire and impulse to make compositional decisions are also sensed through the body-mind, because it reorients the focus on the relationship of the improviser to their experience within the space and time of the performance. By listening to the body's mind, an improviser can feel a sense of the rhythm of a performance, the undercurrent flow of its unfoldment, which may precipitate impulses in several directions; to either come into alignment with the progression of how the performance is unfolding, to support it, or to create a rupture and change it in some (potentially dramatic) way. For example, there may be a slow-paced improvisation that has maintained a certain tone for a duration, which may build a desire in the improviser to make a physical choice that disrupts the serenity of the atmosphere that has been established. A disruptive choice

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<sup>158</sup> For more detail see, Wendy Palmer, *The Intuitive Body: Aikido as a Clairsentient Practice* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 1994).

<sup>159</sup> Unfortunately, attempting to theorise this aspect of improvisation is beyond the scope of this research.

may be to forcefully dance in an extended kinesphere, or to run through the space, thereby refreshing the potential of the rhythm of the space-time via a movement offering that has a different tempo, charge, or sense of atmospheric tone. Alternatively, feeling an impulse to change, yet resisting it and thereby allowing it to grow, is also a way to *build tension* in the space and may reveal a collective anticipation for change that has built to a point of palpability. This is because the experience of an impulse to make a disruption, or any other more subtle change, may be felt by the audience as well as by the performer. Negotiating when and how to create moments of change is important because, at a certain point, the ongoing build of tension will lose its power and dissipate as the impulse for change in a specific moment passes or subsides. Using the body's mind as a barometer for sensing the need for compositional decisions or impulses is, therefore, a highly satisfying way to practice and refine improvised composition. The acts of self-observation described in this thesis are fundamental to accessing an emancipated body-mind; however, there is another practice that can reveal an even deeper level of authentic presence: Authentic Movement.

## 7.8 Authentic Movement

Authentic Movement is a practice that pulls into focus the juncture between emancipative and prohibitive self-surveillance in a different way to image-based practices such as ideokinesis. This is because sensing or listening to what an actual desire for movement is, once an ideal image is relinquished, can become a highly refined form of emancipative self-surveillance. It also presents different challenges for both traditionally trained or untrained dancers because this practice was developed for the purpose of therapeutic self-expression rather than as a performance practice *per se*. Originally called *movement in depth*, what is *authentic* about Authentic Movement is, as Whitehouse explains,

When the movement was simple and inevitable, not to be changed no matter how limited or partial, it became what I call 'authentic' – it could be recognised as genuine, belonging to that person.<sup>160</sup>

The therapeutic value of Authentic Movement as a practice is that it provides a context

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<sup>160</sup> Janet Adler, *Offering from the Conscious Body: The Discipline of Authentic Movement* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2002), xii.

for a person to freely express their personal **psychosomatic** state in a way that precipitates their wellbeing. The basis of movement therapy theory is that all experiences are stored in the body-mind as psycho-physical archives. Furthermore, when someone experiences a traumatic event, or when their self-expressive response to an event is stymied, as it can be when an individual is subject to prohibitive self-surveillance, unexpressed emotions/feelings/ideas/thoughts are then *held* in the body-mind creating physical-mental blockages in the tonus of the tissues, reducing the capacity of tissues to shift tonalities. These psycho-physical archives are often also emotional in nature, and are often connected to emotional or psychological malaise such as depression or anxiety. Therefore the process of unblocking can commonly include the expression or processing of (emotional) feelings or sensations. Psycho-physical blockages can limit the range of movements or movement qualities, reduce the capacity for expression, and/or produce ineffective alignment that in extreme cases can lead to injury or illness over time.<sup>161</sup> As a therapy, Authentic Movement creates a context for the practitioner to become aware of the histories of emotions and ideas stored in their flesh and allows them to be physicalised or expressed in other ways. Besides the potential for Authentic Movement to promote well-being, it has also been adapted by improvisers to generate movement from a somatic source and because it can offer key insights into performance practice.

For improvisers, Authentic Movement offers a useful method for the body's mind to lead the dancing, facilitating a reversal of the traditional body-mind hierarchy. It does this in a number of ways. Firstly, an improviser is invited to physicalise the psycho-physical archives stored in their body-mind. As distinct from the therapeutic practice of simply expressing or processing those archives, this method can be used to refine the capacity for both self-observation and amplification of embodied sources of material for performance. It is not that an improviser's personal psycho-physical archives are necessarily the material of their performance, but an improviser can use this Authentic Movement practice as a way to warm-up and refine their capacity to express their body-mind's desire for movement, as well as perceive the resonance of affects in circulation, when performing improvisation.

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<sup>161</sup> The Body-Mind Centering® work of Bainbridge Cohen addresses this specifically, but it is also the basis of ideokinesis, as Todd explains: "man's whole body records his emotional thinking." Todd, *The Thinking Body*, 1.

It is well known that emotions impact the felt-sense of the body-mind and conversely that corporeal events affect the body-mind emotionally. An everyday example is noticing how feeling happy can cause one's body to also feel light, and conversely how grieving or heartbreak can be physically painful. There is also the well-documented connection between heart disease and depression, including post heart-attack depression.<sup>162</sup> As was mentioned earlier, recent neuroscientific research has found more evidence for the *gut-brain axis* that describes the gut as a *second brain* due to the “bidirectional signalling between the brain and the gut microbiome, involving multiple neurocrine and endocrine signalling mechanisms.”<sup>163</sup> A therapeutic aspect of somatic practices is via the physicalised expression or processing of emotion that has been locked in psycho-physical archives stored in the body-mind, as well as the physicalisation of the resonation of affect in circulation that was explained in Chapter Three. Therefore, in contrast to the method of stimulating a desire to move (in the example, of crossing the threshold between passive to active) using somatisation explained earlier, the practice of Authentic Movement involves listening-sensing the desire of the body's mind without any reconfiguration of the body-schema via imagery.

Secondly, Authentic Movement creates a context for a movement practice that is not a performance. It may seem counter-intuitive to practice a performance method by *not* performing, but authentically not performing actually allows an improviser the opportunity to develop a somatic understanding of what *performing* feels like, through the experience of what it is not. Authentically not performing is actually a very rare experience because people are socially conditioned to be constantly performing in everyday life, albeit on a far more micro level than the theatrical one that occurs onstage.

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<sup>162</sup> There are also phenomena whereby heart transplant recipients have developed the interests or personalities of their donors. See, B. Bunzel, B. Schmidl-Mohl, A. Grundböck, and G. Wollenek, “Does Changing the Heart Mean Changing Personality? A Retrospective Inquiry on 47 Heart Transplant Patients,” *Quality of Life Research* 1, no. 4 (1992): 251–6; Paul Pearsall, Gary Schwartz, and Linda Russek, “Changes in Heart Transplant Recipients That Parallel the Personalities of Their Donors,” *Journal of Near-Death Studies* 20, no. 3 (2002): 191–206.

<sup>163</sup> Taken from the abstract of Emeran Mayer, Rob Knight, Sarkis Mazmanian, John Cryan & Kirsten Tillisc, “Gut Microbes and the Brain: Paradigm Shift in Neuroscience,” *The Journal of Neuroscience* 34, no. 46 (2014): 15490–6. In other words, the biochemical and neurotransmitter connection between the intestinal system and the *enteric* nervous system communicates autonomously with the central nervous system (including the vagus nerve central to the parasympathetic system), thereby producing feelings that don't necessarily involve the brain; the connection functions even if the vagus nerve has been severed). For more research on the gut-brain relationship in neuroscience, see Timothy Dinan and John Cryan, “The Impact of Gut Microbiota on Brain and Behaviors: Implications for Psychiatry,” *Current Opinion in Clinical Nutrition and Metabolic Care* 18, no. 6 (2015): 552–8.

Everyone performs different roles in their daily lives depending on the context: for example, the co-worker, boss, parent, partner, or citizen.<sup>164</sup> The ubiquity of occupying a role within a hierarchy is what Foucault describes in his discussion of surveillance and discipline.<sup>165</sup> The performance that exists in the interface between people is in some ways in recognition that another person is present to, and can be affected by, one's words and actions. The context of Authentic Movement offers a break from the constant requirement of performing a role, while still being held by the container of the attention of another person who acts as witness. To have the attention of another while expressing authenticity is a key aspect to the practice that may not necessarily be as effective or therapeutic if practiced alone. In this practice all that is required is to simply attune to what the body-mind desires to do without judgement, or expectation, in the presence of another person. It is particularly important that the practitioner relinquishes any compulsion to perform for the other, because there is nothing that needs doing and everything (including even falling asleep) is entirely permissible. This is another method of emancipative self-surveillance that privileges an awareness of the psycho-physical expression.

A practice of authentically not performing is a fundamental challenge to the productivity of goal-orientated institutions. Yet, as a performer, I find practicing Authentic Movement offers a heightened opportunity to perceive the resonation of affects in my body-mind and how these are motivating my desire for action. In addition, it increases my capacity to sense what the *tone* of the improvisation is and how not performing might impact the sensitivity and availability of my presence to the moment. The non-performance of the self and the freedom of removing any objective other than simply following one's own desire, may facilitate a type of movement exploration that could therefore be described as authentic, but it is also a way of sensitising the nuances of a body-mind instrument. In the tonus of body-mind, authenticity feels (to me) like relinquishing any hold on, or control over, the interface of the self: the sense of the way one presents oneself to be perceived by others. It is a way of slipping out of a role and into an authentic experience of self and a witnessing of one's own subject formation, in

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<sup>164</sup> That people perform roles in daily life is a well-established aspect of Performance Studies. For example, see Richard Schechner, "Foreword: Fundamentals of Performance Studies," in *Teaching Performance Studies*, eds. Nathan Stucky and Cynthia Wimmer (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002), xi.

<sup>165</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*.

that moment. This shift in tone is perceivable as a lack of self-judgement, which is also held and supported by the attentive presence of the witness. Emptying oneself of self-judgement can be a difficult state to attain but is a key to the emancipation of the subject as it makes rating what is produced irrelevant. For example, people do not judge a tree on the way that it grows because they understand that the growth of the tree is not a deliberate choice made by the tree but a culmination of external forces such as the availability of light and moisture. In the same way, there can be no judgement of what one simply *is* as a non-performing human, because that is understood to be the result of a culmination of forces which are ultimately neither good nor bad; they just *are*. In a sense, Authentic Movement is a way of feeling what it is like to experience-experiment in movement without judgement, and how that approach might open possibilities that have not previously been explored because there is no longer any ranking attributed to their value. In that sense it is a practical way to experience the absence of any external or transcendent authority figure as occurs in the de-anthropomorphised paradigm of Spinoza's immanent evaluation, thus pulling at the edges of Foucault's model of subjectification.<sup>166</sup>

Practices such as Authentic Movement make the palette of available performance qualities and compositional choices much broader for an improviser. The real-time, authentic, qualitative expression of an individual produces a different kind of performance presence and relationship to movement to that of a dancer re-enacting a pre-existing dance that was created in the past and may or may not have originated from that dancer's body. Even if choreographed material did originate from the dancer's body, it was a body that existed in a previous time with different desires for movement that have since passed. Therefore, what remains for the dancer is to recreate a moment of movement that has passed. When re-producing another's movement, or a memory of a movement, the body-mind of the dancer is disjoined from the present moment as the dancer remembers and aspires to recreate the dance of a previous space-time. Performing pre-existing choreography does not facilitate a two-way flow between the dance and the current space-time; it can shift the space-time of the dance as it unfolds, but it cannot be completely shifted by the current space-time because the dancer's body-mind is moving in relationship to a memory. This activity takes the dancer out of the

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<sup>166</sup> Spinoza's notion of *immanent evaluation* is discussed in more detail in Chapter Four *Resonance of Affects and Immanent Evaluation*.



present space-time, working against the integrity of the body-mind, into an oscillation between the future image of the movement that is to be performed and a memory of a past rehearsal. When a dancer can express their own desires in the moment they arise, they can be fully present and receptive to the current space-time as a two-way flow.

While a synthesis of imitative and somatic approaches is important for developing expertise in improvisation, experiencing an emancipative approach is essential for sensitising the improviser to the mind of their body. A practice of self-affirming subject formation, via exploring the non-performative practice of Authentic Movement, for example, and the use of images to sensitise one's experience of the desire of the body's mind, are processes which might allow the body to be danced by an image or a desire. This is a mindfulness practice of sensitising awareness that can imbue all of daily life with an ethical way of being or life practice, as it becomes a way to approach life as an inquiry. Sensitising an improviser to the mind of their body through which compositional decisions can be made reveals the subtle visibility of intention in action, which I believe is ultimately what makes live performance so viscerally engaging to witness and participate in. This chapter has thus described a model for spontaneous composition that draws together many of the concepts in the thesis. The self-reflexive methodologies of improvisation provide points of resistance to the subjection of the body to external codes, habits, expectations, and values, mobilising the forces of affect that de-centre the subject and connect them to new networks and possibilities. The political aspects of this have been traced to the very material of the mind-body through a discussion of the impact of the practice on muscles, nerve endings, and corporeal imagination. Improvisation has thus been linked to innovation at the level of the body-mind, via a method that expands the available possibilities, particularly in relation to the formless aspects of improvised composition.

## **7.9 Conclusion**

As is well known, composing an improvisation is contingent on the relationship of improvisers to the event in which they are participating. This thesis has shown how this relationship can be qualified by an improviser's capacity to tune their body-mind while practicing embodied consciousness, and be composed by the field of information and forces they are immersed in. In my experience, the key to refreshing my enthusiasm for attending to a performance is to cultivate a desire in the body's mind for movement

through self-affirming emancipative self-surveillance as well as somatisation. While tuning in and cultivating desire for movement I can also more clearly perceive how the affects in circulation are resonating in my body-mind. Therefore, what I think of as *my* desire is really a blend of a) what I can perceive of the resonation of affects in circulation, b) my psycho-physical archives which may also be triggered in some way by the affect in circulation, and c) any somatisation I may be working with while thinking-through-the-body, or have worked with in the past that re-emerges as a trace sensation. This thesis has articulated the formless aspect of composing improvisation whereby, in addition to making formal compositional choices about the use of dynamic in space and time, an improviser demonstrates their capacity to amplify and allow the forces in circulation to play the instrument of the body-mind. Creating a language to describe the formless aspects of improvised composition and associated practices supports their pedagogy, and challenges the power structures that have dominated the traditional methods by privileging *undisciplining* processes that develop a capacity for formless composition alongside form-based compositional studies in dance. Theorising the formless compositional elements of improvisation also facilitates dancer agency, preparing emerging professionals for how they might contribute to the post-control collaborative improvisational methods of twenty-first-century choreographers.

There are many aspects of improvisational practice and formless composition that have not been interrogated in language here, but could be attended to in future research. One example that is central to my own practice is a deeper articulation as to how to ignite desire for movement within my body-mind, once a sensation terrain has been established through the use of tasks, by re-invigorating and engaging with the *dissolution of binaries*. Dissolving binaries involves experiencing-experimenting with a specific state in order to understand *what it is not*. As was explained earlier, it is only by embodying what it is to *not perform* that it is possible to understand what it is to perform. Similarly, some examples of the binaries that I might use as a field of information to explore and negotiate through movement are: weight/lightness; soft/firm tone; condensing/expansion; known/unknown; above/below; self/others; fast/slow; large movement/small movement; movement qualities/movement pathways; sustained tempo or pulse/unpredictable rhythm; travelling/staying on the spot; dancing/not-dancing; building tension/breaking tension; and most importantly, thinking-through-the-body (task-based)/the agency of the body's mind. Within this field of information I can play

with exploring the gradients of the spectrum between binaries, finding out what one end of the spectrum is by experimenting with what it is not. Shifting my attention along various spectrums involves both types of embodied consciousness; thinking-through-the-body with task-based images or ideas, and listening to the desires of my body's mind. Shuttling between what I am and what I am not at any given moment also expands my subjectivity through practice, and embodies a political position that is resistant to hierarchies and models emancipation.

Another example of a project that would add a different dimension to this research would be to test the theory of how an audience immanently evaluates an improvisation based on data collection.<sup>167</sup> Devising an appropriate questionnaire to avoid speculation would be a challenge, but the theory to be tested is whether an audience is able to also experience a perception of the resonance of affects while watching an improvisation. Does an audience member perceive the impulses that are motivating an improviser they are watching? Do they also need to enter into a receptive state of body-mind listening in order to perceive these impulses? And do audience members who are also improvisers experience impulses differently?

This thesis makes a valuable contribution to dance studies and especially improvisation theory by creating a map of Western improvisation through history from practices to performance methodologies. By doing so it places the foundational ideas motivating improvisation practice within a network of frames: pedagogy, philosophy, and biology. By interrogating key terms in detail, this research hopes to offer a deeper understanding of corporeal knowledges drawn from practice, as part of an ongoing dialogue of shared and personal experience-experiments, and contribute to the accumulation of languages that might articulate the formless and ephemeral aspects of practice. Oriented as a two-directional exchange between theory and practice, this research seeks to elucidate important corporeal knowledges of dance for the purposes of privileging the knowledges accumulated via practice within the academy. Finally, this research aims to

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<sup>167</sup> While performing with Sue Healey Company in 2003 I was involved in a cognitive psychology research project called *Conceiving Connections*, which measured an audience's response to dance via pre- and post-test procedures. According to dance theorists Robin Grove and Shirley McKechnie, this project aimed at "mapping aesthetic, cognitive, emotional and kinaesthetic responses to particular contemporary dance works." Robin Grove, Catherine Stevens, and Shirley McKechnie, eds., *Thinking in Four Dimensions: Creativity and Cognition in Contemporary Dance* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2005), 6.

remind the reader of the incredible capacities available to their body-mind as a human being, to invite them to explore and question the statements made herein, and to connect to the integrated experience of body-mind.

## Glossary

**Affect** Philosophers and critical theorists use this term to describe how bodies are physiologically affected, beneath conscious awareness, in ways that are not exactly emotional (although they could be) and are not yet conceptualised as an idea or thought. Affects are social or cultural forces in circulation that cause a body to act, following philosopher Benedict de Spinoza's (1632–1677) definition in his *Ethics*. Spinoza's proposition has been developed by affect theorists Henri Bergson, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Brian Massumi, Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, Andrew Murphie, Lisa Blackman, Teresa Brennan, Erin Manning, and Kathleen Stewart.

**Affective formlessness**, in relation to dance composition, is a term used to describe the formless aspect in which ideas or feelings are communicated via the dancer's conscious awareness, intention, and performative state. It refers to the formless aspect of improvisation as directly linked to the "logic" (or processes) of affect, as opposed to the formal (shape/use of time/dynamic) design of choreography.

**Alternative scientists of dance** attend to movement in an investigative and experimental manner and are concerned primarily with the observation, and increased efficiency, of anatomical functions. Rather than considering movement primarily on an aesthetic basis, the alternative science of dance is an *alternative* science because it uses movement practice rather than empirical tests as its method, and it is a *science* because it is closely reliant upon physiology and anatomy, but also has methodological rigour. The alternative scientists of dance referred to in this thesis are primarily somatic practitioners whose work has influenced dance in the twentieth century. They include pioneering dance pedagogue Margaret H'Doubler (1889–1982), who was a student of philosopher John Dewey (1859–1952). Pioneering somatic practitioners referred to herein include American Mabel Elsworth Todd (1880–1956) and her mentees Dr Lulu Sweigard (1895–1974) and Barbara Clark (1889–1982), who developed ideokinesis, and Clark's student André Bernard (1924–2003). Australian actor Frederick Matthias Alexander (1869–1955), who developed the Alexander Technique®, and Israeli physicist and Judo practitioner Moshé Feldenkrais (1904–1984), who later developed the Feldenkrais Method®, are also mentioned.

**Anatomical truth** is my term for the experience of an individual's physiological anatomy *as it is*, with the understanding that this does not imply a pure state, or a singular/generic/universal truth, but one that is affected by any number of social and cultural codes and psychosomatic idiosyncrasies. Anatomical truth is not a fixed place or experience, but an action towards a state of being through which one experiences body-mind *as it is*, rather than somatising an imagined body-schema according to how the subject believes *it should be*.

**Authentic Movement** is a practice that was developed in the 1950s by Mary Starks Whitehouse (1911-1979) (who was a student of Martha Graham (1894-1991) and Mary Wigman (1886-1973)). It is a form of dance therapy which has been adapted by improvisers for artistic purposes. The practice requires two participants, one who acts as a witness by creating a supportive container for the other by paying attention to their movement inquiry for the designated space and time. The active participant closes their eyes and moves (or not) however they want within the set time without any compulsion to produce something, or perform, for the witness. This is a practice that supports the development of a movement inquiry, cultivates dancer agency, and provides an opportunity for experiencing what it is to *not perform* when improvising.

**Automaton** can be used to describe a human-like machine programmed to perform functions or movements. However, in this thesis it is used to emphasise the capacity for a subject to be danced by the affective forces in circulation, without consciously pre-determining the movements that are made.

**Bodies**, in reference to affect theory, are the human and non-human entities that have the potential to co-participate in the circulation of affect. Gregg and Seigworth explain that bodies “are defined not by an outer skin-envelope or other surface boundary but by their potential to reciprocate or co-participate in the passages of affect.”<sup>1</sup>

**Body-mind** is a monist concept where the body and mind are a single entity. It is a central feature of both Eastern philosophy and practice, and Spinozism. Martha Eddy

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<sup>1</sup> Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, eds., *The Affect Theory Reader* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 2. For more on the “impersonal affect” of *non-human bodies* via their “vital materiality,” see Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), xii.

further distinguishes the practices described as *mind-body* and *body-mind* by describing the latter as “the physical portal to a holistic paradigm of consciousness,” and the former as practices such as meditation which “direct the mind to notice the body, or otherwise influence the body especially to ‘quiet it’.”<sup>2</sup>

**The body’s mind** is a key term used in this thesis, drawing from Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen’s Body-Mind Centering® work, to describe the intentions of the body sensed in the tone of the flesh.<sup>3</sup>

**Body-schema** is a term that was coined in 1911 by neurologists Henry Head (1861-1940) and Gordon Morgan Holmes (1876-1965) to conceptualise the sensed kinaesthetic map a subject has of their own body as an “organised model of ourselves.”<sup>4</sup> It is commonly used in psychology and phenomenology to describe the perceived map or schema one has of their body’s dimensions, shape, and spatial positioning. The body-schema enlarges as the body grows (from childhood) and can be extended deliberately or imaginatively in particular ways to include new tools or physical skills.

**Corporeal agency** is a term used in political theory to describe the material agency of individuals and their sense of selfhood in relation to their political freedoms and responsibilities. Dance theorist Philipa Rothfield uses this term in improvisation theory to describe how a body is moved by the force of affects, producing a shift away from dependence on external causes towards the “active mode of affection.”<sup>5</sup> She explains that “the ‘attainment’ of active affections produces a shift from dependence upon external causes to a mode of corporeal agency.”<sup>6</sup> For Rothfield, the active corporeal agency of improvisation is empowering in that it is motivated from within. In contrast, “a body which moves entirely due to external cases expresses a passive affection and to that extent ‘diminishes’ its powers.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Martha Eddy, *Mindful Movement: The Evolution of the Somatic Arts and Conscious Action* (Chicago, IL and Bristol: Intellect, 2016), 12.

<sup>3</sup> Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, *Sensing, Feeling, and Action: The Experimental Anatomy of Body-Mind Centering*, third edition (North Hampton, MA: Contact Editions, 2012).

<sup>4</sup> See Henry Head and Gordon Morgan Holmes, “Sensory Disturbances from Cerebral Lesions,” *Brain* 34 nos. 2/3 (1911): 102.

<sup>5</sup> Philipa Rothfield, “Embracing the Unknown, Ethics and Dance,” in *Ethics and the Arts*, ed. Paul Macneill (Amsterdam: Springer, 2014), 94.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

**Embodied Cognition** is a rapidly growing field of cognitive science investigating theories of mind in a non-dualistic way. Non-dualistic philosophical theories of the embodied mind are diverse, but can be grouped by the common presupposition that cognition is shaped by the body. That the body responds on a cellular level to cognitive thoughts or beliefs has, to date, more scientific evidence behind it but recent research suggests that the body plays a greater role in our thinking than was previously understood. Embodied cognition has roots in Kantian and mid-century continental philosophy, especially Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology.<sup>8</sup>

**Embodied consciousness**, in relation to improvisation, is a term used by dance theorist Susan Leigh Foster to describe the state of conscious awareness that improvisers inhabit when improvising, in order to "enable the making of the dance and the dance's making of itself."<sup>9</sup> It describes an improvisational method of tuning into body-mind in order to compose dance imaginatively in real time.

**Encounter** Spinoza's notion of an encounter is explained further by Deleuze: "When a body 'encounters' another body, or an idea another idea, it happens that the two relations sometimes combine to form a more powerful whole, and sometimes one decomposes the other, destroying the cohesion of its parts ... we experience *joy* when a body encounters ours and enters into composition with it, and *sadness* when, on the contrary, a body or an idea threatens our own coherence."<sup>10</sup> This borrows Deleuze's interpretation of a Spinozan notion of an encounter to describe how touch-based, ethical actions of somatic practice can exemplify a cohesive encounter.

**Ethical actions** are a way of relating to a body or to action, which creates space for the full or authentic expression of another during an encounter. Often occurring through a scientific touch, it is a transmission of a bodily state imbued with the resonation of affects. A scientific touch is one that seeks to collect data on another's psychophysical

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<sup>8</sup> For more detail, see Francisco Varela, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch, *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1991). For a thorough overview of current theories of embodied cognition, see Lawrence Shapiro, *Embodied Cognition: New Problems of Philosophy* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 2010).

<sup>9</sup> Susan Foster, "Taken by Surprise: Improvisation in Dance and Mind," in *Taken by Surprise: A Dance Improvisation Reader*, eds. Ann Cooper Albright and David Gere (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2003), 9.

<sup>10</sup> Italics in original quote from Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, trans. Robert Hurley (San Francisco, CA: City Lights Books, 1988), 19.



state via the sense of touch, rather than impose an agenda as to how the other should respond to the touch. This touch is therefore receptive, rather than prescriptive.

**Ethics of being** is my term for an extension of the practice of ethical actions in dance improvisation whereby an artist enacts an ethical practice in all encounters in their daily life, thus dissolving the boundary between art practice, and life.

**Experience/experiment** is a term used by Laurence Louppe and Stephen Muecke to refer to the French term *expérience*, for which there is no direct English translation. The use of this term acknowledges that experience is inherently experimental and is to be entered into with a spirit of inquiry.<sup>11</sup>

**Forces** is a term that is used in two ways in this thesis. One relates to affect theory, following Gregg and Seigworth's reference to the way in which affects work as forces motivating movement. Gregg and Seigworth explain that "affect, at its most anthropomorphic, is the name we give to those forces – visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally *other than* conscious knowing."<sup>12</sup> Another use of the term follows philosopher Michel Foucault's (1926-1984) conceptualisation of the historical and societal forces that act on and shape body-subjects and the forces those body-subjects produce. He explains: "it is always the body that is at issue – the body and its forces, their utility and their docility, their distribution and their submission."<sup>13</sup>

**Global availability** is a term I have developed and refers to the physical-mental capacity to initiate movement from any body part and produce any possible movement by effortlessly supporting that movement in any direction in space. For example, leading from the knee or the ear spontaneously into a leap then suddenly turning and falling into and back out of the floor. These are the capacities available to an über dancer such as Riley Watts, and can only be partly achieved through codified training. This thesis argues that experience with somatic practices facilitates the capacity for

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<sup>11</sup> Sally Gardner explains these details of French translation in Laurence Louppe, *Poetics of Contemporary Dance*, trans. Sally Gardener (Southwold: Dance Books, 2010), xiv. These terms were also interchangeable in English until the sixteenth century (see Raymond Williams, *Key Words* (London: Flamingo, 1984); John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1934); and Louppe, *Poetics of Contemporary Dance*).

<sup>12</sup> Italics in original quote from Gregg and Seigworth, *The Affect Theory Reader*, 1.

<sup>13</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin Books, 1977), 25.

global availability by broadening the spectrum of available muscle tones and therefore movement textures via emancipative self-surveillance.

**Holding patterns** is a term I use to describe a restrictive and inefficacious coordination of neuromuscular pathways that restrict the functioning of the musculoskeletal system that must be released in order to develop the capacity for global availability.

**Ideation** is a way of using images to passively re-educate the neuromuscular system in order to support more efficient functioning. Sweigard describes various ideation practices in her book, *Human Movement Potential: Its Ideokinetic Function*.<sup>14</sup>

**Ideokinesis** is an evolving practice that aims to increase the efficiency of skeletomuscular alignment using imagery. In the early twentieth century, Todd developed an approach for improving anatomical alignment using not only self-observation, but also visualisation of imagery.<sup>15</sup> Her approach would later be called ideokinesis. Sweigard first described the practice as “ideokinesis” in her book *Human Movement Potential*.<sup>16</sup> Her use of the term built on physiologist and psychologist William Benjamin Carpenter’s term *ideomotor*, which means “the power an idea has over the body.”<sup>17</sup> Ideomotor describes the process by which a thought or mental image produces a bodily response. Carpenter suggests that people respond bodily to what they believe to be true, also known as the *ideomotor effect*, which was his explanation for why people seem to move involuntarily under hypnosis and under the influence of the divining rod. According to ideokinesis practitioner Bernard, however, the term “ideokinesis” was first coined by American piano teacher Bonpensière, as a composite

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<sup>14</sup> Lulu Sweigard, *Human Movement Potential: Its Ideokinetic Function* (London: Harper & Row, 1974), 221. To support her argument for the benefits of the use of ideation, Sweigard referenced John Alfred Valentine Butler, “Pictures in the Mind” *Science News* 22 (1951): 26–35.

<sup>15</sup> Todd’s publications are: Mabel Todd, “Principles of Posture,” *The Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* 182, no. 26 (1920): 645–49, “Principles of Posture, with Special Reference to the Mechanics of the Hip Joint,” *The Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* 184, no. 25 (1921): 667–73, *The Thinking Body: A Study of the Balancing Forces of Dynamic Man* (New York, NY: Princeton Book Company, 1937), and *The Hidden You: What You Are and What To Do About It* (New York, NY: Dance Horizons, 1953).

<sup>16</sup> Sweigard, *Human Movement Potential*.

<sup>17</sup> William Benjamin Carpenter, “On the Influence of Suggestion in Modifying and Directing Muscular Movement, Independently of Volition,” *Weekly Evening Meetings of the Royal Institution of Great Britain*, March 12, 1852: 5. Accessed March 13, 2014. <http://www.sgipt.org/medppp/psymot/carp1852.htm>.

of two “Greek words: *ideo* meaning thought or idea, and *kinesis* meaning movement.”<sup>18</sup> Bernard was originally an actor who became fascinated with dance after watching Eric Hawkins (1909-1984) dance with Graham. He was exposed to ideokinesis while training under Hawkins and later became a student of Clark. Joan Skinner (1924-) was a student of Clark in the late 1960s and developed an image-based dance technique which was later called Skinner Release, and is now known as Skinner Release Technique™. Bernard describes ideokinesis as a physiophilosophical practice, explaining that it is “a philosophy of your body, of how you think about your body, of how you think about yourself.”<sup>19</sup>

**Imitative training** refers to a traditional method of dance pedagogy whereby a student imitates the teacher’s physical form, usually to learn a codified technique.

**Incorporeal** Elizabeth Grosz describes the incorporeal as “the immaterial conditions for the existence and functioning of matter.”<sup>20</sup> She explains how the “incorporeal conditions of corporeality, the excesses beyond and within corporeality that frame, orient, and direct material things and processes, and especially living things and the biological processes they require, so that they occupy space and time, have possible meanings and directions that exceed their corporeality.”<sup>21</sup> The notion of incorporeality is useful for considering how the formless compositional aspects of improvisation exceed the corporeality of a dancer, engage affect and its forces, and continue through a lineage of practitioners.

**Kinaesthesia** is the means through which we perceive ourselves to be in motion through our biological senses. Awareness of the position and movement of the parts of the body occurs by means of sensory organs (proprioceptors) in the muscles and joints. It is sensed primarily through proprioception, and is informed through the sense of weight, touch, and vision. Proprioception is the scientific term for kinaesthesia. However, a key difference is that proprioception includes the inner ear sense of

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<sup>18</sup> André Bernard, Ursula Stricker, and Wolfgang Steinmuller. *Ideokinesis: A Creative Approach to Human Movement and Body Alignment* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2006), 44.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, *The Incorporeal: Ontology, Ethics, and the Limits of Materialism* (New York, NY and Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2017), 5.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

balance.<sup>22</sup> A generic use of the term *embodied consciousness* might be replaced with *kinaesthesia* or *proprioception* to mean a very clear sense of what is occurring within the body while dancing, including where movement originates and how that action is unfolding in relation to time, space, and the effort used.

**Kinaesthetic empathy** German psychologist Theodor Lipps (1851-1914) developed a theory of *einfühlung*, proposing that a spectator of acrobatics empathetically experiences the sensations of the acrobat moving via an *inner mimesis*.<sup>23</sup> Dance theorist John Martin (1893–1985) later developed this notion as a theory of metakinetik transfer, or *inner mimicry* (metakinesis), which has more recently been attributed to *mirror neurons*.<sup>24</sup> Kinaesthetic empathy when viewing dance is addressed by Foster and Dempster, among others. Specifically, Foster’s research into kinaesthetic empathy is explored in *Choreographing Empathy*.<sup>25</sup>

**Material** is a term traditionally used to refer to the content of a dance or a collection of movements and may be categorised as the movement motifs, themes, and/or ideas explored in the dance.

**Metacognition** Watts emphasised the difference between *cognition* or thinking, and *metacognition* or thinking about thinking, during his improvisation workshop at STRUT in Perth, August, 4–15, 2014.

**Mirror neurons** In the 1990s, neuroscientists discovered mirror neurons in monkeys that are activated both when performing an action and when observing the action of

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<sup>22</sup> C. S. Sherrington, “On the Proprioceptive System, Especially in Its Reflex Aspect,” *Brain* 29, no. 4 (1907): 467–85.

<sup>23</sup> Theodor Lipps, “Optische Streitfragen,” *Zeitschrift für Psychologie und Physiologie der Sinnesorgane* 3 (1892): 493–504. See also Christiane Montag, Andreas Heinz, and Jürgen Gallinat, “Theodor Lipps and the Concept of Empathy: 1851–1891,” *American Journal of Psychiatry* 165, no. 10 (2008): 1261.

<sup>24</sup> John Martin, *The Modern Dance* (Brooklyn, NY: Dance Horizons, 1933). See also John Martin, *Introduction to the Dance* (Brooklyn, NY: Dance Horizons, 1965).

<sup>25</sup> Susan Leigh Foster, *Choreographing Empathy: Kinesthesia in Performance* (New York, NY and Abingdon: Routledge, 2011). Elizabeth Dempster, “The Economy of Shame or Why Dance Cannot Fail,” in *Choreography and Corporeality: Relay in Motion*, eds. Thomas F. DeFrantz and Philipa Rothfield (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016): 155–72. See also Dee Reynolds and Matthew Reason, eds., *Kinesthetic Empathy in Creative and Cultural Practices* (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2012) and Gabriele Brandstetter, Gerko Egert, and Sabine Zubarik, *Touching and Being Touched: Kinesthesia and Empathy in Dance and Movement* (Boston, MA and Berlin: de Gruyter, 2013).

another.<sup>26</sup> Cognitive psychologist Catherine Stevens explains how dance communicates via direct perception due to the function of mirror neurons.<sup>27</sup>

**Muscle memory** is a form of procedural motor learning that involves consolidating a specific movement pathway or sequence of actions to memory through repetition until it/they can be performed without conscious control. It is a core feature of imitative dance technique training. Physiologically speaking, once the movement pathway is consolidated into muscle memory, the neurological impulses no longer register in the brain but travel between the spinal column and muscle as a reflexive action. Some everyday examples of habitual movement consolidated to muscle memory are driving, touch typing, walking, and cycling. This term was developed from *motor memory*, physical learning that can occur without conscious awareness, developed by psychologist Edward Thorndike (1874–1949). Thorndike also lectured at the Columbia University Teachers College for almost his entire career.

**Natural movement** was a popular concept in dance at the turn of the twentieth century to describe dance that was not the result of formal training or codification, yet still expressed grace and poise.<sup>28</sup> H'Doubler's concept of natural movement required training in exploratory movement tasks rather than imitation. A contemporary of H'Doubler's, Gertrude Colby (1874-1960), also taught *natural dancing* at Speyer College (1913–1916) and at the Columbia Teachers College (1916–1930s) where she influenced Jesse Feiring Williams (1886-1966).<sup>29</sup> Williams also mentored Todd while she was a mature student at Columbia Teachers College.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> The term *mirror neurons* was first used in Giacomo Rizzolatti, Luciano Fadiga, Vittorio Gallese, and Leonardo Fogassi, "Premotor Cortex and the Recognition of Motor Actions," *Cognitive Brain Research* 3, no. 2 (1996): 131–41.

<sup>27</sup> Catherine Stevens, "Trans-disciplinary Approaches to Research into Creation, Performance, and Appreciation of Contemporary Dance," in *Thinking in Four Dimensions: Creativity and Cognition in Contemporary Dance*, eds. Robin Grove, Catherine Stevens, and Shirley McKechnie (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2005).

<sup>28</sup> Alexandra Carter & Rachel Fensham, eds., *Dancing Naturally: Nature, Neo-classicism and Modernity in Early Twentieth-Century Dance* (New York, NY and Londo: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). Elizabeth Dempster "Imagery, Ideokinesis and Choreography," *Writings on Dance: Ideokinesis and Dance Making* 1 (1985): 21.

<sup>29</sup> Jesse Feiring Williams, *The Principles of Physical Education* (Oakland, CA: W. B. Saunders Company, 1942).

<sup>30</sup> See Michael Huxley, "F. Matthias Alexander and Mabel Elsworth Todd: Proximities, Practices and the Psycho-physical," *Journal of Dance & Somatic Practice* 3, nos. 1/2 (2011): 31.

**Neuromuscular re-education** describes how the use of ideation supports greater functional efficiency of the skeleton through the use of ideokinetic imagery.<sup>31</sup> Sweigard used this terminology when teaching following her doctoral thesis, which was titled *Bilateral Asymmetry in the Alignment of the Human Body*.

**New dance** is described by Dempster as determined by “a reversal of traditional dance practices where training is determined by and serves the performance form,” in contrast to the performance form acting as a platform for the accomplishments of a training modality.<sup>32</sup> Further, “new therapeutic practices and methods, and what could be termed new ‘philosophies of the body,’ have given rise to new ways of dancing,” which she identifies as having an aesthetic distinct from ballet, modern dance, and the “eclecticism of late twentieth century postmodernism.”<sup>33</sup>

**No-mind** (also known as *mushin*) is a Zen practice of mindful awareness that martial artist Bruce Lee describes as “operating when an actor is separate from the act and no thoughts interfere with the action [...] When mushin functions, the mind moves from one activity to another, flowing like a stream of water and filling every space.”<sup>34</sup>

**Non-dance** Certain French dance artists belonged to the milieu of the *la nouvelle danse française* that embraced interdisciplinarity in the 1990s and early 2000s. They presented dance works in a visual art, film, music, theatre, and/or lecture format. This should not be confused with the more recent *post-dance*.<sup>35</sup>

**Post-control** Dance theorist Annie Kloppenberg uses the term “post-control” to refer to an “elastic dialogue of choreographic control in the rehearsal process” in the “project of

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<sup>31</sup> Lulu Sweigard, *Bilateral Asymmetry in the Alignment of the Human Body*, Unpublished PhD thesis, New York University, 1939. Accessed March 31, 2016.

<http://www.ideokinesis.com/pioneers/sweigard/sweigard.htm>. Although Sweigard’s thesis was never published she drew from it when writing her book *Human Movement Potential: Its Ideokinetic Function* (London: Harper & Row, 1974).

<sup>32</sup> Elizabeth Dempster “Preface,” *Writings on Dance: Exploring the New Dance Aesthetic* 14 (1995/1996): 3.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. See also Marcia B. Siegel, *The Tail of the Dragon: New Dance, 1976–1982* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1991).

<sup>34</sup> Joe Hyams, *Zen in the Martial Arts* (New York, NY: G. P. Putnam Sons, 1979), 90.

<sup>35</sup> On *non-dance* see Jean-Marc Adolphe and Gérard Mayen, “The ‘Non-dance’ Is Still Dancing,” *Movement* 1 (2004). Accessed December 28, 2017. <http://sarma.be/docs/784>. On *postdance* see Danjel Adresson, Mette Edvardsen, and Mårten Spångberg, eds., *POST-DANCE* (Stockholm: MDT, 2017).

employing improvisation as a choreographic method” which has been increasingly evident in post-war choreographic processes.<sup>36</sup>

**Post-dance** is a term used by dance theorist Bojana Cvejić and others to discuss a trend of progressive European works made in the past two decades which, rather than focusing on dancing, are about problematising their method of construction through choreographic concepts.<sup>37</sup> Dance theorist Erin Brannigan explains, “Conceptual dance (as well as ‘non-dance,’ ‘post-contemporary,’ and ‘think-dance’) has been used as a term to describe a certain field of European contemporary dance, and is as contentious as ‘contemporary’ dance.”<sup>38</sup>

**Physiophilosophical** Ideokinesis practitioner Bernard describes ideokinesis as a physiophilosophical practice, explaining that it is “a philosophy of your body, of how you think about your body, of how you think about yourself.”<sup>39</sup>

**Psycho-physical** is a term used by Alexander and Todd when developing their somatic practices to describe the unity of body-mind.<sup>40</sup>

**Psycho-physical archives** is my term for the traces or residue of feelings associated with experiences of the body. Neuroscientist Antonio Damasio describes this phenomenon as “somatic markers” of body memory.<sup>41</sup> Spinoza also postulates that the body can retain the residue of the experience of an encounter, explaining that “the human body can undergo many changes, and nevertheless retain impressions, *or* traces, of the objects, and consequently the same images of things.”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Annie Kloppenberg, “Improvisation in Process: ‘Post-control’ Choreography,” *Dance Chronicle* 33, no. 2 (2010): 180.

<sup>37</sup> Cvejić describes *postdance* aesthetics in Bojana Cvejić, *Choreographing Problems: Expressive Concepts in Contemporary Dance and Performance* (New York, NY and London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

<sup>38</sup> Erin Brannigan, *The Persistence of Dance: Choreography, Composition, Experiment*. Unpublished book manuscript.

<sup>39</sup> Bernard, Steinmuller, and Stricker, *Ideokinesis*, 44.

<sup>40</sup> Huxley, “F. Matthias Alexander,” 25–42.

<sup>41</sup> Antonio Damasio, *Descartes’ Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (New York, NY: Putnam, 2003), 165.

<sup>42</sup> Italics in original quote from Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. Edwin Curley (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1996), 70.

**Release** has several common uses in dance. One relates to the release principles of the Skinner Releasing Technique®. As a professional dancer in Graham's and Merce Cunningham's (1919-2009) companies, Skinner studied Todd's postural research and applied Todd's neuromuscular re-education methods to develop movement sequences that aimed to release the neuromusculature through the use of images.<sup>43</sup> Similarly, Bainbridge Cohen developed Body-Mind Centering™, a methodology for working with release principles in movement such as *cellular breathing* and use of ideokinetic imagery.<sup>44</sup> There is also a variation of a release-based contemporary technique where the principles are applied to movement sequences that are learned via imitation following Trisha Brown (1936-2017).<sup>45</sup>

**Resonance of affects** Massumi describes how a body-mind is affected by way of a *resonation* of the sensory surfaces of the body as a “relay between its corporeal and incorporeal dimensions.”<sup>46</sup> Therefore affects may potentially be perceived during improvised dance through their effect or *resonation* in body-mind and experienced as psychosomatic feelings, memories, and the tactile traces of encounters with other human and non-human bodies.

**Self-Surveillance** My use of this term follows dance theorist Jill Green's use of self-surveillance to describe a Foucauldian analysis of conservatoire dance pedagogy whereby students internalise a disciplined surveillance of themselves, in place of the teachers' surveillance.<sup>47</sup> This use is in reference to the processes Foucault describes in *Discipline and Punish* in which pliable and controllable “docile” bodies are produced by the state.<sup>48</sup> I extend Green's term by articulating the differences between *prohibitive* and *emancipative* self-surveillance afforded to different approaches to dance pedagogy that either aim to control and dictate bodily movements, or liberate them via a freeing of the muscle tonus.

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<sup>43</sup> Manny Emslie, “Skinner Releasing Technique: Dancing from Within,” *Journal of Dance and Somatic Practices* 1, no. 2 (2009): 169–75.

<sup>44</sup> Bainbridge Cohen, *Sensing, Feeling, and Action*.

<sup>45</sup> Henrietta Bannerman, “A Question of Somatics: The Search for a Common Framework for Twenty-First Century Contemporary Dance Pedagogy: Graham and Release-Based Techniques,” *Journal of Dance and Somatic Practices* 2, no. 1 (2010): 5–19.

<sup>46</sup> Italics in original. Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2002), 14.

<sup>47</sup> Jill Green, “Foucault and the Training of Docile Bodies in Dance Education,” *Arts and Learning Research Journal* 19, no. 1 (2002/2003): 99–126.

<sup>48</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*.



**Sensorium** is a biological term for the network of somaesthetic receptors and processing centres for the sensory modalities that cover the skin, skeletal muscles, bones, joints, epithelia (tissue that lines the surface of the body, alimentary canal, and other hollow organs), cardiovascular system, and internal organs. The sensorium includes proprioception, temperature, nociception (pain), haptic perception (touch), exteroception (the perception of the outside world), and introception (the perception of internal organs and sensations). The sensorium collects and sends information about what the body is doing and feeling to the central nervous system which processes this information and then directs the physiological systems (muscular, endocrine, circulatory, pulmonary, and digestive) to respond in the way that best supports the continuation of life (homeostasis).<sup>49</sup>

**Scores** Choreographer Jonathan Burrow describes a dance score as the documentation of a *task*, drawing similarity to musical notations as the written form of a musical piece followed while playing.<sup>50</sup> To score an improvisation is to set out a plan as to how it may unfold either by setting tasks or some other structure, focus, or constraint.<sup>51</sup>

**Spinozism** Spinoza was famously denounced by the writ of *cherem* in 1656 for his philosophical views.<sup>52</sup> Spinoza proposed a Pantheist philosophical system as a Western, monist alternative to the philosophical Descartes model of Cartesian dualism. He posited a unified *body-mind*, which he argued was an attribute of a singular substance that he described as *Nature-God* in his *Ethics*, which was published posthumously in 1677.<sup>53</sup>

**Somatics** Philosopher Thomas Hanna (1928–1990) coined the term somatics based on

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<sup>49</sup> The British Dictionary (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2 Cdr edition, 2009). Sherrington, “On the proprioceptive system,” 467–85.

<sup>50</sup> Jonathan Burrow made this point during a workshop at Critical Path, Australia in 2006.

<sup>51</sup> For a foundational account of the use of scoring in Anna Halprin’s improvisation practice, see Lawrence Halprin, “The RSVP Cycles: Creative Processes in the Human Environment,” *Choreographic Practices* 5, no. 1 (2014): 39–47. See also Kent De Spain, “The Cutting Edge of Awareness: Reports from Inside Improvisation,” in *Taken by Surprise: A Dance Improvisation Reader*, eds. Ann Cooper Albright and David Gere (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2003); and Melinda Buckwalter, *Composing While Dancing: An Improviser’s Companion*, (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010).

<sup>52</sup> Spinoza was named Baruch (meaning *blessed*) at birth but changed it when he ceased to be Jewish.

<sup>53</sup> See Spinoza, *Ethics* and also Edwin M. Curley, ed., *A Spinoza Reader: The Ethics and Other Works* (Princeton, NJ and Chichester: Princeton University Press, 1994).

the Greek word *soma*, meaning “the body as perceived from within by first-person perception,” to refer to the philosophical field and physical practices that aim to unify the body and mind and which have greatly influenced the development of contemporary dance.<sup>54</sup> Somatics is used in the West as an umbrella term to categorise the field of philosophical inquiry in both theory and practice, which explores notions of body-mind integration that have greatly influenced contemporary dance.

**Somatic intelligence** Dance theorist Erin Brannigan explains: “somatic intelligence is a model of experience that places the body at the site where feelings or sensations are registered, feelings that may be untranslatable into language or any other medium, but which accumulate as corporeal knowledge.”<sup>55</sup> According to Jane Goodall it is an ability to collect and process movement information.<sup>56</sup> Howard Gardner also describes a multiple intelligence theory of which bodily intelligence is one.<sup>57</sup> Dance theorists Myron Howard Nadel and Marc Raymond Strauss connect his theory to the Dewey inspired work of H'Doubler explaining that “they believed that movement skills were the basis for knowing, imagining, creating and executing in life as well as a stimulus to self-initiated activity and creative communication. Such cutting-edge ideas preceded by three-quarters of a century the theories of Harvard professor Howard Gardner (b. 1943), who today espouses a bodily/kinaesthetic intelligence as part of his theory of ‘multiple intelligences’.”<sup>58</sup>

**Somatisation**, according to Bainbridge Cohen, means “to engage the kinaesthetic experience directly, in contrast to ‘visualization’ which utilizes visual imagery to evoke a kinaesthetic experience. Through somatization the body cells are informing the brain as well as the brain informing the cells.”<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Thomas Hanna, “What is Somatics?,” in *Bone Breath and Gesture: Practices of Embodiment*, ed. Don Hanlon Johnson (Berkeley CA: North Atlantic Books, 1995), 341.

<sup>55</sup> Erin Brannigan, *Moving Across Disciplines: Dance in the Twenty-First Century* (Currency House Platform papers, no. 25, 2010), 13–4.

<sup>56</sup> Jane Goodall, “Knowing What You Are Doing,” *The Performance Space Quarterly* no. 14 (1997): 20–3.

<sup>57</sup> Howard Gardner, *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1983).

<sup>58</sup> Myron Howard Nadel and Marc Raymond Strauss, *The Dance Experience: Insights into History, Culture and Creativity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 176.

<sup>59</sup> Bainbridge Cohen, *Sensing, Feeling, and Action*, 1.

**Subcortical** The subcortical region of the brain is below the cerebral cortex and facilitates bodily functions, usually beneath conscious awareness. The cortex is commonly described as comprising of three areas: motor, sensory, and associative.<sup>60</sup>

**Sympathetic resonance**, also known as sympathetic vibration, is a process of harmonisation whereby a passive resonating object responds to external vibrations to which it has a harmonic similarity.<sup>61</sup> A common example can be demonstrated with tuning forks that may produce a harmonising sound when one of them vibrates.

**Tasks** is the common term for image-based or linguistic directives embodied imaginatively, often by way of setting restrictions or limitations, to generate a particular quality of movement in an improvisation. For example: *swing the bones, press skin surfaces, lead through the ends, or fall upwards*. In some contexts, the term “score” is used, but this thesis makes the distinction that a score is the documentation of the method, similar to a musical score.

**Territories** is a term I use for a collection of (usually quite complex or juxtaposing) tasks that combine to facilitate a particular movement state (similar to a visual landscape or sound scape). I embody a collection of tasks with particular textures/tones/qualities/speeds/levels, etcetera, to create a territory that has its own movement “identity.”

**The body’s mind** is the term I use to refer to the subtle intention of the body, or how the body desires to move, if it is listened to rather than mobilised in service of another purpose.

**Thinking-through-the-body** is a way of self-reflexively using tasks as parameters when practicing or performing improvisation. An improviser focuses their conscious awareness on a specific task, imagines how they might embody that task, and attends (self-reflexively) to how well they are able to achieve the set task to continue to refine their embodiment of it. This method is similar to learning codified dance movements,

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<sup>60</sup> B. Crosson, “Subcortical Functions in Language: A Working Model,” *Brain Language* 25, no. 2 (1985): 257–92.

<sup>61</sup> Veit Erlmann, *Reason and Resonance: A History of Modern Aurality* (Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books, 2010).

but instead of replicating the form, the dancer is investigating a task as a set of principles that may produce a range of possible forms.

**Tone** in dance studies refers to muscle or organ tone in relation to the level of tension held within the tissues.<sup>62</sup> It can also refer to the thickness of the movement, its weight and density, as this is relative to the amount of tension held. For example, if I were to imagine that the air surrounding my body was thicker (than it really is) it would shift the tone of my movement and increase my movement density. If I were to relinquish any muscular resistance against gravity I could increase the perceived weight of my movement via the reduced muscular tone of the limbs.

**Tune** is the method of becoming attuned to a particular state while improvising. Influential improvising artist Lisa Nelson uses the term *tune* in relation to her improvisational practice.<sup>63</sup>

**Über dancer** is the term I use to describe an artist who can attend to and access an extremely diverse range of movement qualities and pathways with the clarity and precision of a highly trained technician, whilst composing an improvisation. They are also a highly capable improviser adept at choreographing real time, without or within an ensemble as a self-organising system, in order to realise or even exceed the choreographer's vision.

**Undisciplined** Following Dempster's notion that somatic practices are a way of *undisciplining* the body, *undisciplined* is used in this thesis to describe the position of somatics and related improvisational and compositional practices in relation to traditional pedagogical methods and institutions.<sup>64</sup>

**Unprofessional** Post-modern dancers in 1960s New York, such as the Judson Dance Theater, are well known for catalysing unprofessional explorations in dance, including an appreciation of movement outside the codified forms and experimentation with untrained dancers. However, essentially they investigated the ontology of traditional

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<sup>62</sup> Louppe, *Poetics of Contemporary Dance*.

<sup>63</sup> For more detail see [http://sarma.be/oralsite/pages/Testpage\\_Lisa\\_Nelson\\_%28general%29/](http://sarma.be/oralsite/pages/Testpage_Lisa_Nelson_%28general%29/). Accessed October 17, 2014.

<sup>64</sup> Elizabeth Dempster, "Undisciplined Subjects, Unregulated Practices: Dancing in the Academy," *Dance Rebooted: Initializing the Grid* (Melbourne: Ausdance National, 2005): 1–11.

dance performance through satire, imitation, critique, and subversion, rather than the rejection of it entirely.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Sally Banes, "Democracy's Body: Judson Dance Theater and Its Legacy," *Performing Arts Journal* 5, no. 2 (1981): 98–107.

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