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Dancing materiality

a study of agency and confederations in contemporary outdoor dance practices

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Dancing Materiality

*A Study of Agency and Confederations
in Contemporary Outdoor Dance Practices*

Paula Kramer

May 2015

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the University's
requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Paula Kramer

Abstract

This thesis studies materiality in the context of contemporary outdoor dance practices in the natural environment. The more particular territory of this research is comprised of receptivity-, materiality- and/or exposure-based practices, influenced predominantly by the international lineages of *Amerta Movement* and postmodern dance. This territory is understood to be a relevant niche domain that is relatively uncharted and particularly informative regarding questions of materiality. The practitioners that this study turns to are mostly located in the UK, but also in Germany. The key influence of *Amerta* is rooted in Central Java, Indonesia. The main empirical data was collected between 2010-2012 in the UK.

This work is a practice-as-research project and consists of a written thesis and a performative afternoon. All questions and arguments have been generated and developed through movement- as well as text-based research practices. The methodology draws on qualitative, ethnographic research methods such as participant observation, fieldnote writing and interviews. It further employs creative research methods such as movement-based writing, research installations and the documented immersion into dance practice and performance making. The main theoretical resonances were found in the field of new materialism and speculative realism. The key arguments of the research were thus developed through creative practice and *diffraction reading* (Barad), particularly of the work of Jane Bennett, Karen Barad and Graham Harman.

The findings of this research suggest that attending to materiality supports dancers in refining a sense of embodied emplacement that furthers movement practice, especially in outdoor contexts. Sensing ones own material body is paramount here. In resonance with new materialist and speculative realist scholarship this research argues that dance making takes place in intermaterial confederations that cross the familiar human – non-human divide. Such confederations allow for a decentralisation of the human positionality that is relevant beyond dance and affects ontological conceptualisations and practices of life at large.

The findings of this thesis further suggest a partial integration of concepts that on philosophical grounds preclude each other. For the context of dance practice this research puts forward that Barad's proposal of entanglement can co-function with and is co-relevant to the autonomy of objects and materials proposed by Harman. The thesis thus argues that materials of all different orders occur in *inter-independence* (Suryodarmo) rather than only entangled with or withdrawn from each other. Both discrete and independent entities and mutual affordances impact the practice of outdoor dance; reality both exceeds the dancer and resonates materially within the human body.

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First of all deep thanks and much gratitude to my director of studies Prof. Sarah Whatley and my supervisor Dr. Natalie Garrett Brown, for believing in this research from the start and trusting the process throughout. This thesis would neither have come into being nor seen its completion without their ceaseless support, availability for feedback and advice, joyful sense of humour, acknowledgement of all small steps taken and an unfaltering belief in practice. Thank you.

I further extend deep thanks and much gratitude to the movement practitioners Bettina Mainz, Helen Poynor, Sandra Reeve, Suprpto Suryodarmo and Simon Whitehead for developing and sharing their practices and for continuing to be teachers, mentors, friends, colleagues and/or points of reference and inspiration. Your work provided a base for this thesis and lies at the root of my own movement practice and thinking. It has shaped me, guided me, questioned me and supported me when I most needed it. Thank you.

I also thank my family for patiently accompanying the production of this work. I thank my parents for travelling our way when childcare was in need. I am further grateful to my partner for his supportive company and immense help in providing time and space to work as well as technical and life skills for performance and book making. And I thank my son for offering to help me write these many chapters at the tender age of two, going on three. I wish you could have!

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I further thank the wider community of practice-as-research who has made possible and continues to support arts-informed knowledges to enter the academic system in forms such as a doctoral thesis. This project could also not have been realised without the funding I received from Coventry University. For both I am very grateful.

Last but not least, I thank my two examiners, Prof. Fiona Bannon and Dr. Scott Delahunta, for the invaluable skill of giving the somewhat scary and definitely serious procedure of the viva a human face and making it an unexpectedly joyful event.

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Prologue

Come, read. Think, see. Taste, hear.

This thesis consists of a text and a performative afternoon under chestnut trees as two final products of researching *materiality* with and through dance. One component is written on these pages and able to travel, the other was danced in a field and is temporally as well as locally bound. Both were created together.

As you are reading this written component I invite you to take a brief inventory of your own current condition and position in relation to the atmosphere, materials and textures and that surround you, so that the most prominent research tool and base of this thesis appears rather than disappears – the body in relationship to the material world. As you continue to read, I suggest you shift your position until you are comfortable. More than one shift might be needed, maybe a breath, and another. Please also take this moment to double check your current location (bed or bench, train or tree, desk or dirt?) and feel what you are holding in your hands whilst reading (paper or ipad, pencil or pen, keyboard or cup?), as well as sensing your overall position. Where does your body touch another material, how are you sitting, lying? How are you positioned in space? What are you feeling? Maybe there is something you could do to be even more comfortable, whatever that might mean for you (blanket or breath, stretch or soup, water or wine?).

I further invite you to engage playfully with this writing. If you were to fold one page of this thesis into a paper boat and let it swim on a body of water with the intention to sense your own body in relationship to the boat, the water and the wider context of the location where you are performing this action, you would probably get the gist of this text as much as when you read the whole oeuvre. If you were to repeat this action in various weather conditions and locations, touching and being touched by paper, water and ground, recording your observations, thoughts or insights in words or images, all the better. I thus

suggest that it is possible to communicate what I seek to communicate here through bodily engagement and experience as well as through reading and thinking. I invite you to take breaks, walks and skips through the work, following your curiosities.

A few documentary items that trace the process of making and performing the practical thesis component are bound into this written thesis, such as a DVD with photographs, films and audio tracks and two booklets that are reprinted in the appendix. For those reading the electronic version of this thesis, some of the audio-visual materials can be found online.¹ Maybe have a first look at some of these items before you continue to read. I further provide footnotes when particular files of the DVD could be viewed/heard in relationship to a specific section of the text.

And now - sit back, lie down, turn over. Shift your position, take a breath. If you can and feel like it, eat and drink throughout.

¹ For films please check <http://bit.ly/1RoIFj2> or if no longer working search youtube for my name and *Dancing Materiality*. Further material can be found on my website www.paulakramer.de under the tab "research".

As a philosopher I work in language and concepts, but if you're talking about materiality, I don't see any other way of researching this except through the body. (Heim 2013)

1. Introduction

This thesis attends to materiality in dance. It principally asks: *How do materials confederate in the work of contemporary outdoor dancers and what are the effects?* Whilst the primary focus is on the presence of materials in processes of dance making, the thesis also opens towards philosophy and living practices and asks how materials affect “how we live on earth”.² Overall this thesis argues to sense, think and move beyond the human, to include the context of the world, the other-than-human, into what is seen and understood as having relevance for and agency in our practices of dancing and living. It is primarily written for dancers and performance practitioners as well as academics in this field. However it is also geared towards an audience interested in embodied outdoor practices more generally, as well as individuals dealing with creative working methodologies such as practice-as-research and further those concerned with shifting the human position away from its current centre.

Contemporary outdoor dance is the field of action and inquiry here, with a focus on current artistic practices, workshops and performances taking place in the natural environment. Such practices have been given different names by scholars and practitioners alike, such as *ecological movement* (used by movement artist/researcher and therapist Sandra Reeve for her work, 2010: 198), *non-stylised and environmental movement* (used by movement artist Helen Poynor for her work, 2013: 169) or *environmental dance* (used by dance artist and scholar Nigel Stewart as an overarching term, 2010: 32). In this thesis I work with the expression *contemporary outdoor dance practices in the natural environment*. I argue that this expression emphasises the relationship between the practices that fed into this research and contemporary dance as it evolved

² ‘How do we live on earth?’ was the question Stephen Bottoms had brought forth in our shared call for papers and editorial of the collectively edited Performance Research issue 17:4 *On Ecology* (Bottoms, Franks and Kramer 2012).

out of the post-modernist movement in dance in the 1960s and 1970s, rather than the ecological change movements of the same time. This choice also highlights that I read the contemporary practices I engaged with through the vector of dance rather than other influential strands on this territory, such as therapeutic or spiritual practices. I further use natural environment as a locational pointer towards non-urban working sites rather than as a descriptor of the movement practices.

In my usage of the term natural environment I draw on feminist theorist and philosopher of science and technology Donna Haraway as well as philosopher of science Bruno Latour. With Haraway I suggest to understand both nature and the natural environment as:

situated naturecultures, in which all the actors become who they are *in the dance of relating*, not from scratch, not ex nihilo, but full of the patterns of their sometimes joined, sometimes separate heritages both before and lateral to *this* encounter. (2008: 25, original emphasis)

I thus understand the natural environment not as a static, fully knowable and separable entity but as a process that is situated, contextual and partially bound to our present experience of it. I furthermore follow Latour's remarks in his lecture 'Air Condition', which he gave in the *Nature Space Society* series at the Tate Modern in London in 2004. Here he speaks of the term nature as conflicted and contested and proposes that "to be close to nature is not to be close to outside, undisputable entities, but actually to be inside dispute" (Latour 2004: n.p.). I thus use the term natural environment not to delineate a fixed exteriority but to speak of a territory with which we are in communication and of which we are a part.

The actual sites that inform this thesis are further of varying degrees of naturalness and by no means untouched by humans or machines. What is more, all the practitioners and practices that have fed this research project also work in village sites, cityscapes and indoor dance spaces. It is thus the focus of this thesis that homes in on their work in the natural environment rather than the sole preoccupation of their work. On the whole I suggest that the semiotic

charge of terms such as nature, environment or ecology is so high that the breadth and specificity of working approaches easily succumb to their weight. In other words: there is more to the contemporary outdoor dance practices that I turn to here than what our current imaginations of nature might allow for. To this excess this thesis attends.

I come to this work as both dancer and scholar with the intention of drawing out the potentials of contemporary outdoor dance practices in the light of affecting how we think about making dances and living in this world. I consider opinions on outdoor dance practices to be easily clouded, even in my own first associations, as practices that primarily aim for “becoming-one” with nature. I suggest that the desire to reconnect with nature is easily coupled with an understanding of humans and nature as separate and in need of reunion rather than as manifold materials situated on the same plane and always already engaged in a variety of confederations. Object-oriented philosopher Graham Harman for example argues that such a dualistic opposition between human and world is often “falsely overcome by gluing two pieces together that should never have existed in the first place” (2009: 119). He thus argues against a “fundamental rift” between human and world and agrees with Latour who “starting with countless actors rather than a pre-given duality of two *types* of actors [...] shifts philosophy from its stalemated trench war towards the richness of things themselves” (Harman 2009: 119, original emphasis).

This thesis thus introduces a perspective on outdoor movement practices that highlights the shared materiality of both human mover and (natural) world. It highlights that outdoor movement territories are populated by materials of many different orders that occur in partial or full autonomy of each other as well as standing in relationship. It is a field of which we are already a part and therefore we do not need to effort a merger, but can instead turn to materiality as a key support for noticing and working with the confederations that are always already at work.

Years of dancing preceded this specific period of “practice-as-research” and have impacted my choice of focusing on *dancing materiality*. What drew me back into dance again and again is what I might call “feeling myself” or “feeling alive”, “feeling part of this world” or “feeling that life makes sense”. A feeling, as Reeve has termed it, of “belonging rather than longing” (2010: 201). From my earliest ballet child memories onwards and throughout my niche training in outdoor movement practices, dance has always touched me most when I was able to sense my body in resonance with the aliveness of life at large. This is my core fascination – the capacity of dance to make tangible something as hard to grasp as ‘being part of life’.

In 1998 I began to work with movement artist Bettina Mainz in and around Berlin and was further involved in the practice of forms such as Contact Improvisation, Body-Mind Centering® (BMC®) and Klein Technique™.³ Slowly I developed a sense of the capacities of my bodily materiality and its involvement in feeling “alive” or “part of this world” as I call it above. Not the tricks the body can perform through training, but its ‘raw material’ and its relationship to other materials of this world. Reflecting on my movement practice and student experiences during the early stages of this research I began to understand that a sense of materiality (my own and that of my surroundings) offered me a crucial entry into moving, particularly in the natural environment. I have first written about this in the article entitled ‘Of not getting lost: making use of materials’ (Kramer 2011). The title reflects the intention to not get lost in thought, in the desire for a particular experience or in the critical evaluation of movement and to instead find ways of being in touch with myself and the location I am in and moving from that *confederation* - a term I have come to use in the context of this research and to which I return later in this introduction and attend to throughout the whole thesis. This way of working has its roots particularly in

³ Contact Improvisation is a duet-based movement form “with dancers supporting each others’ weight while in motion” (Novack 1990: 8). The form was first developed by US-American dancers Nancy Stark Smith (b. 1952) and Steve Paxton (b. 1939) in the 1970s. BMC® is “an integrated and embodied approach to movement, the body and consciousness” developed by Bonnie Bainbridge-Cohen (USA), who opened the School of Body-Mind Centering® in 1973 (School for Body-Mind Centering 2014). Klein Technique™ works “at the level of the bone, not the traditional level of the muscles” and is a movement and bodywork practice that aims in particular at professional dancers. It was developed in the US, initially by Susan Klein in 1972, and furthered in collaboration with Barbara Mahler (Klein and Mahler 2001).

studying with Mainz, who has installed in me a deep respect for materiality as a fundamental source for moving and being with this world.

In the last weeks of thesis writing a diary entry from 2005 fell into my hands. It offers a trace of my beginnings in feeling to be “of materiality” or of “becoming body”, as I call it below:

I feel more flexible, less scared, and I have sunken, just a little bit – deeper inside me. [...]. I feel more like – grass, or let's say – a bungee cord, something strong, resilient, yet flexible, soft to touch. Silk. Maybe silk. Or the material of spider webs. But I'm not quite as stringy, I guess. Rather a bit more round in form and of material. Maybe I'm a little bit like mud, but stronger, yet, not a rock, not an eggshell, rather a muscle, or moss, or clay or play dough? I keep my colour, my form, my material base – while at the same time I'm able to change, to be moved. [...] maybe I'm just becoming – body! (Personal diary 15.02.2005)

This excerpt speaks of a pre-thesis sensibility towards and engagement with materiality that nurtured me personally as well as my studies of movement practices. The key topos of materiality then came to the fore again through this practice-as-research process, which has deepened my trust in materiality and diversified my understanding of its versatile and efficacious role in outdoor dance practices and beyond.

Through the material richness of outdoor sites a turn to materiality is on the one hand particularly necessary and on the other particularly available in outdoor environments. After my early training in outdoor movement with Mainz, working with movement artist Helen Poynor in the context of this research re-emphasised this aspect. Poynor's work with materiality offers, as an example, a counterbalance for the vastness of wide open spaces that can have the effect of sending a dancer far away from the body, site and practice at hand and into imaginations, worries, or the question of why or how to move rather than moving. This grounding aspect of working with bodily materiality is particularly developed in chapter six. On the other hand this thesis shows, through Poynor's work as well as my own (chapters six and seven), that a dancers materiality is also activated through the materials present on site. Poynor proposes for example that the materials of a site speak to and influence

the mover, offering possibilities of noticing and coming into our own materiality. Working with touch or across space she suggests that: “Rocks actually teach materiality, they offer materiality” (personal conversation 02.04.2015). These words speak to the notion of material agency, a concept this thesis builds on and develops throughout.

The specific outdoor sites and material features this thesis most particularly deals with are all located in the UK and include woodlands, fields and individual trees, mountain ranges and hills, cliffs, beaches and rivers, and a movement garden. This thesis speaks of the embodied experiences of movement work within such sites and argues that the human body forms part of the material sphere. Rocks, trees, tar, people, rain or ants – their arrangements, temperatures, textures, their shapes, size or noises form *intermaterial confederations* and together bring forth what we do and how we move. Materials shift and change alongside each other, moving and bringing movement forth, our bodies touching and being touched. Such confederate encounters between materials are continuous presences alongside which dancers work and alongside which all humans always already move and live. I use the term confederation drawing on the work of political theorist Jane Bennett, who suggests that the *Vital Materialism* she proposes is “filled not with ontologically distinct categories of beings (subjects and objects) but with variously composed materialities that form confederations” (2010: 99). Through analysing a palette of outdoor movement practices this thesis positions the human-world relationship to manifest through confederations made up of materials of different orders, as indicated by the term *intermaterial*.

The practitioners who have informed this study are all situated in the field of contemporary performing arts and include Bettina Mainz (Germany, b. 1965), Helen Poynor (UK, b. 1953), Sandra Reeve (UK, b. 1955), Suprpto

Suryodarmo (Indonesia, b. 1945) and Simon Whitehead (UK, b. 1961).⁴ It is a niche community and their work is not united by a name – rather all these practitioners have created their own names for their practices or do not use a specific name. One overarching factor however is the connection to *Joged Amerta/Amerta Movement*, the movement practice of Indonesian movement artists Suryodarmo, which I introduce specifically in chapter five. Mainz, Poynor and Reeve all have studied substantially with Suryodarmo and their practices are informed by his work. Another shared territory is contemporary dance and performance art. Mainz has studied at the School for New Dance Development and has been influenced by dancers such as Kirstie Simson (UK) and Katie Duck (b. 1951, USA)(personal email 07.12.2014). Whitehead has trained at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance in London (the former Laban Dance Centre) and has been influenced by working with British dancers/choreographers such as Miranda Tufnell and Rosemary Butcher (b. 1947) as well as Serbian performance artist Marina Abramovic (b. 1946) (personal email 16.02.2012). Poynor studied extensively with US-American postmodern dance pioneer Anna Halprin (b. 1920) and Reeve is influenced by the theatre work of Jerzy Grotowski (1933-1999). The individuals I have primarily worked with and interviewed for this thesis are further united by a strong desire to leave the studio and work outside, all executing this wish rather pragmatically – by spending extended time outdoors in all weather conditions.

My thinking about materiality in relationship to movement practice has received significant input by the work of feminist philosopher and physicist Karen Barad (1998, 2007, 2008, 2012), political theorist Jane Bennett (2010, 2012, 2015) and object-oriented philosopher Graham Harman (2010, 2011a, 2011b, 2015), as three theorists whose writing is deeply involved with ‘material reality’. Their work offers a lens through which I began to see outdoor dance practices in a

⁴ Where possible I have inserted the years of birth (and death) for all practitioners whose work has informed this thesis. Where this is not the case I could not find these dates and unless otherwise noted these practitioners are currently living artists.

way I had not done before. A diffractive reading (Barad 2007) of their work in conjunction with dance practice thus forms the source from which the body of this writing was developed.

These related strands of thinking allow, in the words of Barad, “matter its due as an active participant in the world’s becoming” (2008: 122). From my perspective, the work of Bennett further offers particularly productive alliances for the territory of outdoor dance with material affinities, because her work inquires so directly into how our world might be different if we thought of materiality as lively, of our own bodies as heterogeneous assemblages and the locus of agency as shared, confederate and distributed (although not necessarily equally) between humans and nonhumans (2010). This thesis thus turns towards materials such as rocks, rivers, rain and trees and inquires what our dance practices might need to remain open for their presences and what kind of shifts in practice and perspective such intermaterial confederations afford, in dance and beyond.

This research is also indebted to the influences of phenomenology on dance research and draws on early phenomenologists such as Merleau-Ponty who positions human experience as embodied, inter-subjective as well as bound to being-in-the-world. My contention however is, as I have argued elsewhere, “that the phenomenological focus on the experiential realm of the human-being-in-the-world benefits profoundly from being subverted” (Kramer 2012a: 84). This thesis therefore proposes an opening and tilting of phenomenological thought. I primarily build on Bennett’s attempt of “a more radical displacement of the human subject than phenomenology has done” (2010: 30)⁵. Considering dance practice through the lens of her work I firstly suggest that unlike a phenomenological take on subjectivity as purely human, we need to think of human subjectivity as constituted in confederation with the non-human. Simultaneously, and reading dance practice through Harman, this thesis argues for a partial autonomy and independence of all entities. This

⁵ Bennett acknowledges that Merleau-Ponty was beginning to think along these lines in his unfinished work *The Visible and the Invisible* (1968) (Bennett 2010: 30).

thesis therefore opens the phenomenological focus on human subjectivity and tilts it towards intermaterial confederations.

Through my engagement with the theoretical territories of new materialism and speculative realism I have come to agree with object-oriented philosopher Levi Bryant's claim that even in the work of some new materialists "the term 'materialism' has become so watered down that it's come to denote little more than 'history' and 'practice'" (2014: 1). I also began to engage with the work of anthropologist Tim Ingold towards the end phases of my research, who similarly questions the large influx of literature on materiality that has so little to do with actually engaging with materials (2011: 19-32). In line with Bryant and Ingold I would argue that material is mostly thought and speculated about in new materialist scholarship rather than directly consulted and confederated with in physical human - non-human contact, which is the base of this research project. I thus answer Barad's question "How does one even go about inquiring after the material conditions [...] when materiality itself is always already figured within a linguistic domain as its condition of possibility?" (2008: 121) with: "Be with it, move with it." I consider this to be an option that is rarely realised yet is a fundamental aspect of this research project in which materiality was encountered as well as researched *through the material body*.

I argue here, that the intrinsic connection of dance to the physical, material body as the primary medium of expression makes it particularly relevant and potent for the study and discussion of materialism. Ingold for example suggests that the properties of materials are "neither objectively determined nor subjectively imagined but practically experienced" (2011: 30). In light of his perspective this thesis suggests that practice-as-research in dance offers a particularly relevant lens for the study of materiality because of its intrinsic connection to the physical, material body through which materiality is indeed "practically experienced". As humans we are bound to the body, we are "not free" as Suryodarmo suggests in a workshop I participated in, "we are in our system – we are in our body" (fieldnotes 09.06.2011). The body is fundamental to all our movements and as this thesis develops, attending to this

material base offers a potent tool for dancing and living with as well as conceptualising intermaterial confederations.

Key terms that pertain to this thesis are *thing*, *object*, *material* and *materiality*. Whilst all of them touch upon an immense field of theoretical engagement I am aiming to provide a delineation here that situates primarily how I work with them practically. Most importantly my emphasis lies on their shared materiality. Of all these elements I seek to touch what is of material, by which, with Ingold, I refer to “the stuff that things are made of” (2011: 20). This stuff is what I touch and engage with in dance, not differentiating between dealing with a cup, a leaf or dirt. I am thus interested in and advocating with this thesis a way of working that speaks directly to ‘the material’. Unlike Ingold - and despite sharing some of his apprehensions - I still consider ‘materiality’ a useful term to speak of things, objects and materials and employ it predominantly to speak to that which *unites* them – a shared materiality that crosses these separate categories. Thus if I write that I turn to materiality, I turn to more than materials, I also turn to things and objects.

As for a differentiation between things and objects, less rather than more distinction is relevant in my work. Both Bennett and performance studies theorist and curator André Lepecki propose a differentiation of things and objects, which this thesis selectively applies. Both consider things to have greater freedom and efficacy than objects, which Lepecki considers to be “ontologically tied to instrumentality, to utility, to usage, to means” (2012: 77) and Bennett suggests are caught up in what she calls a “for-us” (2015: 102). Chapter eight of this thesis proposes a similar understanding of ‘thing’ (based on movement practice), in the discussion of my engagement with an over-sized ball of string and other, smaller *material companions*. In this section I suggest that I use ‘thing’ in line with Bennett and Lepecki, as an “active party in encounters” (Bennett 2015: 102), as intermediary and companion that supports processes such as performance making and performance viewing. Yet overall I am less interested in *Moving as Thing* (Lepecki 2012) and more interested in

moving as material and *dancing materiality* as well as the agentic capacities that I consider to reach across categories such as thing, object and material.

As a whole and emerging from the engagement of moving as and with materials, this thesis is concerned with contributing to practices of embodied knowledge and scholarship involved with life at large rather than being removed from both. Such a stance has significant epistemological and methodological consequences. Rather than working with the critical distance of traditional scholarship that might aim to analyse, as objectively as possible, the concepts and choices of movement practitioners, this thesis is based on a very close, bodily and subjective involvement. As stated above it asks how materials confederate in the work of contemporary dancers, but it also works out how dance practice can function as a method for studying material agency more generally.

Whilst this thesis offers an original contribution to knowledge, it does not aim to separate critical thought and embodied experience. Rather than staying out of the contested zones of experience, it proposes that practice and thinking, doing and understanding, moving and knowing are inextricably linked and confederate in the production of research results or knowledge. In this way this thesis seeks to “embody critique” (Garcés 2009) rather than to acquire critical distance. Philosopher Marina Garcés asks how we might “incarnate critique” and how critical thought might “acquire a body”. She argues:

If critique was used traditionally to combat darkness, today it must combat impotence. The global world is completely illuminated. [...] Nonetheless we are capable of doing so little. About ourselves. For our world. We can say it all and nonetheless we have nothing relevant to add. [...] To embody critique means to ask how to subvert one’s life nowadays in such a way that the world can no longer remain the same. (2009: 203)

Viewed from this angle, this thesis aims to provide and provoke critical knowledge that is neither separated from embodied experience nor from its field of inquiry. It produces insights that are nurtured by proximity rather than

distance and in the light of Garcés aims to support our ability to act and engage in the territory of daily life.

Methodologically the research process was guided by practice-as-research in all its phases, and as its author and maker I actively cultivated an intermingling of academic and artistic practices, shaping this work through *doing research*, amongst people, books and trees. Additionally the chronological order of research stages such as data collection, data analysis, performance-making, writing, documentation and dissemination have overlapped and were sometimes inseparable. I argue that such multi-modal and non-chronological ways of working are necessary and adequate for research that draws its data from embodied, experiential and processual as well as textual modes. Dancing and dance-making are complex, non-linear and multi-dimensional processes which need to be met by research approaches that are able to resonate these specificities.

As an antidote to the existing dilemma of separating out and weighing up against of artistic practice versus academic knowledge production, I propose a different perspective – to not understand practice-as-research as a combination of art and scientific research, but as a thing of its own. To not try and pick apart the realms of theoretical engagement and artistic practice in order to purify them again, but to favour mutual spillages and impure practices, to consciously produce amalgamations and to develop research methods that are appropriate for this new species. Working modalities and outcomes would then best be judged in relationship to other practice-as-research projects, rather than compared to 'pure art' or to 'pure academic research'.

In the frame of this practice-as-research project I developed my methods of gathering data informed by ethnographic models developed for researching through being-with and participation, such as participant observation and fieldnote writing during workshops, interviews and the documented immersion of myself into the work of others as well as my own. The pools of knowledge I tapped into during my research included the work of experienced outdoor

dance practitioners as well as my own. The data I draw on has been collected in workshops, trainings and interviews between 2009 and 2012, as well as my year-long process of making the performance *body, trees & things* (2011 – 2012). Communication and interaction with the artists that have informed my research reached into the writing-up phase of 2014-2015 and is (for the time being) set up to continue. I thus do not claim a distanced and objective position vis-à-vis my research or field, on the contrary, this work is purposefully based on my own involvement with outdoor movement and I have embarked on this research journey in order to understand, communicate and situate more fully what I experienced in years of movement practice prior to this research project.

Chapter Outline

This chapter outline further introduces the structure of the thesis. Following the *Introduction*, chapter two, *Theoretical Resonances*, delineates the significance of attending to materials and materiality more broadly as well as the relevance of dance for the research of materiality. It further traces the resonances of scholarly writings that have contributed to this research. These are predominantly works by Bennett, Harman and Barad. This thesis thus builds on Bennett's distributive and confederate positioning of material agency (2010), Haman's suggestions on the autonomy and independence of objects (2011a, 2011c) and Barad's propositions on entanglement and the inhuman we are (2007, 2012).

Chapter three, *Methodological Placing*, turns to the underpinnings of practice-as-research and the methods I have applied. It particularly argues for uniting critical thought with embodied experience as well as for immersive scholarship that studies from within. It thus builds on Ingold's notion of "togethering" (Ingold 2011: 226) and endorses Garcés' suggestion of "embody[ing] critique" (2009: 203). Apart from detailing my use of methods from the spectrum of dance ethnography such as participant observation and interviews, the chapter further introduces methods that were developed

particularly for and in the context of this practice-as-research project such as movement-based writing and photography and research installations.

Chapter four, *Practical Placing*, then opens into a field review of the *Roots and Sprouts* of contemporary outdoor dance and offers a historical perspective on the field that draws on the development of modern dance and outdoor movement experiments that took place under its auspices. It asks for connections and frictions between the historical and the contemporary field and examines particularly the outdoor experiments of leading figures of modern dance such as Isadora Duncan (1877-1927), Rudolf von Laban (1879-1958) and Mary Wigman (1886-1973).

Chapters five, six, seven and eight then discuss the core focus on materiality in contemporary outdoor dance practices and offer an analysis of various ways of working with materials in this context. All four chapters draw on a close engagement with practice and look at the ways materiality is dealt with, drawn on and made use of in the work of movement practitioners. All four offer strands towards answering my core research question of how materials confederate in the work of contemporary dancers and the effects of such confederations. Chapters five to seven mainly face towards dance and movement practice more specifically, chapter eight then opens towards life at large.

The order of chapters five to seven is a genealogical and generational one, beginning with a chapter based on the work of Suprpto Suryodarmo, followed by one based on the work of Helen Poynor who intensively studied with Suryodarmo and concluding with a chapter drawing on my own practice as someone who studied with both. This order offers different angles and viewpoints on questions pertaining to the presence and relevance of materials in contemporary outdoor dance and is further resonant of the direct teacher-student relationships that are still a formative part of how dance is taught.

Chapter five, *All Has Being and All Has Fact*, traces the roots and history of *Joged Amerta*, the movement practice of Suryodarmo, and introduces practices of relaxation and receptivity as fundamental to productively engaging with materiality in dance. It further develops the proposals of facticity and the

capacity for being of things, objects and materials that the lens of *Joged Amerta* allows for.

Chapter six, *Working Across Materials*, outlines the *Walk of Life*, the teaching practice of Poynor, and introduces the focus on the body in her work. It further opens a perspective on working across materials in a way that values both a notion of boundaries between as well as an intermingling of materials.

Chapter seven, *Physical Exposure*, then turns to making and performing *body, trees & things*, the practice component of this thesis. Through an analysis of my working process it argues for walking, dwelling and moving-dancing as exposure practices that invite noticing and getting in touch with the material liveliness that surrounds us and dance making in what I call *intermaterial confederations*.

The final chapter eight, *Corresponding with Life at Large*, then takes the central proposals of this thesis further afield, arguing that the effects of experiencing materiality as agentic and lively in dance have the potential to question our understandings and ways of dealing with materiality more generally. The chapter firstly turns to the *permeability* between dance and daily life through a return to *Joged Amerta* and further offers inspiration for community practices that draw on dance and allow for being *differently social*. It then turns towards *material companions* in dance and positions *things as intermediators*, suggesting that a confederate way of making dances might affect our wider relationships with this lively material world. It thus positions dance as a *practice ground for philosophy and living* that offers a territory for the embodied exploration of the consequences and potentialities of ontological debates and current challenges of “how we live on earth”.

2. Theoretical Resonances: Attending to Materials

Introduction

This thesis was written at a time in which a more general turn towards things, objects and materials was on the rise. In the context of philosophy, Harman notes: “After years of obsession with written texts, continental philosophy has recently raised the colorful banners of materialism and realism” (2011b: 52). This turn towards materiality marks a significant shift away from the emphasis on semiotics, textuality or performativity in previous decades. Because dance practice is so deeply rooted in the physical material of the human body and outdoor dance practice is specifically exposed to the wide material variety of which this world is constituted, the renewed theoretical attention to material concurrent to this practice-as-research provided useful “resonances” (Nelson 2013).⁶ The following sections delineate the theoretical territories which have primarily impacted this thesis and introduce aspects from philosophy and political theory that were principally engaged with throughout the research.

Turning Towards Materiality

It is in waves that attention turns to that which is “material” or “real” throughout the history of philosophy, with varying definitions of such terms. One of such waves is currently under way and I suggest that one of the strands that gave rise to it is feminist theory. Already in the 1980s feminist scholars and activists were significantly engaged with materiality and US-based writers such as Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga (ed. 1981), bell hooks (1981, 1984), Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1984), and Gayatri Spivak (1988) raised their voices against dematerialized constructivism. Materiality and more specifically the

⁶ My usage of the term *resonances* as a central concept for the way practice and theory relate to each other throughout this thesis builds on theatre scholar Robin Nelson’s work. Nelson was part of a practice-as-research group to which I also contributed at Tanzkongress 2013 in Düsseldorf, Germany. There he lectured on ‘How do we know? On the Methodology of Practice as Research’ (08.06.2013) and highlighted the potential of resonances between theory and practice in practice-as-research processes. In *Practice as Research in the Arts* Nelson introduces “resonances” as a key term (2013: 7) and proposes that “contemporary work is likely to resonate with ideas circulating elsewhere in culture and perhaps more specifically within other academic disciplines” (2013: 31).

markedness of the human body was one of the territories brought back into focus then as a means to re-gain political leverage amidst post-modern scholarship that was feared to ignore the material to such a degree that difference would no longer matter. I recount this history here because this was the first body of theory in my scholarly training that enabled me to make sense of the simultaneous and interrelated presence of what is and what we make of it, rather than essentialising the former or hyperfocusing on the latter. A deep concern for the simultaneous relevance of what Barad terms “matter and meaning” (2007) has remained with me ever since. I recount it further, because feminist theory has a strong share in the current new materialist turn, a territory charted for example by the work of feminist scholars Rosi Braidotti (2002, 2012), Elisabeth Grozs (2010), Stacy Alaimo (2008, 2010) or Barad, whose work I particularly engage with in this thesis. This aspect is closely investigated in the work of ‘third generation’ feminist scholar Iris van der Tuin, for example in *Generational Feminism – New Materialist Introduction to a Generative Approach* (2015). Feminist theory thus forms a key influence on the theoretical base of this thesis, without constituting its main concern.

Matter and Meaning

In the context of this research I draw on work emerging from the current new materialist turn that continues to attend to the co-emergence of matter and meaning, to their interdependencies but also their possible independence.⁷ Van der Tuin and Dolphijn trace the term *new materialism* to have been “coined by Manuel DeLanda and Rosi Braidotti in the second half of the 1990’s” (2012: 48). One of the fundamental trajectories of this field is that things, objects and materials are understood to have agency as well as autonomy rather than being considered to be dead or passive matter fully available for human projection or consumption. New materialism is adamant in taking materials seriously whilst simultaneously and equally seriously considering the impacts

⁷ The concurrence, or in Barad’s words entanglement, of matter and meaning is one of the central concerns of her work, this phrase therefore occurs throughout it, but prominently for example in the subtitle of *Meeting the Universe Halfway – Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (2007).

of culture, language and meaning making. I thus disagree with emerging cultural studies scholar Dennis Bruining's allegation that new materialism falls prey to a "material foundationalism" (2013: 149) that positions materiality as "beyond culture" (2013: 151) and "'material reality' as an indisputable universal good" (2013: 156). Instead I follow van der Tuin's analysis that "new materialism is not a paradigm shift or a rewriting of [...] the linguistic turn" (2011: 271). As an example may serve the work of Barad, a central figure in new materialist thought, whose scholarship deeply questions what she calls an "asymmetrical faith in our access to representations over things" (2008: 126) but does not privilege material essentialism in return. Instead Barad argues for a materialism that "provides an understanding of the role of the human *and* nonhuman factors in the production of knowledge, thereby moving considerations of epistemic practices beyond the traditional realism versus social constructivism debates" (1998: 89, original emphasis).

Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO) and *Speculative Realism (SR)* are separate but closely related branches of philosophical thought and metaphysical positioning around, towards and with objects, rooted and prominently discussed in the work of scholars such as Graham Harman, Timothy Morton (2013a, 2013b) or Levi Bryant (2011, 2014). The autonomy and independence of objects and their (partial) withdrawal from human access is particularly emphasised in this part of the tide, with Harman arguing for example (contra Latour and philosopher Alfred North Whitehead) that an object is "*more* than its effect on or relations with other objects" (Harman 2011b: 64, my emphasis). Another point of central concern is the critique of correlationism, coined by French philosopher Quentin Meillassoux (2008), who distances himself from the Kantian dogma that we cannot think of the world independently of our human perception of it with this term. The work of Harman is similarly anti-correlationist and considers reality as existing independently of our minds, proposing for example that "reality is so real no knowledge does justice to it" (2015: 13).

Artists and art events have been particularly engaged in dialoguing with scholarly work stemming out of these recent materialist and realist trends.

Testimony to this is the presence of Barad (2012b) and Harman (2012) in the *100 Thoughts, 100 Notes* project of documenta 13⁸ (Kassel, Germany) as well as publications such as *Carnal Knowledge: Towards a New Materialism through the Arts* (Barrett and Bolt 2013) and *Macht des Materials/Politik der Materialität* [*Power of Materials/Politics of Materiality* (my translation)] (Witzgall and Stakemeier 2014) stemming out of the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich, Germany. The performing arts have been less present in these trends, but first published material includes Lepecki's article 'Moving as Thing' (2012) and the collection *Performing Objects and Theatrical Things* (2014) edited by theatre scholars Marlies Schweitzer and Joanne Zerdy.

Bennett, Harman and Barad

From a wide variety of new materialist thinking currently under way this thesis is particularly indebted to political theorist Bennett's *Vital Materialism*, her articulations on material agency and the distributive and confederate nature of such agency. To give further room to the autonomy and independence of things, objects and materials, this thesis also draws on Harman's *Object-Oriented Philosophy*. My work, however, is not centrally concerned with the question of how deeply or fully objects withdraw from or transcend human access, it is more that I value the freedom Harman grants to objects from the viewpoint of creative practice. In the course of this research I have further engaged with Barad's *Agential Realism*, because her work is particularly compelling in its expression of material entanglements (2007) and what she calls the "inhuman" we are (2012a). Despite their partial opposition, the work of all three is allied in the task of turning the theoretical tide away from text and representation and towards materiality, thus recalibrating the concurrence of matter and meaning.⁹ All three share a deep attraction to things (Bennett), objects (Harman) or matter (Barad) and all three theoretical realms

⁸ Since 1955 documenta takes places every 5 years in Kassel, Germany and is one of the world's largest and most prestigious shows of contemporary art.

⁹ This is a shared objective by non-representative theory, developed mainly through geographer Nigel Thrift (2007) and much discussed since, predominantly in human and cultural geography.

further open a space in which the spotlight is taken away from the human and more is allowed to exist than a purely human-mediated world. It is thus the act of taking things, objects and material and that which we do not fully know seriously that makes these particular theorists productive accomplices in the endeavour of researching contemporary outdoor dance practices in the natural environment. These theoretical approaches for example allow me to position contemporary outdoor dance practices as work that comes about through intermaterial confederations, a point I develop particularly in chapter seven. Often misunderstood as practices where humans try to commune with, be or move like grasses, waves or trees, I would like to propose a changed viewpoint on contemporary outdoor dance practices, as practices that glorify neither the human nor the natural environment and that allow for confederations as well as independence.

I now turn to the tensions that manifest in the work of these three theorists. Harman, most prominently, is a keen anti-materialist in critical distance to the work of Bennett and Barad. Rather than wanting to be subsumed in the materialist camp he declares that – at least theoretically – materialism “must be destroyed” (2010: 772). Thus rather than thinking about materiality Harman proposes that we need to consider “reality”, composed of “sensuous object”, that we can make contact with, and “real objects” that exceed what we can know and therefore call for speculation or a speculative realism (Harman 2015). However, where Harman and OOO focus on “individual entities”, the reality of which is withdrawn, Bennett’s Vital Materialism, and I would add here also Barad’s Agential Realism, focus on relations and entities that exist in and through confederations rather than in separation (Wong 2015: 11).

My suggestion here is that from the viewpoint of creative practice, the notion of *diffraction* brought forth by Barad drawing on Haraway (e.g. Barad 2007) and Suryodarmo’s suggestion of *inter-independence* (e.g. Jones 2014)

propose a productive co-existence of such differences.¹⁰ Diffraction draws on “the way waves combine when they overlap and the apparent bending and spreading of waves that occurs when waves encounter an obstruction” (Barad 2007: 74) and has been methodologically applied for example by Haraway (1997), Barad (2007) and van der Tuin (2011) as a way of “reading diffractively for patterns of differences that make a difference” (Barad 2012c: 49). Inter-independence moves beyond interdependence or interbeing as made famous for example by Buddhist Monk Thich Nhat Hanh (e.g. 1996) and as present across ecological thinking. It allows for the co-existence of interdependence *and* independence, defined by Mainz as “a relation that *relies* on but does not *lie* on and that can *stand* on its own” (2014: 81, original emphasis). Both diffraction and inter-independence make the drawing on theories that might otherwise be considered as mutually exclusive a productive endeavour.

I now turn to each of these theorists to describe the strands of their work that have most strongly influenced mine and the ways in which this thesis draws on and extends their thinking.

Jane Bennett and Vital Materialism

This thesis primarily draws on the work of Bennett who is professor of political theory at John’s Hopkins University in Baltimore (US). Rooted in thinkers such as Baruch Spinoza, Gilles Deleuze and Bruno Latour as well as critical vitalists such as Henri Bergson and Hans Driesch, her work reflects with intricate detail on “thing power” and the material agency of such daily life matter as electricity, food or plastic. In her book *Vibrant Matter* (2010) she develops a “theory of materiality as itself an active, vibrant power” (2010: 48) and suggests moving beyond a “life/matter binary” (2010: xviii). One of Bennett’s specific propositions is the acknowledgement of thing-power, which she defines as “the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle” (2010: 6). Bennett further emphasises an

¹⁰ The term “inter-independence” stems from Suryodarmo’s teaching vocabulary, referenced for example by Amerta practitioner and musician Tim Jones 2014: 159.

inherent heterogeneity of materials and her thinking fosters a decentralisation of the human being through positioning bodies as well as the locus of agency as always taking place in assemblages and confederations. The engagement with contemporary outdoor dance practice, which is at the heart of this thesis, draws on this notion of material agency as distributed or confederate, and as composed of heterogeneous human and non-human factors. This thesis develops the argument that outdoor dance practice comes about through what I call *intermaterial confederations*, a term that draws on Bennett and emphasises the multi-material and multi-agentic texture of outdoor dancing.

Bennett's work is further relevant to the wider outlook of this thesis as it moves from dance practice to living practices, because her writing is rooted and accountable both to political theory and daily life practices. Bennett firmly advocates that it is relevant to our future well-being to develop a sensitivity towards the nonhuman world and an understanding of how much this world is always already part of our selves. In line with this idea, this thesis suggests that outdoor dance practice offers a practice ground in this respect that is relevant beyond the making of movement.

Graham Harman and Object-Oriented Philosophy

Whilst Bennett makes space for “material agency in which human perception and conceptualisation participate but *do not and can not exhaust*” (2011: n.p., my emphasis) and argues that thing-power “gestures toward the strange ability of ordinary, man-made items to *exceed* their status as objects and to manifest traces of independence or aliveness, constituting the outside of our own experience” (2010: xvi, my emphasis) the work of Harman is a valuable addition in its decisive emphasis on the autonomy of objects. Harman is professor of philosophy at the American University in Cairo (EGY) and uses the term “object” in the sense of “unit”, which he considers inclusive of events and processes (2015). The term object-oriented philosophy has been used by Harman since 1999 (Harman 2010: 772) to demarcate his specific trail through the wider field of speculative realism and object-oriented ontology to which he

belongs (both terms are not quite interchangeable, although often used as such).¹¹ The strongest influences on his philosophy are Martin Heidegger and Bruno Latour, and in a monograph on each he develops his position vis-à-vis theirs (Harman 2002, 2009). Harman further has a strong affinity to classical thought, not as static retro-glorification, but with a belief that the Greek classics have plenty to offer for the development of contemporary philosophy.¹² A key aspect of his philosophy is that objects are not exhausted by their relationship to humans, nor to each other and he further insists on a reality beyond human access.¹³ Harman argues for example that if entities such as rocks, trees and stars “are real, then they must be real not just apart from us, but apart from each other as well” (2011b: 55).

Read through my practice-as-research, Harman’s proposals allow for a sense of clarity within material-spatial organisations that I have not found as strongly expressed in the other theoretical strands mentioned here. His work further allows for the presence of what we do not know (a reality we cannot fully access) and an invitation is extended to objects (such as trees) to step into this arena. This allows a positioning of the natural environment not only vis-à-vis a dancer that engages within it, but also as completely independent. Through this conceptual shift, leaves, trees, rain, dancers and rocks can operate on the same ontological plane, known and unknown to each other, undiminished by human correlationist perception, which is an important departure from the human subjectivity and human perception centred phenomenological premise of ‘being-in-the world’. When I perceive this autonomy and independence in my dancing I often sense myself more clearly, and in turn have space to notice relationships, confederations, entanglements

¹¹ In Harman’s OOO/SR tutorial blog entry he states: „The one thing that’s changed since July 2010 is that some of the non-OOO people connected with speculative realism have distanced themselves ever further from the term ‘speculative realism’, meaning that it’s no longer nearly as incorrect as it was a year ago to treat SR and OOO as synonyms” (Harman 2011d).

¹² The comment that Aristotle is currently the most overlooked and underappreciated philosopher can be found on Harman’s blog many times over and interviewed by Gratton he states: “I have much sympathy for classicism, but none at all for conservatism. The past is dead unless we continually revive it in our own thinking. [...] for me classicism means: ‘come on, let’s produce some new classics!’” (Gratton 2010: 96).

¹³ I am necessarily simplifying Harman’s thinking here. His much more differentiated position is detailed for example in his monograph *The Quadruple Object* (2011a) or his essay ‘On the Undermining of Objects: Grant, Bruno, and Radical Philosophy’ in *The Speculative Turn. Continental Materialism and Realism* (Bryant, Srnicek and Harman 2011).

and resonances that are beyond my longings for connection. Whilst this may in the first instance sound contradictory, my argument is precisely that notions of autonomy and independence can foster intermaterial confederations.

Karen Barad and Agential Realism

This thesis thirdly draws on, as well as partially questions, the work of Barad and her detailed explication of interrelations and entanglements. Barad is a feminist philosopher and physicist and most of her research is based on quantum physics, drawing from and extending the work of physicist Niels Bohr - not as a cultural studies (re)turn to the sciences of “proof”, which has been rightly questioned, for example by Bruining (2013), but as a scientist and philosopher drawing from her training in physics for the development of her materialist philosophy.¹⁴ Based on her knowledge of, and experimentation with quantum mechanics, specifically dealing with the behaviour of small particles such as electrons or photons, Barad proposes an organisation of the world based on interrelation. Two of her central concepts are that of “entanglement” and “intra-activity”. Using both, she develops her understanding of the world in which “matter and meaning cannot be severed” (Barad 2012c: 69) and in which substance is “not a thing, but a doing, a congealing of agency” (Barad 2008: 139). Whilst I seek to partially challenge Barad’s entanglement proposal through an emphasis of boundaries (particularly in chapter six), her work on the “inhuman within us” (2012: 8) has been invaluable for my research. In her essay ‘On Touching – The Inhuman That Therefore I Am (v.1.1)’ (2012) Barad speculates that it is “waking us up to the inhuman [...] we are” which allows us to be “more intimately in touch with this infinite alterity that lives in, around, and through us” (2012a: 9). Drawing on my research on and through dance practice I argue

¹⁴ In his article ‘A Somatechnics of Moralism: New Materialism or Material Foundationalism’ (2013) Bruining critiques new materialism for falsely positioning the postmodern and poststructuralist work as disregarding materiality. He further detects and criticises a turn towards science in new materialist thought and argues that “new materialist considerations of matter often go hand in hand with a return to science as if contemporary scientific research has the answers postmodern(s) (feminists) have obscured with their obsessive focus on language and representation” (2013: 162). In both case I share his worry but argue that these allegation do not apply to the strands of new materialist thought I draw on.

that these Baradian proposals relate well across fields and are helpful for thinking about dancing in confederation with materiality. I have found her considerations to resonate productively with my experience of waking up to my own materiality and noticing that being in touch with my material base supports my moving with(in) and across the materialities of the word. Her work has further allowed me to consider the *material we are* as a factor that successfully cuts across delineations such as human – non human, organic – non organic through offering a strong connecting force between materialities that, in Barad's words, live in, around, and through us.

Turning to Dance

As a whole this thesis develops how such varied resonances between practice and theory can further our thinking on dance and movement practice, but also our thinking about and living of our lives. 'Applying' new materialist and speculative realist thought in this way to the field of dance and performance studies, allows me to suggest a trajectory similar to the one which dancer and dance scholar Martina Ruhsam is currently developing in her work, for example on the '*Resurgence of Things*' in contemporary (indoor) performance. In a lecture manuscript Ruhsam suggests that:

at stake is not so much the ontological question of what a thing is (in the way that object-oriented philosophy and speculative realists are occupied with) but rather the question of what things or nonhuman bodies can do, which powers they have and how these powers might be engaged with to render other performances and forms of life possible. (2015: 2)

This thesis further draws on a theoretical spectrum rather than a specific theory and my intention is not to develop another strand of materialist or realist philosophy or dwell on their contradictions, but to allow such thinking to diffractively inform my understanding and analysis of dance practice. I further suggest that the knowledge we can draw from dance extends, concretises and speaks back to aspects of such bodies of philosophy.

Because of the direct and often extended contact to things, objects and materials in contemporary outdoor dance practices in the natural environment, this territory is particularly well positioned to further illuminate, question and specify theoretical suggestions such as the confederate nature of agency or the autonomy of objects. They offer a practice ground in which some of the theoretical principles detailed above already form part of the practice. It is the lowering of an ear to the ground and staying there, the touching of wet rock, spiky chestnut and soft sand with bare feet and taking a step and another and another. It is the exposure of the body and the mind stripped bare of understanding, to the sea, to the sand, to the field, to the river with the curiosity of ‘what might happen’ which speak of the presence of material agency, autonomy and intermaterial confederations. And equally the mentioned theoretical strands support considering the human body in relation to the natural environment as material amongst material rather than getting caught up in dualist human-nature constellations. Imaginations, romanticisations and constructions of the natural environment are undeniably present, but as this thesis argues throughout - they do not and cannot exhaust its material qualities. This stance is similarly supported by work in human and cultural geography and the influences of non-representative theory (NRT). One of NRT’s founding and driving forces, geographer Nigel Thrift considers speculative realism to parallel “a key effort of modern geography [...] the struggle to come to terms with what is called, variously, the environment or ecology or nature, a world which clearly intersects with the ‘social,’ but can never be reduced to it” (Thrift 2011). Whilst sites such as sea shores or mountain ranges instantly flood the human imagination as we associate them with grandeurs such as eternity and infinity or lay upon them phantasies of a good simple life that city dwellers project onto nearly any countryside, such sites as any other never fail to materially affect the dancer apart and outside of these imaginations. This research emphasises to take note of the material characteristics of the natural environment that are immediately tangible for the human. The darkness of night impacts our orientation, as it rains, we get wet, rocks have sharp, hard edges and so on. But adding to this, experiential and

sensual qualities such as dark, wet, hard-edged change depending on the time spent within the environment and the kind of physical activity or creative practice engaged with. The body adapts and the experiences of materiality shift, hard-edges can turn into a “spa of rocks”, thorns can ignite a surprisingly satisfying movement quality because the dancer needs to pay attention and after many hours of night walking we can see differently.¹⁵ Things, objects and materials thus imprint bodily material, dance and site meet materially. Muscle strength is for example called forth by working in mountain sites, as the mountain seeps into my body, my legs become ‘mountain legs’ as I recount in chapter five.

And what is more, materiality exceeds its effects on the human dancer. What the bodies of theory I refer to allow me to do is to accept that things, objects and materials partially exceed me, my knowledge and imagination, that they are real and independent of me as Harman argues, and whilst imagination, longings or desires may bring movement forth, so does the material that confederates with my dancing as argued by Bennett. This research suggests throughout that contemporary outdoor movement practice draws on all these aspects: That which I know, that which I do not know (yet), that which I cannot know, that which exists and that which does not exist, that which I can feel and that which exceeds me.

The following chapter now turns towards the methodological approaches that have made possible and shaped both the gathering of empirical data for this thesis and the processes of making sense of it.

¹⁵ The first two examples are discussed with more detail in Kramer 2012a. The night vision example draws on a personal conversation with Whitehead (23.11.2010).

“[...] we must do more than look at movement when we write about dance.” (Sklar 2001: 32)

3. Methodological Placing: Practice-as-Research

Introduction

This chapter discusses the methodological underpinnings of this practice-as-research inquiry and the specific methods employed. Practice-as-research is a novel academic territory in which artistic practice and qualitative research methodologies operate in conjunction, or – to stay with the terminology of this thesis – act in confederation. With Nelson I position a practice-as-research project to entail practice as “a key method of inquiry” and a piece of artistic practice to be “submitted as substantial evidence of a research inquiry” (2013: 8-9). In the case of this thesis practice-as-research is manifest firstly in my participation in movement workshops and trainings as a researcher, and as an outdoor dancer continuing to learn her trade. It secondly entailed documented individual in- and outdoor movement practice as well as the production and submission of a performative afternoon as “substantial evidence” of the research process. Thirdly it resulted in the development of project-specific methods that are intricately related to the research subject of materiality and reflective of the pluridimensional and creative approaches towards knowledge production proposed by practice-as-research. These project-specific methods were research installations and movement-based writing and photography, which I introduce and discuss in this chapter further below. Overall I refrain from comparing practice-as-research to artistic practice outside of academia or to qualitative research in the social science and humanities that are unrelated to the practice of an art form. Instead I understand and position practice-as-research as a unique territory, with its own methodological underpinnings and procedures.

Main methodological influences

Jane Bacon, whose dance research and writing is situated in the overlapping field of dance ethnography and practice-as-research and informed

by a long standing engagement with Authentic Movement,¹⁶ suggests to “define a methodology that can operate across boundaries, one that works in the field, in the studio and in any other experimental spaces and places” (2005: 224). In this context she drafts the possibility of a “body/mind landscape” (2005: 220). If both dancing and thinking is something we do in relation to each other within the same “landscape”, a conceptual space is opened that enables researchers to experience-as-research and to develop modes of presenting their work that correspond with kinaesthetic experiences. Dancing becomes a way of “thinking through the body”, as choreographer and dance scholar Carol Brown calls it (2003: 8 in Pollard 2007: 70).

Practice-as-research and dance ethnography provide the main methodological grounding for this research project. Both fields understand what we explore to be fluid rather than fixed, both value complexity and interdependence rather than expecting simplicity, and both acknowledge that research is impacted by and reflects back to the self. Much of the pioneering work on the integration of artistic practice into academic research in the UK has been shaped and informed through the activities of PARIP (Practice as Research in Performance), a five year research project between 2001-2006, funded by the AHRB (now known as the AHRC) at Bristol University.¹⁷ This history of practice-as-research is summarised for example in Angela Piccini’s article ‘Notes and Queries: An Historiographic Perspective on Practice as Research’ (2004). Robin Nelson’s handbook *Practice as Research in the Arts. Principles, Protocols, Pedagogies, Resistances* (2013) further lays out the history of practice-as-research in the UK (and beyond) as well as logging the current state of affairs internationally and proposing a specific ‘model’ for working with practice-as-research in academia.

In summary, practice-as-research marks a shift towards understanding experience, practice and tacit knowledge as relevant components in the context

¹⁶ Authentic Movement is a form of “self directed movement [...] usually done with eyes closed and attention directed inward, in the presence of at least one witness” (Authentic Movement Community n.d.). Authentic Movement was first developed by Mary Starks Whitehouse (1911 – 1979).

¹⁷ I am grateful to be of a generation of practitioner-researchers that benefits from the integration of practice-as-research into academic institutions of the UK in the recent past. My migratory journey to the UK to do a PhD is due to the availability of this context for artistic practice coupled with research and I am indebted and thankful to those who have established this field and possibility.

of knowledge production through artistic making. Depending on the disciplinary and regional boundaries within which the research practice is placed, different terminology is employed, such as practice-as-research, artistic research, practice-led or practice-based research.¹⁸ I use ‘practice-as-research’ here and place myself with this choice in the field of performing arts research in British Higher Education. Often abbreviated as PaR (Practice as Research, e.g. Nelson 2013) I have chosen the hyphenated, lower case version proposed in *Practice-as-Research: In Performance and Screen* (Allegue et al. 2009), reflecting my aesthetic preference of avoiding the repeated insertion of an acronym with upper cases in the middle of sentences. With this wording I further embrace the standpoint that practice *is* research, or as dance philosopher Anna Pakes suggests:

Understanding is already embodied in actions the artist performs during the making process, there is no need to alter the nature of that process in order to give it credence as thoughtful activity (2009: 12).

In the same vein dancer and dance scholar Kim Vincs suggests that dance forms a “substrate in which to think about dance” (2007: 100). This thesis takes this proposition forward. It positions movement practice and performance making as research practices in and through which epistemological and ontological aspects of dance practice and life more generally can be explored and understood. Vincs further calls for a radical democratization between writing and dancing and argues for the possibility of giving equal weight and generative influence in research to both, understanding them as “functioning together, on the same epistemological level” (2007: 111). This suggestion further speaks to the primary integration of embodied practice as part of the knowledge production process of this thesis, which includes a wide array of movement and writing practices.

Practice-as-research is a way of working that allows the researcher-maker to generate knowledge that he or she would not be able to generate

¹⁸ Nelson’s 2013 publication *Practice as Research in the Arts* includes six chapters that each speak to regionally different approaches and traditions. Three further publications provide national overviews: Barrett and Bolt (2007) for Australia, Allegue et al. (2009) for the UK and Riley and Hunter (2009) for the US.

otherwise. A central shift is the turn towards ‘the body’ and ‘experience’ here. Rather than excluding the body and embodied experiences from research because they are considered to be unable to produce evidence, the opposite is proposed. Performance studies scholar Tami Spry argues for example: “When the body is erased in the process(ing) of scholarship, knowledge situated within the body is unavailable” (2001: 724). Practice-as-research therefore provides an academic research context in which the body and embodied experiences are *traced* rather than *erased*, just like bone can be felt when tracing the shoulder blade in a somatically based partner exercise.

One aspect of this turn to the body in practice-as-research is the integration of embodied experiences into research processes. Drawing on the phenomenological emphasis of experience, practice-as-research highlights turning to *practice* in order to engage with experience. As the authors of *The Embodied Mind* point out, even though Husserl’s phenomenology allows for an “examination of experience” (Varela, Thomson and Rosch 1993: 15) it also ignores “the direct embodied aspect of experience” and ultimately remains entirely theoretical (1993: 17). They further assess that Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of experience stresses “the pragmatic, embodied context of human experience, but in a purely theoretical way” (1993: 19). This research therefore seeks to re-emphasise the turn to direct experience rather than a theoretical acknowledgement of its relevance and seeks to answer Varela, Thompson and Rosch’s call for a method that “can provide an examination of human experience in both its reflective and its immediate, lived aspects” (1993: 21) with: practice-as-research in dance.

A central methodological premise of practice-as-research is thus the relevance and validity of embodied experience and “feeling with” as research practices, for which methodological traditions of dance ethnography provide a useful foundation. Leading figures such as dance ethnographer Deidre Sklar have argued and evidenced since the early 1990s that the ethnographic study of dance “is necessarily grounded in the body and the body’s experience” (1991: 6). Sklar articulately describes and argues that there is “no other way to approach the felt dimensions of movement experience than through the researcher’s own

body” (2000: 71). Most of her writing on methodology focuses on what she terms “empathic kinaesthetic perception” (Sklar 2001: 31) or “feeling with” (Sklar 1991: 8), arguing that this “kind of ‘connected knowing’ produces a very intimate kind of knowledge, a taste of those ineffable movement experiences that can’t be easily put into words” (Sklar 2001: 32). It is filtering through what was sensed and “linking bodily sensation with other senses and with verbalization”, that subsequently allows for a pluri-dimensional understanding of actions, events and their meaning (Sklar 2006: 106).

Through the work of dance scholars such as Sklar and Barbara Browning (e.g. *Samba: Resistance in Motion*, 1995), the arguments for embodied, at times even passionate, research have been spelled out for subsequent researchers to be made use of. Dance ethnography as a field offers a range of methodological considerations that support the conceptualization of the body itself as a locus of intelligible understanding and the commitment to embodied experiences. I also agree, however, with anthropologist Sally Ann Ness’s cautionary remarks, that the shift towards embodied research practices does not inevitably cause “an epistemological or philosophical shift of any particular kind”, although it certainly has capacity to do so (2004: 138). Ness analyses a whole range of possibilities between “observation-driven” (2004: 125) and “participation-driven” (2004: 131) research, making the case that a disembodied observational approach does not necessarily preclude a valid analysis of felt experiences in movement (2004: 128). She further notes that embodied practice can still result in writing that seems to be “derived from observation alone [...] even though participation may have been a main, or even the primary method” (2004: 131). Many factors thus determine how embodied experience ultimately informs research practice, such as prior training in creative and movement practices, but also training in practice-as-research or embodied dance ethnography as two strands that allow to effectively research with and through the body.

The research activities and methods of this thesis

The following sections provide an audit of the research activities undertaken and position and discuss the methods applied. The tools I have worked with were participant observation, fieldnotes and interviews, movement-based writing and photography, and research installations. Movement-based writing and photography, as well as research installations, were methods that I developed particularly in and from the context of this thesis. These methods of experimental documentation and dissemination have been significant in the development of the central insights of this thesis and are as relevant as my processes of participant observation and interviewing. Movement-based writing and photography allowed me to meet embodied experiences in a way that a more distanced and scholarly tone of writing did not. Both further impacted the structure and visual presentation of this thesis and I consider them to be practices that also contribute to practice-as-dissemination, a term I have coined in my writing on research installations (Kramer 2011, 2012b).

Researching from Within

As a whole this thesis has consciously been produced from within – that is through participating in the work of the artistic community of which I am myself a part and in confederation with a wide variety of materials. My way of working resonates with Haskell, Linds and Ippolito’s proposal to position research as unfolding in “instances of complicity” (2002: abstract) and their argument that “knowing emerges collectively through engagement in shared action” (2002: para 7). As participant-observer, collaborator, student, dance maker and researcher I have engaged with the work of well-established practitioners of contemporary outdoor dance in the natural environment in the frame of this practice-as-research project and beyond.

This research does not stem from distanced, but from immersive and embodied critique. Barad contends that critique is currently “over-rated, over-

emphasized, and over-utilized” and the methods I have applied and introduce in this chapter seek to counterbalance her observation that critique is all too often:

a destructive practice meant to dismiss, to turn aside, to put someone or something down – another scholar, another feminist, a discipline, an approach, et cetera. So this is a practice of negativity that I think is about subtraction, distancing and othering. (Barad 2012c: 49)

Rather than adding to the climate of distance, negativity and dismissal that Barad describes here, this chapter builds on and argues for immersive scholarship and practices of *togetherness*, a term that draws on Ingold who suggests: “Where studying *of* is a process of othering, studying *with* is a process of togetherness” (Ingold 2011: 226, original emphasis). During the research process I therefore immersed myself in studying *with* contemporary outdoor dance practitioners whose years of practice much outnumbered my own and a wide variety of materials of the world at large.

Before the term practice-as-research was coined, theatre maker Jerzy Grotowski (1933 - 1999) proposed in 1978 that an understanding of his paratheatrical work was only possible from within. He suggested:

when there is no division between actor and spectator, when every participant of the process is a person who is doing, then a description ostensibly from the outside, [...] one that tries to grasp what is happening and why, [...] can only lead to misunderstandings [...]. Only a description “from within” is possible here. (Quoted by Kumiega 1985: 86 in May 2005: 345/346)

This quote speaks of Grotowski’s key decision in the late 1960s to “leave the theatre” and work with paratheatrical processes “involving other people and nature” (The Grotowski Institute n.d.), rather than rehearsing work for an audience. The workshops and trainings I have attended as part of my research can be positioned as related to Grotowski’s paratheater in the sense of being intensive events set in the natural environment of which all participants were a part. Mutual witnessing belonged to the fundamental structure and an

audience was hardly ever neatly separable.¹⁹ Apart from my practice submission *body, trees & things*, the open day of *The Ecological Body Workshop* (2011, Suryodarmo and Reeve), to which I return in chapter five, was the only event that invited an audience. But in the latter instance some members of this audience also contributed small-scale performances to the event. In terms of *body, trees & things*, which I fully discuss in chapter seven, I structured the event so that audience members were offered moments of participation such as walking a specified path to and from the performance site, being invited to add to a documentary installation and sharing food at the end of the event.

Since the strands of contemporary outdoor dance I have researched are more strongly defined by workshops, trainings and individual practice rather than by performance output, I suggest similarly to Grotowski that the most adequate form of research in this context happens from within. I overall enjoyed this position and felt grateful for the possibility of such a close investigation of my artistic home territory, but also realised that it is no easy feat to navigate my position. ‘Home’ of course is something I did not want to put at risk and at times I felt particularly exposed and uncomfortable because of this intimate connection. Particularly at the outset I felt fearful of ‘getting things wrong’ and the risk of a falling out with the individuals whose work I was researching. Anthropologists Lynne Hume and Jane Mulcock acknowledge such feelings as a likely part of participant observation and state: “Fear, self-doubt, and feelings of failure can haunt us throughout our entire stay in the field” (2004: xxiii). In my own research journey the worrisome feelings faded once I focused on my own experiences and aimed at being as specific as possible in recording them. The emergence of materiality as my central concern provided further and very literal grounding. With this focus I began to research dance practices in terms of their particular relationships with materiality and what

¹⁹ I use the terms ‘witness’ and ‘witnessing’ throughout the thesis inspired by my experiences of *Authentic Movement*. This movement form is “based on the relationship between a mover and a witness” (Adler 2002: xvi) and special attention is given to non-judgemental witnessing. Poynor also works with this sense of witnessing and suggests for example to “not shoot with arrows through the eyes” and to “receive” the dancing of the mover as a witness (fieldnotes 24.01.2011).

they might have to offer to my inquiry of material agency, rather than feeling like I had to produce an evaluation of the work of other practitioners.

Audit of Research Activities

The first central set of research activities involved participation in the working practices of well-established contemporary movement artists whose focus lies on working in the natural environment. My fieldwork included workshops with Jennifer Monson (two), Helen Poynor (four), Sandra Reeve and Suprpto Suryodarmo (one) and Simon Whitehead (two), as well as participating in the foundational year of Helen Poynor's *Walk of Life* Training Programme.²⁰ I further draw on working with Bettina Mainz for a period of about ten years prior to beginning the PhD as well as communicating and small-scale collaborations with her throughout.

I have further conducted three formal interviews with Helen Poynor, two with Simon Whitehead and one with Suprpto Suryodarmo with additional informal conversations of which I have produced written memos as well as phone or email conversations in order to clarify specific questions (with Whitehead, Poynor, Reeve and Mainz).²¹ In addition I have produced many pages of fieldnotes as well as drawings and photographs. These research activities mainly took place between March 2010 and August 2011 after which I moved on to the second central set of research activities that consisted of producing, documenting and asking questions of my own movement and performance practice.

My research approach does not lend itself to numbers and statistics, as engagements and formats varied greatly. One attempt to produce numbers resulted in a total of around 35 days spent in workshops, 15 days in Poynor's

²⁰ Full list of workshop titles, locations and dates: **Jennifer Monson**: *Presence, Space and Monsters* (Berlin, 12. – 16.07.2010), *4x4 Dance, Body and the Environment* (Findhorn and Dundreggan Estate, Scotland, 18. – 29.04.2011, I left on the 26th), **Helen Poynor**: *Spring Awakening 2010* (Charmouth, 19. – 21.03.2010), *Midsummer Songs* (Charmouth, 26. – 27.06.2010), *Spring Awakening 2011* (Charmouth, 01. – 03.04.2011), *Women, Rocks and Water* (Branscombe, 23. – 25.03.2012), *Walk of Life, Foundational year* (Beer and Charmouth, September 2010 – May 2011), **Sandra Reeve and Suprpto Suryodarmo**: *The Ecological Body* (Charmouth, 05.06.2011 – 11.06.2011), **Simon Whitehead**: *4x4 Dance, Body and the Environment* (Findhorn and Dundreggan Estate, Scotland, 18. – 29.04.2011), *Locator 22, at SEA* (Pentre Ifan, Preseli Hills, Wales, 16. – 19.07.2011).

²¹ List of interviews and dates: **Helen Poynor** 29.06.2010, 11.01.2011, 13.04.2011; **Suprpto Suryodarmo** 09.06.2011; **Simon Whitehead** 23.11.2010 (unrecorded), 07.12.2010

foundation training over a period of nine-months that further included two individual sessions with Poynor and the commitment to weekly solo-practice, three large and public and three small and semi-public research installations, a year long process of performance making leading to three intermittent and one final performance, roughly 150 pages of (computer written) fieldnotes, around seven handwritten notebooks (including quite small ones), four A3 drawing pads filled with drawings as well as four films, innumerable photographs and uncountable bodily memories. From all these activities I have drawn to enlighten my questions on material agency in contemporary outdoor dance practices and more specifically on how intermaterial confederations impact dancing and dance making in ways that could usefully spill into practices of living.

Participant Observation, Fieldnotes and Interviews

As part of the data gathering process I employed classical qualitative methods of ethnographic research such as participant observation, fieldnotes and interviews. Sociologist Helen Thomas thoroughly discusses the wide reaching post-positivist, feminist and postmodern shifts that have taken place in regard to ethnographic research methodologies and provides a clear understanding of the dance ethnographer “as a situated embodied individual who has to approach the area of study in a self-reflexive manner” (2003: 81).²² For me this self-reflection primarily took place in fieldnotes and drawings that I produced during the processes of participant observation as well as alongside my own movement practice. These were the places and times in which I sorted through my various positions of student, friend, collaborator and researcher, as well as recording what happened during each day of a workshop or training. Participant observation, a “core activity in ethnographic fieldwork” (Emerson,

²² The potentials of embodied research are particularly explored in dance ethnographies, but also employed outside of this specialised field. In her part of the introduction to *Anthropologists in the Field* Hume for example describes that, “through my embodied experience of attempting to participate and observe, I gained a better understanding of the difficulties of Aboriginal community life” (2004: xiv). Barbara Browning further quotes Clifford’s understanding that “participant observation obliges its practitioners to experience, at a bodily as well as an intellectual level, the vicissitudes of translation” (Clifford 1988 cited in Browning 1995: xix), showing that implying the body and physical participation into research was neither invented by nor is it restricted to dance ethnographers.

Fretz, and Shaw 2007: 353), slowly also became another principal method of my research.

Today's understandings of participant observation hold space for personal implication and fallibility, positioning researchers not as neutral observers discovering the truth, but as situated and embodied individuals, which necessarily influence the process of research. But participant observation also has a more positivist past. In Friedrichs' and Lüdtkke's sociological manual *Participant Observation: Theory and Practice* from the mid 1970s, for example, the authors state their aim to be “the controlled, i.e. standardised participant observation of various objects in a field by several observers on the basis of a uniform observation schedule” (1975: ix). My fieldnotes were nothing of the like. I did not follow an observation schedule, only the commitment to produce handwritten notes throughout a workshop in a way that did not negatively impact my practice or that of others as well as sitting down with my computer and recollecting the whole day each evening until everything I needed to write down had been written.

Data gathered through participant observation is traditionally collected in the form of written fieldnotes and/or audio/video recordings, in the understanding of embodied dance research however, also as “bodily memory” (Sklar 2000: 75). Thus my body, involved in practice, was also involved in data gathering and the research I did further encouraged, impacted and clarified my working approaches in the natural environment. One of the potentials of embodied participant observation in dance research is that dance is defined by what Sklar calls the “double act of moving and feeling oneself moving” (2000: 72). The kinaesthetic sense of feeling oneself moving opens a door towards accessing the experience of dancing and makes the body “capable of generating not just practices, but also ideas” (2000: 73) as Sklar argues building on Susan Leigh Foster’s notion of bodily writing (1995).

In addition to embodied participant observation and extensive fieldnote writing I also conducted interviews with the individual practitioners with whose work I engaged. In many interview situations a central question pivots around the researcher’s ability to operate ethically in a field to which they do

not belong, particularly if researching from a position of privilege vis-à-vis the research subjects. This privilege is often manifest in the ability to exit the field when desired or when the job is done, an issue discussed in Barbara Sherman Heyl's article on interviewing in the *Handbook of Ethnography* (2007: 347) where she draws on the work of feminist ethnographer Judith Stacey (1988). I found myself however in the contrary situation in that I did research in a field of which I was already a part, or, when this was not the case, one that I wanted to enter or belong to, rather than having to exit again. A decision I therefore took from the start and developed in collaboration with the practitioners I engaged with, was to negotiate research agreements that would respect the artist's individual needs and interests in seeing what I 'did' with the data. In one case this entailed, based on the artist's request, sharing all interview transcripts as well as all writing prior to publication. In this case we simultaneously agreed (in writing) that I still had the freedom to state what I needed to, as long as it was clearly framed as my understanding of the practice rather than presented as the practice itself. Whilst this agreement worried me in the beginning, it developed fruitfully and insured a sound connection with movement practice also in the writing-up stages as our dialogue continued beyond the direct encounters in movement practice.

The misrepresentation of an individual's work turned out to be the main concern in these agreements, which is again a known and much discussed problem in ethnographic research on 'others' (e.g. Clifford and Marcus 1986 or Minh-ha 1989). Data in hand it is all too often only the researcher who decides what is represented and how. Many individuals who participate in research projects may not be aware of this issue, yet artists are of a cohort that is acutely aware of the relevance of how their work is represented in the public domain.²³

At the outset of my research I had anticipated that interviewing would be my main method of data gathering, but it became much less important

²³ For an in-depth investigation of the relationship between dance practitioners and dance scholars in the university context see for example Pollard et al (2010): 'A gift of writing? Choreographer and writer collaborations in the university.'

throughout the process. The main insights have been gathered through the direct physical involvement with my own movement practice and that of others and the development and application of various experimental documentation and dissemination practices. The interviews I conducted however did support the contextualisation of these practice-based methods and were especially valuable to gather biographical and background information that was not easily available elsewhere.

I noted overall that I found the process of interviewing more stressful than anticipated. Reflecting on the third interview that I conducted with Poynor I noticed for example that my mind was constantly checking if anything Poynor mentioned was answering my research questions (interview memo, 13.04.2011). I was never quite at ease with the process of interviewing and always felt some weight of responsibility on my shoulders of guiding the interview in whatever could be considered the right direction. One method I developed to support my interview process was to produce A3 mind-map type interview-maps, on which I wrote, drew or glued the questions that I wanted to ask, some background information I had gathered or open threads that remained from a prior interview. These I could briefly share with my interviewees before we began talking and also use them to remind myself of what I wanted to ask as the course of the conversation began to take its own flow. This allowed for a certain transparency as to where I was headed with the interview and offered a way of visualising and materialising a starting point and loose guide for the interview process.

The traveller metaphor that Steinar Kvale (1996) introduces for qualitative research interviews thus works well for me. As Sherman Heyl notes the

traveler metaphor sees the interviewer as on a journey [...]. The route may be planned ahead of time, but will lead to unexpected twists and turns as interviewer-travelers follow their particular interests and adjust their paths according to what those met along the way chose to share. (2007: 371)

Upon realising that the interviews were not as central as I had anticipated, I began to adapt to the practice-as-research process also as a methodological journey, as described in the quote above. I soon began to develop my own research methods (drawing on those of others), which I felt were better suited to meet the kind and plurality of data I was encountering in dance. The methods I developed and applied in particular were research installations and the integration of movement-based writing and photography into my practice-as-research process, and it is these that I discuss next.

Movement-Based Writing and Photography

This section addresses the use of different registers of writing and image making as practices that informed the processes of data gathering and making as well as the visual presentation of this thesis. Whilst this text is predominantly written in consciously subjective but academic style, words arranged in poetic shape, excerpts of fieldnotes, drawings and photographs are interspersed throughout. Drawing on anthropologist Ivan Brady's writing on research poetry, I place such insertions into this text in order to "write about experience [...] from a sensual perspective" (2004: 628) and to contribute to sensual scholarship more broadly, a term Brady draws from fellow anthropologist Paul Stoller (1997). I position such insertions as *repositories* created through *movement-based writing* and *movement-based photography*, repositories that contain and offer information, for example about the site and my working within it. I place such repositories into the scholarly text as a necessary epistemological act for this research project, which fundamentally builds on the multisensory knowledge of moving. "Corporeal knowledge degrades when transmuted into discursive practice; experience is uprooted in the act of writing it down" (2005: 347) explains theatre scholar Theresa May. Resonant with her words I contend that one way of recalibrating this loss is to weave techniques such as poetic writing and image making into the practice of movement as well as into scholarly work that emerges from it.

My concern here is to contribute to dance scholarship that keeps the door open to movement experience in a way that does not “insulate us from the experience” as trauma researcher Sophie Tamas (2009) writes, but rather provides access to it. Though Tamas is working on the recovery and articulation of domestic abuse, her points are valuable for scholarship linked to embodied experiences in the widest sense. Her central point is to challenge the convention of “sound[ing] OK” and “turn[ing] trauma into knowledge” (2009: para 10) in a way that lifts the self out of and away from the experience and into scholarly sense-making. Whilst acknowledging the need to do so both as a personal and academic survival strategy, she argues with Haraway’s classic text on situated knowledges (1988) that this kind of “god-trick positions the other as a colonized object” which in the context of autoethnographic scholarship is “inside us” (Tamas 2009: para 11). It is thus a way of writing that stays in connection with self and experience she is arguing for: “Switching into observational mode may let me produce knowledge and avoid uncomfortable feelings but what it costs is that I never really experience my experience. I’m not where I am” (2009: para 16).

In line with Tamas’s suggestions this thesis includes writing and images that speak from the experiences of moving, rather than removing the self from the instance and writing about it from a distanced and analytic vantage point. Such writing, drawing and photography is intricately linked to my movement practice and formed part of my data gathering and documentation practices. With critical management scholars Garance Maréchal and Stephen Linstead it is “derived from a specific activity and seeks to embody the rhythms, time and space of that activity” (2010: 75). It is the particular qualities, insights and sensations of moments in time, of corporeal experiences and of the materialities of a location that I wish to bring to this thesis, resonating with Brady’s call that we “need theories of the world that actually involve our interactions with it, not just abstractions from it” (2004: 633). Using photography in this context has particularly helped me to transport the concrete sensual qualities of the materials on site onto the pages of this thesis, capturing atmospheres, textures, colours and arrangements of the things I saw,

felt, noticed or touched. Movement-based writing and photography both offered me *differently verbal*²⁴ and non-verbal ways of reaching from the sites of movement practices and instances of making into their analysis and their further interlacing with texts, theories and other experiences.



27.03., 02.05. and 25.04.2012, Stoneleigh (UK), Chestnut Site

Maréchal and Linstead (2010) discuss research poetry in the context of working with the rules-oriented form of a *metropoem*²⁵ in ethnographic research, but contend that their methodological proposals are transferable to other settings. Useful for the positioning of my writing and photography is their emphasis on the writer's immersion into a specific activity as well as the focus on mobility, both as a context in which writing is produced (in their case the subway, in my case contemporary outdoor dance) as well as a positioning of research poetry in a wider sense. They note that "research poetry cannot [...] justify itself in terms of a romanticized turning toward, and encapsulation of, the essential other, just as it cannot claim access to an essential self" (Maréchal and Linstead 2010: 69) as voiced by critics of research poetry. Rather, they argue, it "remains always in motion" (Maréchal and Linstead 2010: 69), thus offering a non-essentialist vantage point on research poetry similar to Brady who considers "poetry as a self-constructing form of discovery" (2004: 630). In light of these writings I do not consider my writing and photography to access or express fixed truths of movement practice. I rather argue that such creative

²⁴ The term *differently verbal* draws on my practice-as-research with Poynor. The original term I developed in this context was the notion of being *differently social*, an idea that I return to in chapter eight. Both terms are coined in relation to the commonly used term *differently able*, which aims to replace the derogative term *disabled*. Rather than expressing inability, differently abled points to abilities that differ from what is understood to be the norm. With differently social and differently verbal I thus highlight a variation from the norm of being in a social situation or in this specific case above documenting movement practice.

²⁵ Maréchal and Linstead's term "metropoetry" is derived from the term "poème de metro" by French Oulipian poet Jacques Jouet. They explain: "In our broader deployment of this term, the Paris métro becomes symbolic of other forms of movement, and so we condense the terms and drop the accent to create the neologism *metropoem*, with *metropoetry* indicating the genre" (2010: 76).

processes are valuable collaborators for articulating multisensory, embodied knowledges “in motion”.

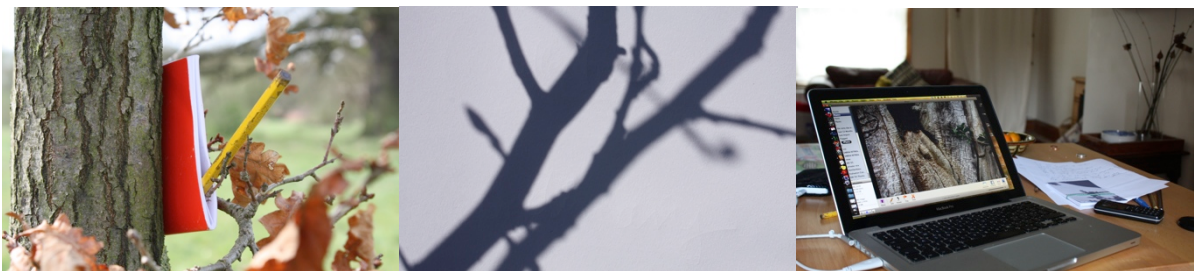
Pathways between moving, drawing, single word or poetic writing and publishing/performing are already to some degree established in the field of dance and dance research. My working strategies thus build on the use of creative writing in dance research as well as longstanding movement practices and publications that employ imagery and writing.²⁶ The greatest difficulty still remains in combining writing that stems directly from experiences of movement with the writing and publishing of academic texts, as the requirements and conventions governing the knowledge producing economy of the academy hardly leave space for unfinished sentences. Yet examples for creative writing practices in the context of dance scholarship do exist and include work by dancing and writing scholars such as Niki Pollard (in collaboration with influential British choreographer Rosemary Lee, e.g. 2006, 2010) or Alys Longley (e.g. Longley and Tate 2012, Longley 2013a, 2013b). Further examples include canonical publications such as the already mentioned writings in dance ethnography by Ness (1996) and Sklar (2000) as well as Ann Cooper Albright’s (2007) multimodal work on Loïe Fuller dance history.

Since the early stages of my research I have been concerned with the divide between *moving* and *writing*: coming directly from movement practice, my body filled with sensorial experience, I arrange words outside of grammatical shape and reason, with colours and images filling the page alongside words. Sitting at my desk, writing and revising thesis chapters or articles, my sentences are in grammatical order and “make sense”. Yet the memories of movement, insights and understanding gained in and through practice seem to belong to a different world that is difficult to access through

²⁶ Prominent examples of using imagery and creative writing in combination with somatic movement practice include the work of Anna Halprin (Tamalpa Institute) or Bonnie Bainbridge-Cohen (School of Body-Mind Centering®). Published books and articles that contain practice-based, non-linear, experiential writing and images some of which are frequently used in both dance scholarship and dance practice include Tufnell and Crickmay 1993 and 2003, Olsen 1991, 2002 and 2014, Frank and McHose 2006, Deveril 2008 and Rytz 2009 and Garrett Brown et al. 2011.

thinking alone. Longley similarly asserts that: “Travelling between the highly physical, complex world of kinesthetic knowledge to the descriptive, documental or conceptual register of written language is often an uncomfortable, if not painful, ride” (2013b: 70). I have particularly found the work of Ness, Sklar and Longley to provide successful experiments of weaving embodied experiences into scholarly writing. Ness and Sklar achieve this through dialoguing with extended fieldnotes, Longley through her inclusion of creative writing into academic text and the publication of artist’s books that stem from movement practice. Sklar specifically suggests to understand writing in relationship to dancing as “an aesthetic *embrace* that invites sensuous opening, almost as if words need to be irresistible, to partner bodily experience at all its levels of intensity, intimacy, and multiplicity” (Sklar 2000: 73, original emphasis).

In the making of my thesis I sought out techniques that were able to partner and co-exist with the sensibilities of movement practice and bodily experience, techniques allowing for reflection and documentation alongside, without leaving the multisensory capacities of the body and the generative and meaning making potential of creative movement practice behind.



14. and 01.04.2012, Stoneleigh (UK), Chestnut Site, 7.04.2012, Coventry (UK)

A notebook close by, I write and draw between moving, sitting against a studio wall or under a tree, lying on the floor or on the grass. I take photographs when compositions of materials, structures, light or spatiality exceed my verbal capacities or inclinations and I sit with my laptop in the evening and write some more.

Sometimes my hands are cold or wet, sometimes I'm hungry, sometimes I have just slept. Rather than producing writing only in retrospect and with analytical, explanatory and interpretative aims or photography that documents through factual accuracy, such writing and photographing happens on site and alongside my movement practice. Longley's propositions here support this way of working as "experimental documentation" that is not about "taming and containing creative practices in tidy, conventional forms" (2013a: 77) but that is in itself "a creative practice that emerges from working between creative spaces" (2013a: 78). Rather than to "make sense of" my movement practice I write and take photographs to record and extend inclinations and ideas that arise during movement practice, even if my verbal or visual outputs make "no sense". Whilst I seek to capture some of what is happening in movement, I practise documentation as a continuation and extension of movement practice into writing and photographing, speaking *from* rather than *about* moving, in order to not exclude the very material I am aiming to grapple with here.²⁷

I refer to the techniques I employ alongside dancing as *movement-based writing* and *movement-based photography*, resonant of and drawing on Longley's work on movement-initiated writing (Longley and Tate 2012, Longley 2013a, 2013b). These approaches are closely related and I argue with Longley for a positioning of such moving and writing as "co-extensive" and "imbricated" (Longley and Tate 2012: 234) as well as aiming to evoke rather than describe experience (2013b: 79). The terminological difference is thus only of nuances, but I consider movement-*initiated* writing to have a stronger emphasis on the creation of something new – such as artist's books or choir-lyrics in the case of Longley's work (e.g. the *kinaesthetic archive book* and *Circle* in Longley 2013b). Longley carefully theorises and practically engages with the spatial and material specificities of paper as well as the implications of understanding writing and books as "sites of performance" (2013b: 80). I similarly take some of my writings

²⁷ I take this notion of speaking *from* an experience rather than *about* it primarily from practising with Poynor, who has repeatedly encouraged us to do just that when sitting in a circle and verbally or visually sharing our experiences of moving (interview memo, 13.04.2011).

and photographs forward into making documentary booklets, installations, exhibitions or to co-produce academic text, however I consider these writings and photographs as intermediators (a term I return to in chapter eight) rather than new art works that have been initiated through movement practice. My primary concern thus remains the exploration, development, documentation and dissemination of movement practice.

Working with movement-based writing and photography in the context of my practice has offered me useful reflective, intermediate and transitional spaces between kinaesthetic and verbal expression. As Pollard notes, writing that emerges in close relationship to movement practice might need extensive revision on the road to publication with the risk of “becoming something other than practice and practitioner-focused” (Pollard et al. 2010: 157/158). I have thus chosen to insert writing and images that stem directly from moving into the main body of academic text, rather than revising it until it has become “something other”. And whilst all poetic and visual insertions are labelled with the date, site and context of their origin, not all of them are further analysed in the main body of text in an effort to also allow for a few instances of unmediated access to practice.

As mentioned in the introduction of this section I consider movement-based writing and photography to produce *repositories* that are generated by movement practice and contain condensed information and knowledge from the corporeal, embodied, multisensorial and differently verbal nature of movement practice. Pollard argues that such writing is often poetic, “carries not descriptive, but inventive, talismanic force” and “might be said to compress mobile, charged potential” (Lee and Pollard 2010: 28). It is this idea of cradling charged information or potential, that faces both towards practices of creation as well as dissemination that I seek to bring forward with the term *repository*. The beginning of the poetic reflection entitled ‘residue’ on my participation in *LOCATOR No. 22, at SEA* with Simon Whitehead might serve as an example here, containing multiple strands of information related to my participation:

at sea
you say
and we go
there

20. July 2011, Locator No. 22

These few words cite the workshop title and email announcement beginning with “at SEA” and speak of the day on which we walked from our house in the forest, following a stream down to the sea, through woods and village, dunes and sand, swimming in the end in a rough sea, arriving back home late in the evening, tired. I argue that many of the central points are already captured in these very few words – a sense of guidance and leadership, of leading and being lead, into possibility and impossibility - *at sea you say and we go there*.

I propose that such repositories have the possibility to contain condensed information and interface both with the felt world of movement practice as well as with the felt world of receiving it, for example through scholarship. It is thus my hope that these repositories “could make you feel something” (Tamas 2009: para 20), could touch your embodied experience as a reader and thus allow for different modalities of knowledge production, dissemination and reception to be part of this thesis.

Research Installations

As a method that allowed me to specifically combine practice-as-research and practice-as-dissemination, that is the gathering of data and the communication of my working process and/or results, I worked with research installations throughout the whole process of making this PhD. I consider these installations to be an idiosyncratic method tightly connected to the specificities of my project, although adaptations for other projects are thinkable. As I state elsewhere I understand a research installation to have “material as well as metaphorical properties, it is *something* that is both static and there, yet it is also processual and changing, as I generally invite participants to intervene in the construction” (Kramer 2012b: 170). I developed this method without

following a particular model. The first installation emerged from my desire to have a conversation with my supervisors in the physical presence of my research materials. I wanted to create a possibility in which we could literally walk into the research and speak about it there and then. I could have taken my supervisors on site to move with them, but I was looking for a medium that allowed me to share my work ‘off-site’ and that already offered a transliteration rather than an enactment of dancing. I was also keen to find a form that allowed me to combine the various media that were relevant to my research such as movement, writing, photography and drawing.

I thus produced a first installation in a small theatre studio space at Coventry University in June 2010, towards the end of the first year of my PhD. It was installed for a couple of days and I had placed on the floor all the books I engaged with at the time along with post-it notes and comments written in chalk. I further zigzagged coarse string across the floor, which became a recurring item of all following installations, an aspect I discuss in chapter eight in consideration of *things as intermediators*. An audio score of live improvised music was playing that had been recorded in a session in which I was co-improvising with four musicians associated with Coventry University. In future version the audio scores always stemmed from my research sites, but in this instance this sound material was as close as I could get to sound that was recorded during research. Visitors of the installation were given time to explore the space on their own and encouraged to leave comments in the form of post-it notes.



30.06.2010, Coventry University (UK), Room 206

Most notably from this first instance I remember a comment from a PhD colleague that suggested installing the items three-dimensionally, which I took up for all subsequent versions. Looking back at the material now, I notice that

central themes of this thesis were already present in the first installation, such as the statement “the door is the body” in relation to participating in Poynor’s work, whose focus on the body I develop in chapter six.

I had not originally planned to take this installation work further, but it took on a life of its own and I was encouraged to share it further. I began to take installations to conferences and dance events as an additional way of communicating (my) research. One such instance was my installation *Dancing in Nature Space* at the Nordic Forum for Dance Research 2011 in Odense, Denmark. I discuss this instance more specifically in ‘Of Not Getting Lost: Making Use of Materials’ (Kramer 2011) and ‘Dancing in Nature Space – Attending to Materials’ (Kramer 2012b). In both articles I argue for the use of practice not only as a means of research, but also as a way of building “corridors that extend from research and performance as directly as possible into dissemination” (Kramer 2011: 1). I argue for the use of installations here because: “Rather than reducing the three-dimensional, spatial and embodied practice of dance to a text on a page, an installation introduces possibilities of continued embodied engagement and participation in a research process” (Kramer 2012b: 161).

After the experiences at NOFOD 2011 I began to frame the installations with a workshop structure, beginning with an introductory movement task that invited participants to turn their attention to the materiality of their own body (for example through a touch-based exercise) followed by the invitation to enter the installation and play with as well as comment on all the items placed in it, not feeling any sense of ‘do not touch’. Visitors were encouraged to move with the objects in the space, to look at images or film, to listen to audio scores over headphones, to play with instruments and to add material and comments as desired. This particular structure ends with the task to take one particular item out of the installation and meeting outside of the installation space for a reflection circle.



This item has been removed due to data protection. The unabridged version of this thesis can be viewed at the Lanchester library, Coventry University

12.07.2013, The Walk-In PhD, Conference of Dance and Somatic Practices, Coventry University (UK)

Whilst the installations are predominantly a documentation and dissemination practice, they also bring forth new data and questions through the visitors' engagements with the installation, their handling of materials, their writing of comments or leaving voice messages on a recording device. The duration and spatiality of an installation allow for a physical being-with research, as if "walking-into" a text, a documentation of a performance, a process of thought or a practice of making. One of my installations was thus called "The Walk-In PhD", presented at the Dance and Somatic Practices Conference at Coventry University, 12 – 14 July 2013.

Concluding Thoughts

Whilst the methods of data gathering and dissemination I applied in the context of this thesis allowed me to gather data of a wide variety and many kinds, I also noted in the process of 'writing-up' that more consistency in my usage of methods could have helped the process of shaping the thesis and building my arguments. I still trust what expert for qualitative research methods Valerie Janesick calls the sixth or intuitive sense that all researchers use in their own way (1998: 61/62) but suppose that it could have eased my handling of the data, had I made clearer methodological choices earlier on.

Yet a firm commitment to adapting to the research process and to dealing with my core inquiry from different angles rather than applying standardised methods, allowed for meeting the vitality and unpredictability of my field. This way of working served me well in gathering nuanced data, however the breadth of it also made it difficult to establish a clear overview in the end. In some way I had gathered more and more diverse data than I could

fully handle. This is closely related to the nature of embodied, experiential or creative data that necessarily spills over and breaks through the possibilities of being viewed and analysed through a stable system. Because I recorded and responded to my research field with movement-based writing and photography, memo writing, interviews, drawing, dancing and installations, much of the data was unique in such a way that it was hard to systematically analyse across data modes.

In summary I argue that the challenges I note are currently inherent to practice-as-research. My testing and discussing of innovative methods contributes to this emerging field. Whilst proliferating in many directions the methods I employed allowed me to successfully engage with my research topic of materiality. Comments that visitors left in installations included for example notes such as “A feeling of bringing the outside in ... And the inside, into ourselves” or “Heavy, weighted, textures – I can smell the sea, I can feel that weight” (installation comments, 17.01.2011) which speak to the ability of materials to transport qualities and characteristics across sites. The examples of movement-based writing and photography included in this thesis further invite the materials I dealt with and experiences I made to be present in this thesis. Mediated by writing, drawing and photography, which bring their own material registers and resonances, but nonetheless present in their colours and immediate effects on me, for example, rather than serving only as the background on which this thesis draws.

The next chapter now turns to experiments with outdoor dance in the context of the evolution of modern dance, offering a field review that traces the connections and frictions between the historical and the contemporary field.

My idea of dancing is to leave my body free to the sunshine. (Isadora Duncan in Daly 2002: 101)

4. Practical Placing: Roots and Sprouts

Introduction: Historical Roots in the Making

The following chapter introduces the work of early 20th century modern dance pioneers who turned to the natural environment as a place to practise dance. This was a radical choice as dance performed for an audience was still bound to a theatre setting in the cultural context of Western Europe at this time, a tradition that began to flourish centuries earlier with the French royal ballets of King Louis XIV in the 17th century (with works such as *Ballet de la nuit*, 1653). The 20th century dancers I introduce here were pioneers who broke with the movement style of ballet and its indoor setting. Apart from this specific Western European performing arts context, dance has a stronger outdoor tradition as community or social dances or danced rituals. But rather than presenting a transcultural history of outdoor dance in the natural environment, I develop a very specific pathway here: It is that of professional dance and movement practitioners active in the context of performing arts who place their work outdoors, in personal and teaching practices as well as in performances. In the Euro-American context in which this thesis and I myself are placed, this field has historically been predominantly shaped within communities of white dancers and especially so by female practitioners, which is also the strongest cohort among the practitioners with whom I engaged in the context of this thesis. The workshop and training groups I participated in were similarly predominantly white, with a sizeable white male presence and a small number of women and men of colour. At the same time outdoor dance in the natural environment is quite fundamentally affected by Eastern philosophies and movement traditions. These began to enter the Western scene as modern dance practices were developed, expressed for example through a yin-yang symbol in the gable of one of the central buildings of Dresden-Hellerau, where Mary Wigman began to study Dalcroze Eurhythmics with composer and educator Émile Jaques-Dalcroze (1865 – 1950) in 1911. Martha Eddy, somatic practitioner and writer, further notes: “The transmigration of people and ideas

from the east to the western part of the globe also shaped the development of somatic practices, by exposure to the philosophies and practices of mind-body practices such as the eastern martial arts and yoga” (2009: 7). Since then the influences of Eastern movement and contemplation practices has significantly grown and remains highly influential today. This aspect is particularly reflected in this thesis, as one of the main dance traditions that influence the contemporary practitioners I engaged with is *Joged Amerta*, the work of Indonesian movement artist Suprpto Suryodarmo.

As historians have widely argued, it is no longer fathomable to find the truth in historical sources (e.g. Ankersmit 1994, White 1973). Since the by now familiar poststructuralist and postmodern turns in the humanities, historical facts or neutral records are no longer assumed to exist. On the contrary, each source needs to be considered for its originating context and in acknowledgement that the stories and connecting threads we develop are part of an endeavour of “making history” (Carter 2004: 1, Nicholas 2007: 15). Whilst imagination also plays into this process of making and creating, Carter points out that, “history is an imaginative act but it is not an arbitrary one” (2004: 3). This chapter is written in recognition of these challenges as I embark on offering a broadened perspective on contemporary outdoor dance through engaging with the making of history.

The early modern dance practitioners on whose work this chapter draws are Isadora Duncan (1877 – 1927), Rudolf von Laban (1879 – 1958), Mary Wigman (1886 – 1973), Ruby Ginner (1886 - 1978) and Madge Atkinson (1885 - 1970). Whilst much has been written about these influential figures of dance history, this chapter particularly focuses on tracing connecting threads as well as frictions between the historical and the contemporary field of dancers working in the natural environment. Both cohorts are, for example, noticeably infused with a concern for wider societal issues such as community building, wellbeing, or the broad and ever changing challenges of ‘living in this world’. On the other hand the central concept of the natural environment seems to have shifted from one that rested on concepts of eternal harmony and beauty to

a contemporary notion of the natural environment that emphasises constant change and flux. This chapter develops both connections and frictions between the historical and contemporary field to delineate more clearly the territory within which this practice-as-research project is located.

Rather than re-entering the dance archives, this chapter has been developed through looking at lenses already established by dance historians. The materials informing this chapter further include primary sources such as Duncan's "The Dance of the Future" (1903) (republished in Brayshaw and Witts 2014) or dance critic John Martin's "Characteristics of the Modern Dance" (1933) (republished in Huxley and Witts 2002) as well as Mary Wigman's writings from 1886-1973, published in English as *The Mary Wigman Book: Her Writings* (1984 [1973]).

Dancing in Modernity

The practitioners whose work this chapter draws on developed the fundamentals of their practices in the early decades of the 20th century and were mostly active in Europe (with many connections to the US). These pioneering years fall into 'modernity', a time "associated with rapid changes in society, via capitalism, bureaucracy and technological development" (Fensham 2011: 8) and a much contested umbrella term. Debated especially in the social sciences for its meanings and delineations, modernity is used here to designate a time period - the late 19th and early 20th century. Contestation of stable definitions notwithstanding, modernity was marked by significant societal shifts which impacted the art world. These included particularly the continuing and growing urbanism and industrialisation, socio-economic 'progress', significant changes in work patterns, work places and infrastructures, such as the first subways in London (1863), Paris (1900), Berlin (1902) and New York (1904). Social structures were equally under transformation, challenged for example by the early women's rights movements. Women began to demand

their share of participation in the public sphere, with the suffragette movement fighting for the right to vote across Europe and North America.²⁸

In the midst of these changes, a few pioneering dancers developed what was then called “new dance” (by Duncan 1903 in Brayshaw and Witts 2014: 167), “*Ausdruckstanz*”²⁹ (dance of expression) (by Wigman), “free dance” (by Laban 1975 [1948]: v) as well as “modern dance” (by Martin 1933 in Huxley and Witts 2002). Their practices stood in sharp opposition to classical ballet and were developed deliberately in relation to the socio-political, scientific and philosophical shifts that marked their time. Taking off their dance shoes these dancers worked in bare feet, which proposed a “radical departure” from ballet as well as becoming “the symbol of dance modernism” (Newhall 2009: 139-140). Whilst several men, such as Laban, were active creators and promoters of modern dance, it was particularly women who entered new territory as dancers and began to claim the right to compose and perform their own dances (Tomko 2004: 82). Facets of modern dance were thus aligned with more general societal shifts. As Cater notes:

These dance forms facilitated choreographic creativity by women which is not commonly found – or rather made public – in the history of Western theatre dance up to this period. They embodied new emancipations; allied with the principles of dress reform and allowed women not only to explore a much more overt relationship with their bodies through participation and performance but also to do so in the public domains of the salon, the stage and the open air. (2010: 92)

Dancers who engaged with modern dance questioned ballet as having outlived its time and considered untrue in its gravity defying aesthetics. Wigman argued in 1933 that ballet had “reached such a state of perfection that it could be developed no further” (in Huxley and Witts 2002: 404) and “lacked the movement vocabulary to allow the contemporary dancer to connect her body

²⁸ Note that ‘women’ often meant ‘white women’ here, as the analyses of the ‘public’ and ‘private’ spheres as gendered frequently focused only on white women of the middle class and “ignored the situation of working-class women, slave women, and later free women of color who toiled in the paid labour force” (2004: 82) as dance historian Linda J. Tomko notes for the US-American context.

²⁹ With regard to the term *Ausdruckstanz* dance historian Michael Huxley cautions against establishing superficial links between modern dance and Expressionism, based on loose translations such as „expressionist dance” for *Ausdruckstanz*. At the same time he acknowledges the validity of identifying “distinctive conceptual similarities” when conducting careful analyses (1994: 155).

to the larger world” (Newhall 2009: 72). What was needed instead, was dance that expressed the emotional states of the time, marked by rapid societal changes, economic instability and the trauma of the First World War. Duncan similarly fought against ballet’s ‘unnaturalness’, which she considered to be an “expression of degeneration, of living death” produced by “deformed muscles” and “deformed bones” (Duncan 1903 in Brayshaw and Witts 2014: 165). She challenged ballet’s gravity defying aesthetic and formality, which she considered unnatural and unhealthy, attacking it for producing “sterile movement which gives no birth to future movements, but dies as it is made” (Duncan 1903 in Brayshaw and Witts 2014: 165). Her alternative, to which I return further below, proposed ‘natural’ movements in line with natural laws such as gravity and responsive to the diverse and individual predispositions of the human body (Duncan 1903 in Brayshaw and Witts 2014: 166). The separation from ballet is one defining element of modern dance that also speaks of the struggles of a young art form to position itself as equal to the ranks of more established traditions of the ‘high arts’.

Active on both sides of the Atlantic, separate but also interrelated (Burt 1998), the pioneers of modern dance developed work rich in variation. Protagonists of modern dance were debating to establish a shared understanding of their teaching and performance practices and the underlying philosophical approaches, but the field was wide and varied, resisting such streamlining.³⁰ Modern dance thus never developed into one specific form, aesthetic or training and Martin famously argued that “modern dance is not a system; it is a point of view” (Martin 1933 in Huxley and Witts 2002: 300). Modern dance was, and here I follow Burt, “not a direct aesthetic expression of positivist ideologies of progress but a *progressive deconstruction* of outmoded aesthetic conventions and traditions” (1998: 15, my emphasis). Modernism and modernity, he argues, should not be conflated, as the former is not simply a

³⁰ Efforts of definition are for example traceable in an essay by Wigman student Hanya Holm on the differences between American and German modern dance in 1935 (reprinted in Partsch-Bergsohn and Bergsohn 2003, p. 57 – 61) or the debates of the early Tanzkongresse (Dancers’ Congresses) held in 1926, 1928 and 1930 in Germany.

representation of the latter. Moreover, he details that “modernisms of early modern theatre dance in Europe and North America constituted *particular responses to the experience of modernity*” (Burt 1998: 10, my emphasis). Modern dance thus unfolded through questioning and challenging conventions, and through dealing and engaging with the changes and adversities of its time. Marked by desires for truth, freedom and change, as well as a strong emphasis on physicality, modern dance developed in the spirit of offering its own exploratory suggestions and aesthetics, but resisted being systematized into one specific ‘school’.

The resistance towards the regulations and formalities of ballet resonate from the early modern break with ballet into the practices of post-modern and contemporary dance, including the outdoor strands. The multifaceted understandings of modern dance and its resistance to a coherent system mentioned above were reflected in a lack of comprehensive schools or academies. Instead, modern dance was primarily taught by individual pioneers, who grouped enthusiastic students around them. Some of them were able to maintain temporary or semi-permanent companies alongside a small school such as Wigman, others like the young Laban taught summer schools or workshop at locations such as Monte Verità, a central location for the formation of modern dance to which I return in the following section. Whilst schools for post-modern and contemporary dance such as the School for New Dance Development in Amsterdam have meanwhile developed out of the foundational break with ballet and the work of early modern pioneers, the situation of outdoor dance practices today is quite similar to that of early modern dance. Whilst there are connections between academic institutions and individual artists – Whitehead for example teaches composition at Aberystwyth University and Poynor is a visiting professor teaching outdoor practice at Coventry University - there are no schools or degrees that focus entirely on the practice of outdoor dance. Very similar to their peers a century ago, contemporary outdoor dancers are individual artists that gather students around their specific practice. But even where small schools or trainings exist, such as the “School of Movement” in Cologne (Germany) that draws on *Amerta*

and has a strong outdoor focus or Suryodarmo's Padepokan Lemah Putih in Solo, Java (Indonesia) as well as the year-long trainings that Reeve and Poynor have developed, the field offers no formal way of becoming a teacher or ways of certified professionalization.³¹

Dancing Outdoors

This section argues for the little discussed relevance of outdoor practice to the wider development of modern dance as a genre. With highlighting this connection I seek to strengthen also the place of contemporary outdoor movement practice in wider field of contemporary dance, which is similarly under-recognised. The work of Laban and Wigman may serve as examples here for the significant influence outdoor movement practice had on the formation of modern dance more widely. Both of their work significantly drew on the natural environment and both of them are central figures of modern dance.

Laban's life work drew on the natural environment throughout – first and most obviously in his early improvisational work on Monte Verità and large scale outdoor movement choir events and later through his detailed consideration of structures such as crystals in relation to movement, which he regarded to be “the discerning spirit of nature, their planes the planes of movement and the basis for his scales of movement” (Davies 2006: 35). Laban is one of the most influential figures in the development of modern dance in Europe. His impact on dance and dancers continues until today, due to his innovations in practising dance and analysing especially the relationship between movement and space, which gave rise to his famous notation system. Many of his students became dance innovators of their own, developing and carrying on his legacy, such as Wigman, Jooss, Irmgard Bartenieff (1900 – 1981) or Lisa Ullman (1907 – 1985). Contemporary institutions continue to offer certification in Laban Movement Analysis, such as the US-American Laban/Bartenieff Institute of Movement Studies or its European counterpart, the European Association for Laban/Bartenieff Movement Studies.

³¹ I discuss this topic in chapter five in relation to *Amerta Movement* more specifically.

Laban first studied visual arts in Munich and Paris and only later dedicated his life fully to dance. 1913 was the first year of Laban's renowned summer school at Monte Verità, where he began his teaching career and is said to have asked his students to "throw off the constraints of materialist society and devote themselves to nature and art" (Partsch-Bergsohn and Bergsohn 2003: 8). In the spirit of his time he taught at least part of the day outdoors, in the open air, beginning with "swinging scales"³² (Partsch-Bergsohn and Bergsohn 2003: 11) and making use of the landscape for improvisation. It was in the years following their initial meeting at Monte Verità in 1913 that Laban and Wigman are said to have been "laying the groundwork for a new approach to modern dance; one that was expressive of Mother Nature and human nature, that embraced the outer and the inner terrain" (Bradley 2009: 12). Reflected here is not only their pioneering spirit that brought change into the world of movement and dance, but also the prevalent notion of their time of nature as female and inherently good – a benign 'mother'.

One of Laban's large scale, outdoor ritual, performance and community event was his dance in honour of the sun (*Sonnenfest*), performed with Wigman at Monte Verità in August 1917 (Newhall 2009: 25). In these early years Laban appears to have been driven by a dual commitment of developing dances that reflected and revived a sense of community as well as being expressive of the "harmonious" structures he, like Duncan, found in nature. While further developing his thinking on spatial harmony and natural structures later in his life, for example through his study of crystals, his actual practice of working and dancing in the natural outdoors dissolved. Considering his whole life span, the work directly 'in nature' was not the central focus of Laban's practice. Yet this is where his early experiments took place and his conviction that nature provided a fundamentally relevant 'model' for movement remained throughout his career.

³² Some authors such as Wigman biographer Newhall refer to this warm-up as 'swing scales', which she further explains to be "Laban's earliest studies of a codified method of warming the body while exploring dance fundamentals of space, time and effort" (Newhall 2009: 22).

The German expressionist dancer Mary Wigman began her study with Laban in 1913 at Monte Verità, following the recommendation of painter Emil Nolde, whom she reports to have said to her: “He moves as you do and he dances as you do – without music” (Wigman 1984 [1973]: 26). Wigman describes her time working with Laban in the natural environment of Monte Verità as the decisive turning point for her career as a dancer:

Open air, meadows surrounded by trees, a sunny beach, and a small group of rather queer people. [...] We moved, we jumped, we ran, we improvised and outlined our first simple solo dances and group sketches. To me it was meant to be a short summer course, and it turned into a life’s direction. (Wigman 1984 [1973]: 33)

Her early experiments at Monte Verità and a year she spent working in solitude in Switzerland after departing from her collaboration with Laban in 1918, seem to have been the times when Wigman was exposed to and experimented most significantly with working in the natural environment. At Monte Verità, as expressed above, she thrived as a student in the experimental and nature-orientated context she found herself in and a few years later she chose to work in the surrounding nature of a Swiss sanatorium in search of recovery from exhaustion and illness. She remembers:

I worked outdoors and, like the great Isadora Duncan, I believed that as much clothing as possible should be discarded, even to stockings and shoes. [...] I worked each day as long as there was light to see. I created dances which to me seemed expressive of the joys, the sorrows, the conflicts of mankind, and finally I felt ready to come out of my unlike solitude and dance for others. [...] I brought forth my own creations, born in the solitude of the mountains. (1984 [1973]: 51)

Wigman describes the natural environment as a source of inspiration and solitude, a place to connect with deeper matters of life. ‘Life’ and the permeability between life and dance was a concern for Wigman more generally, as for her contemporaries, and Newhall argues that “all her dances were autobiographical in the deepest sense” (2009: 61). Working outside in small student groups, engaged with basic, daily life movements and concerned with

dancing, but also with life at large: As I develop in the following section, this is a multifaceted connecting thread between past and contemporary practices. The permeability between dance practices and life at large is further fully developed in chapter eight as a core aspect of contemporary practices.

Dancing Daily Life

The work of modern dancers generally developed among the fertile ground of philosophical, socio-economic and utopian (counter)movements that were emerging in both Europe and the United States in response to modernity. Many groups and individuals searched for and promoted a wider life reform (*Lebensreform*), often praising life close to nature as an ideal. Turning to the natural world for a meaningful existence had already blossomed in late 18th to mid 19th century Romanticism on which the reform movements as well as dancerly experiments of the early 20th century drew. Returning to nature – for example through living in an alternative community, following a vegetarian diet or practising dance, hiking or gymnastics *en plein air* was held with high esteem. Jeschke and Vettermann comment on the life reform movements in Germany as follows:

With a ‘back to nature’ ideal, young men and women of the bourgeoisie were searching, emotionally, if not ecstatically, for their roots, rejecting, in their eyes, the dehumanizing effects of industrialization and its resulting urbanization and alienation. (Jeschke and Vettermann 2000: 56)

The work of modern dancers in the natural environment thus developed in a time period characterised by a shared attention to ‘all things natural’ by many artists and intellectuals, accompanied and supported by broader societal reform movements. New ways of living were tried and new forms of artistic expression sought. As Fensham summarizes:

During the first quarter of the twentieth century there was a return, in the West, to notions of the ‘natural’ in diverse fields of cultural activity. For many, outdoor pursuits; freer ways of learning; liberating costume; the authenticity of emotion and

sexual desire; and the natural world itself were all privileged in action and belief. (2011: 1)

In Europe two locations were particularly open to and supportive of dance as part of alternative, rural communities and provided space for dancers to teach and develop their practices: Monte Verità, which germinated in Switzerland in 1900 and Dartington Hall in the UK, bought by its founders in 1925. Both communities had a utopian outlook and were seeking to develop a way of life which differed from the economic, educational and social mainstream of their time. Monte Verità is famous for its experiments with vegetarianism, anarchism and eccentric spiritual practices and Laban biographer Bradley argues that the “confluence of various art forms with the ideas of free love, feminism, organic gardening and freemasonry led to explorations of new forms of creating and sharing dance” (2009: 11). Dance historian Nicholas observes that at Monte Verità “dance was embedded in, rather than divorced from, daily life” (2007: 37). Working in the garden, dancing in the fields and living a ‘healthy’ life thus belonged together at Monte Verità, in an effort to provide a holistic alternative to a fragmented, modern and urbanised life.

Bradley notes a similar ethos present at Dartington Hall, where “creative work [...] was as much a product of the estate as the vegetables” (2009: 34). The founders and collaborators at Dartington emphasized new practices of farming, forestry, social life and education, with a strong emphasis on fostering creative expression and artists. Whilst the founding community of Monte Verità came to an end in 1920, Dartington Hall developed into a central location for avant-garde dance in Britain. Many high profile dancers have worked there, from pioneers such as Laban, Kurt Jooss (1901 – 1979), and Sigurd Leeder (1902 - 1981), and continuing into the postmodern era of dance, led by innovators such as Mary Fulkerson. This era ended when the internationally renowned Dartington College of Arts, that focused on innovative higher education in the arts from the 1960s onwards, merged with the University of Falmouth and relocated in 2010. Dartington Hall is since managed by a charitable trust.

The attention to and concern with ‘daily life’ constitutes a connecting thread between early modern dancers that moved outdoors and the

contemporary practitioners that have contributed to this thesis. Be it visiting an organic farm and eating there with the workshop group of *The Ecological Body* (Suryodarmo and Reeve 2011, fieldnotes 8.06.2011), exploring the movement qualities of ‘daily life’ with Suryodarmo in that same workshop (fieldnotes 07.06.2011) or fasting and breaking the fast collectively with the Locator 22 group (fieldnotes 18.07.2011, workshop with Whitehead), issues that pertain to life at large impact the structures and settings of contemporary outdoor movement practices. This aspect, which I refer to as a particular permeability between dance practice and daily life, is developed more specifically in chapter eight.

Dancing Stability and Flux

In the late 19th century early modern dance pioneer Isadora Duncan was one of the first to dance with bare feet and to dress in loose tunics inspired by the Greek classics. Her “introduction to ‘uncorseted’ dance” (Newhall 2009: 10) influenced generations of professional and lay dancers, especially women. As a contemporary, Laban was well aware of Duncan’s accomplishments in dance and credits her in the introduction of his book *Modern Educational Dance* for “freeing the dancer’s body from excessive clothing” (1975 [1948]: 5) and reawakening “the sense of poetry of movement in modern man” (1975 [1948]: 6). Originally from North America, Duncan spent most her life travelling, teaching and performing in Europe and Russia, living a flamboyant and much contested lifestyle. Her radical approach to free movement stood in clear opposition to ballet as mentioned further above. As her alternative she praised unrestricted, ‘natural’ movements in tune with a continuous and harmonious rhythm she observed in nature and a way of dancing that was expressive both of the individual as well as of humanity and the wider universe.

Duncan claimed nature as her “first and only teacher” (Daly 2002: 88) in the development of her idiosyncratic style of dancing. Laban similarly proposes that the natural environment affects movement practice. He suggests for example that “the dancer learns that nature imposes a kind of harmony in

movement, a harmony found in all of nature's manifestations" (Dörr 2003: 10), as Laban expert Evelyn Dörr relates, drawing on Laban's first book *Die Welt des Tänzers* (The Dancer's World) (1920) and his handwritten notes, undated but believed to have been written between 1910 and 1914.

This positioning of the natural environment as a teacher resonates in contemporary outdoor practices. Poynor for example suggests that in her work "the environment itself become the teacher with different elements eliciting different experiences and movement responses" (2014: 228) and Suyodarmo explains how he developed his practices through extended exposure and movement in the natural environment, a topic I expand in the following chapter. Suryodarmo has further very carefully designed the outdoor movement space on his land in Java, as described by dance and somatics educator Susan Bauer:

Bordered by a stream, the land is a 'mosaic' of many separate sections that Prapto designed – earth mounds, a long walkway, a Catholic grotto, a bamboo hut shaded by a tree, a Balinese-style tower, an octagonal paved platform, a grassy square in the sunlight – each meant to activate specific energies. (2014: 212-213)

Natural and landscaped garden environments are thus positioned as having an effect on and bringing forth human movement responses across practices from the past and the present. However, what is claimed can be learned from these teachers varies across time and thus reflects the intricate co-construction of 'nature' by humans that engage with it. Our ideas of nature can fertilise almost any set of hopes, aspirations or convictions. Whilst the practices of the early 20th century primarily position nature as offering harmony, stability, purity or morality, contemporary practices accentuate the notions of flux, unfixedness and diversity.

Duncan for example primarily insisted on a perfected image of nature. Her concept of the natural environment strongly emphasises the harmonious and beautiful qualities of an inherently pure and good nature. Her famous speech 'The Dance of the Future', which she gave in Berlin in 1903, began with the following words:

The movement of waves, of winds, of the earth is ever in the same lasting harmony. We do not stand on the beach and inquire of the ocean what was its movement in the past and what will be its movement in the future. We realize that the movement peculiar to its nature is eternal to its nature. (Duncan 1903 in Brayshaw and Witts 2014: 164)

Whilst this sense of being in the ‘now’ – not inquiring for the past or the future – is resonant in contemporary practices and has room for change and flux, Duncan closes this notion by emphasising a sense of nature remaining the same and describing the ocean as moving in “lasting harmony” in a way that is “eternal to its nature”. Daly (2002) further quotes passages of Duncan’s childhood memories from California which similarly emphasise selective facets such as beauty, harmony, eternity and warmth:

In Spring our fields dazzle the eyes—Dancing in the breeze laughing back its beams to the sun—a host of yellow flowers [...] and I danced in the Meadows as Their sister [...] All during the hot summer the Gold burns As a child I danced on the sea beach by the waves—The hot sand burned my feet—The gold sand burned my eyes—The Sun danced on the waves—The movement of the waves rocked into my soul—Could I dance as they. Their eternal message of rhythm of Harmony? (Duncan in Daly 2002: 90)

Whilst Duncan mentions the capacity of the sun to burn, the main emphasis of this extract is on the merry qualities of spring and summer and the understanding that nature offers an “eternal message of rhythm of Harmony”. What remains unmentioned in Duncan’s accounts are aspects such as the cold and discomfort of winter and rain, the cruelty of death and decay, the arbitrariness of floods or earthquakes, the challenges that rocks and thorns pose to the dancer’s bare foot. Duncan’s conceptualisations rather subsume the variety of conditions of the natural world into a coherent, beautiful and everlasting image.

Contrary to such an understanding of ‘lasting harmony’ in the natural environment, the contemporary practices I researched emphasise qualities of change and flux in the natural environment. This is a significant trait in Poynor’s teaching which I develop in chapter six and an aspect that Poynor also

specifies in the context of her teacher Anna Halprin's work: "For Halprin, the fact that nature is in a state of constant flux requires the performer to be able to respond instantaneously to changing conditions [...]" (2009: 127). It is notions of change, adaptation and constant transformation (not forgetting environmental changes as a precarious state) that outdoor dance today is concerned with, much in contrast to Duncan's representation of the natural world as eternal summer and harmony.

However, as Duncan matured as an artist and was exposed to writings such as Friedrich Nietzsche's (1844-1900) *Birth of Tragedy* (1872) in 1903, her notion of nature "took on a fiercer face" and "was no longer just the lovely Flora" as Duncan biographer Daly suggests (2002: 95). She further proclaimed that the dancer of the future "will dance the changing life of nature" (Duncan 1903: 168 in Brayshaw and Witts 2014) which signifies a leaning towards the current day emphasis on instability, flux and change. Yet a notable point of distinction to contemporary practice remains the habit of practising year round, which is a prominent feature today, versus the strong emphasis of summer atmospheres and summer tunics in the work of Duncan and many who followed in her wake. In contrast raingear (especially in the UK) is part of the basic movement equipment today and the workshop groups often look like a group of hikers approaching a day-hike. I noticed this in particular when working with Poynor who specifically prompts workshop and training participants to dress adequately. In a letter outlining the foundation training she wrote to the participants:

Be prepared for all weathers include layers, waterproofs
(including trousers) a hat (rain or shine) sunscreen and gloves.
Wear outdoor shoes with a good grip (that will not slip on wet
rocks or mud and that are comfortable and safe for clambering or
walking some distance). (Poynor 2010)

Especially during this training year with Poynor I began to treasure the possibility of working outdoors in all seasons and have come to appreciate the seasonal specificities, including the colours, speeds and limitations of the bitter cold of deep winter in Berlin.

winter [...] sometimes I get pulled into you directly into another time, slow but also eternal, and death is related to cold. i feel you winter, i'm between you in the cold air, the grey sky, the water, the wind, the black branch. i'm in you winter, i'm in your time. (Drawing pad fieldnotes, 18.11.2011)

Duncan developed her image of nature as harmonious also through drawing on the latest developments in the sciences of her time, such as the writings of German biologist Ernst Haeckel (1834-1919): “After reading Haeckel, Duncan came to understand ‘Nature’ not just as seasons or flowers but as a comprehensive system whose inherent harmony she mapped on her body” (Daly 2002: 99). Whilst Duncan’s reading of Haeckel supported her understanding of the natural world as inherently harmonious, it also opened the possibility to decentralise the position of the human being, which is one of the core potentials this thesis develops through the analysis of contemporary work. Daly suggests that

Haeckel rejected the tradition of anthropism, which opposes the human organism to the rest of nature and places man at the center of God-created universe. [...] Haeckel replaced anthropist dogmas and the duality of orthodox religions with a comprehensive view of the universe. (2002: 99)

Such a questioning of the human central position was a daring proposition in its time and Haeckel was among the early supporters of Charles Darwin (1809-1882). The appreciation of Haeckel’s work by Duncan allows for threading another connection to contemporary practices, of which my reading suggests a notable potential to dethrone and decentralise the human being, which is one of the central proposals this thesis makes throughout.

Whilst some of Duncan’s stable, eternal and harmonic image of the natural world may have limited her movement practice, she was nevertheless a revolutionary figure who had the courage to explore movement in the natural environment and author her own style. Her teaching and performing inspired especially women to dance in clothes and ways previously unheard of in this specific cultural context, and she fearlessly proposed alternatives to ballet, the dominant and only accepted high art genre of dance at the time. In this way her

work is closer to contemporary practices than her emphasis on ‘harmony’ might first suggest and the tunics of her day may well be an equivalent to the raingear worn today.

Inspiration and Improvisation

Another aspect of differentiation or friction between past and contemporary outdoor dance practices is the positioning of the natural environment as a source of inspiration for the development of movement material or as the main locale of practice. That is, as a temporary site of practice on the way to staging a piece in a theatre or as the ‘final destination’ for a work.

Such a placing of nature as a source of inspiration and a place for the development for movement material is present for example in ‘Natural Movement’, as practiced and developed by Ruby Ginner and Madge Atkinson in the UK in the first half of the twentieth century. The name of the practice is resonant of Duncan who spoke of “natural dancing” (Carter 2011: 16) and Atkinson apparently first adopted the term from the Spong School in Hampstead, where she completed her diploma in a course of the same title (Carter 2011: 19). One of Ginner and Atkinson’s aim was to develop “systemized methods of teaching” in order to address their perceived lack of just that in the work of Duncan (Carter 2010: 93/94). In 1918 Atkinson’s school of Natural Movement opened in Manchester (Carter 2010: 93/94) and Ginner began the Ginner-Mawer Summer School with her colleague Irene Mawer in the same year (Macintosh 2011: 43).³³ It is known that Atkinson visited dance schools in Germany and briefly met Wigman in 1930 (Carter 2010: 97), possibly in recognition of the similarity of the practices they respectively had developed.

Deeply involved with adopting what they considered principles of classical Greek movement, ‘Natural Movement’ promoted a positive and healthy image of the natural world and the body within it and is thus closely related to Duncan’s work. Its focus was on “natural’ ways of moving”,

³³ Their movement tradition continues until today with a ‘Natural Movement Group’ under the auspices of the ISTD – the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing, an international examination board for dance teachers of various disciplines based in London. N.b. I could thus far not trace the year of birth and death of Irene Mawer.

“choreography that was authentic in mood” or “subject matter drawn from nature” (Carter 2011: 23). Nature served as source that inspired improvisation and the further development of movement material, and Ginner explains:

for inspiration of rhythm and expression we turn to nature, the
rhythms of the sea, the river, the scudding clouds, the trees
tossing in the in the wind, the light of birds and the raging of fire.
(1926: 452 in Carter 2011: 24)

The final productions were often resonant of the natural world in their themes and references, yet presented in “considered and crafted form” (Carter 2011: 19). It was, as Carter argues further “a world transformed by artistic and pedagogical values” (2011: 25).

The same applies to Wigman who recalls instances of developing improvisational material for her choreographies in the natural environment, such as at Monte Verità, where a group of Laban students “would camp down in a dell at the foot of a steep rock which I climbed to improvise a wild witch dance” (Wigman 1984 [1973]: 46). This may have been one of the first incarnations of what later became her famous ‘witch dance’ (*Hexentanz*), performed as a carefully refined and choreographed piece for the stage in 1914, at Wigman’s first public solo performance in Munich.

Across the work of Wigman, Laban, Ginner and Atkinson, the direct engagement with the natural environment was most significant in the early years of dancing (Wigman and Laban) and in the early phases of making dances (all), offering a source for raw improvisational material for future choreographies. What may have influenced these decisions was a completely different context of performing and viewing improvisation before the post-modern work of such key players as the Judson Church (NYC). Whilst it is nothing extraordinary today to see fully improvised dance performances, there was no broader context for such events in the dance world of the early 20th century.

In differentiation to positioning the natural environment as a source for work that is later developed for indoor stages, current day practices in my observation engage with the natural environment not as a step along the way,

but as the place where both practice and performance, sourcing and staging take place. This way of working seems more closely related to the early experiments of Laban and Wigman rather than their later work or the ‘Natural Movement’ approach. Whilst all practitioners that I have engaged with in the framework of this thesis also perform indoors, they also produce specific site-specific pieces for audiences. In my making of *body, trees & things*, the practice component of this thesis, my working on site was not a step towards an indoor showing, but a process of producing and performing work in confederation with the materials on site. As I have noted above for improvisation the ‘normalisation’ of site-specific work since the early experiments of a century ago has brought forth a culture of making and viewing dance in which work in the natural environment has been able to flourish into more than a sourcing step along the way.

Freedom and Foreclosure

A further point to discuss is the characteristic hovering of early 20th century outdoor dancing between bringing a free and daring spirit into dance and the limitations it simultaneously provided by constructing what was ‘right and good’, for example about nature. On the one hand such moral judgments resulted in a limited perception of the natural world, and on the other made the work of many practitioners susceptible to primitivist, racist and/or nationalist tendencies. Fensham argues for the first quarter of the 20th century that:

One of the central tenets of the beliefs [...] was a return to the representation of the ‘natural’ body in many forms of artistic expression, with aspirations to a liberation through nature [...].
(2011: 1)

Whilst these ‘liberatory’ intentions had truly daring and innovative aspects, and allowed for as well as promoted radical experiments with the body (especially for women), they simultaneously had retrogressive and conservative manifestations. An “underlying modernist fascination with otherness” (Burt

1998: 19) and with it a precariously racist exoticism and primitivism hovered across intellectual and artistic work of the early 20th century and the imagined 'savage' that moves freely and in harmony with the natural environment inspired also early modern outdoor dance pioneers in Europe and the US. At the time still sheltered by the general acceptance of such primitivism, it was not unusual amongst white artist and intellectuals to either denounce or elevate artistic or living practices of non-whites, similar to the judgement that women could either be saints or whores, but never something in between. For Wigman and her contemporaries, such as the painter Emil Nolde, a celebration of the 'exotic', primitive' or 'savage' was often the case, as these 'other' cultures were thought to have kept and treasured a better way of living. Duncan similarly idealised the 'savage' body of the past as living freely and close to nature and claimed that the "movements of the savage, who lived in freedom in constant touch with Nature, were unrestricted, natural and beautiful" (Duncan 1903 in Huxley and Witts 2002: 171). Yet her specific concept of a 'natural body' reached towards the ancient Greeks in search for a 'civilised/white' rather than a 'primitive/black' engagement with nature and the natural (Daly 2002: 89/90), mirroring equally the easily engaged racism of the time. Especially later in her life Duncan had no difficulties in providing racist commentary on African-American inspired dance and music, relating it to the "primitive savage" and attacking the "tottering, ape-like convulsions of the Charleston" (Duncan 1933 [1927]: 358 in Grau 2011: 11). Simultaneous to an elevation of the exotic other many white modern dancers thus arrogantly dismissed African-American inspired dance and music such as Jazz. Ginner called it "neurotic" (in Macintosh 2011: 55) and Laban rejected "Charleston, Black Bottom, Swing [...] as 'degeneration'" (in Kant 2004: 114).

The emphases on community and natural, healthy ways of moving and dancing further made practices susceptible for hierarchical and oppressive developments, in their aspirations of a 'betterment' of the human race. As Burt points out, nationalist tendencies of modernist artists of the time were already prevalent, both in Europe and the United States, resulting in "a celebration of the national rather than the international" (1998: 11). This combination of

nationalism coupled with a desired proximity to nature, which was idealised as good, pure and a wellspring for health, as well as a source for community building arguably also provided a fertile ground for the growth of racist ideologies and the success of the deathly politics of National Socialism in Germany.

Laban for example specifically emphasized the role and potentials of dance as a community practice in the context of a transforming society, modelled after the positive aspects he proposed to be present in nature. He thus devised large-scale performances in the natural environment, which included his famous “movement choirs” (*Bewegungschöre*) – large groups of mostly amateur dancers whom Laban or one of his students worked with in a “communal, improvisational and participatory style” (Bradley 2009: 16). Attracted by what he read as a “communal celebratory culture” (Dörr 2003: 22) Laban celebrated thriving moments under the Nazi regime and “welcomed the Nazis’ seizure of power and identified unquestioningly and uncritically with their so-called national revolution” (Dörr 2003: 22). He wanted to be the one “to create the new symbols of a national transformation” (Laban 1934 in Dörr 2003: 22). After first successes and enthusiasm, however, he himself fell into disrespect, because his choreographies for the collective offered too much “free play”, “organic development” and “abstract expressiveness” (Dörr 2003: 25). He eventually had to flee from Nazi Germany in 1937, finding refuge at Dartington Hall in the UK. Whilst this ‘communal’ aspect of Laban’s work at first merged easily with the ideologies of National Socialism, his original motivation was different and concerned with reform movements and participation, as he argued that a “dance philosophy that seeks to reform society should seek to involve a wide public [...]” (Dörr 2003: 18).

Wigman’s career in Germany followed a similar yet less dramatic curve. She first worked in silent submission under the Nazi regime, yet later fell into disgrace as an artist. Her position is hard to pinpoint, as both documentation of an overt anti-Semitism exist (e.g. Kant and Karina 2004), as well as dance historian Susan Manning’s suggestions that “archival documents tell only part of the story of the Wigman school during the Third Reich” (2006: 205), arguing

that it provided an artistic refuge at the time. Since Wigman was able to maintain a restricted life and teaching practice under National Socialism in Germany, some collaboration with the regime has to be assumed.

How do these aspects of freedom and foreclosure relate to contemporary practices in the natural environment? White women, as already stated in the introduction to this chapter, continue to dominate the practitioner cohorts of contemporary outdoor dance which I have researched as well as the academic setting in which this thesis was produced. This speaks of structures of privilege and exclusion that are far from being fully addressed or resolved. If looking at highly successful European contemporary companies such as the ones of Sasha Waltz (Germany) or Akram Khan (UK), a completely different level of diversity is the case. An analysis of the precise structures and reasons for such a presence or absence of diversity cannot be achieved here, but would be a pertinent concern of a future study.

However, the positioning of the natural environment as being in flux coupled with the possibility of turning towards material agency and intermaterial confederations in contemporary outdoor dance, which I develop in this thesis, provide offer reasons for hope in these respects. A turn towards materiality bears the potential to meet and engage with differences whilst simultaneously being reminded and part of a shared material base. Dance practices that come about in intermaterial confederations cannot but be in relationship to the world as we co-create it and thus bear the potential of continuing the development of working practices and structures that foster multiplicity, unfixedness and possibilities to meet.

Concluding Thoughts: Connections and Frictions

In conclusion, this section draws together additional and some of the mentioned connections and frictions between the historical roots and the contemporary sprouts in outdoor dance practices. The strongest connections are a shared turn towards the body and the relevance of life at large to the

making of dances as well as the relevance and inclusion of daily life movements such as walking into dance practice. Wigman for example

emphasized the experience of walking itself. [...] the goal of the walking practice was to bring the walker into the present moment and to demand concentrated attention to a sensation that had become automatic. (Newhall 2009: 140)

As will become apparent in chapter six on Poynor's work, this quote could be used almost exactly the same to describe her work. Rather than being a specificity of contemporary practices, threads of modern dance also emphasised the inclusion of daily life movements into dance practice as well as a strong physicality in opposition to the etherealness of ballet. This provided a 'rooting down' and appreciation of the materiality of the human body rather than a rejection of it. Wigman for example defined "a physical 'being present'" as a dancer's task in the world, which from her point of view "seemed to have passed away in contemporary life" (Newhall 2009: 78). In regard to Duncan's practice Daly argues that with a shift from an Apollonian to a Dionysian standpoint she "no longer merely contemplated the spirit of dance, as one who relates the story of something; she threw herself into the spirit of the dance, as one dancing the thing itself" (2002: 95). The human body was thus of paramount relevance in the early modernist dance developments, also identified as "part of that more authentic, natural world that could be accessed through the *Körperkultur* or physical culture movement" (Newhall 2009: 70). In this atmosphere of re-discovering the body and admiring the natural world, dance offered a compelling field for experimentation.

This turn towards the body and bodily material has strong resonances with contemporary practices. As I argue throughout the thesis, the turn towards materiality is one of the decisive features of contemporary outdoor movement practices that I consider largely unrecognised and underdiscussed in the wider field of dance studies. Aspects of this turn towards materiality are discussed with more details for example in chapter five with regards to Suryodarmo's way of working with 'facticity' or his understanding of 'reality world', as well as in chapter six with regards to Poynor's emphasis on bodily substance. Yet a

distinguishing feature between past and present appears to be the degree and kind of actual exposure to the natural environment. This shift could simplistically be called from 'clean' to 'dirty'. Spotlessly clean white women in white tunics wearing headbands dominate images of early modern dancers working in the natural environment. The modernist aesthetics of outdoor movement practices was one of the human being atop or in front of a sunny, stable and harmonious nature, in resonance of the wider socio-cultural context in which a renewed rise of man over nature was just manifesting through the advancements of the industrial revolution.

This is a differentiation to contemporary practices, which offer ways of working as material amongst material that I specify in the following chapters. Particularly the direct and sometimes also durational exposure to materials on site during all seasons, unencumbered by the possibility of getting wet and dirty, is a distinguishing feature of contemporary outdoor dance practice in the natural environment. Whilst the emphasis on the body is shared across practices of the past and the present, how and when this body is exposed to the natural environment differs across time. The following three chapters now turn more specifically to the work of contemporary practitioners, each one drawing out a particular aspect of working with materiality. This empirical series begins with the work of Suryodarmo and the delineation of material's facticity as well as its capacities of being that I found to be present in his practice *Joged Amerta*.

5. All Has Being and All Has Fact

Introduction

This chapter draws from my practical and theoretical engagement with *Joged Amerta/Amerta Movement*, the work of Indonesian movement artist Suprpto Suryodarmo. It introduces the roots of this movement practice and offers a short consideration of the name that is often translated with “the moving-dancing nectar of life” (Reeve 2010: 189). It further turns to the understanding of the natural environment in this practice as undivided from everything else and highlights the multi-faith orientation of its spiritual undercurrent. The chapter also introduces the basic principles of this movement practice as I have come to understand them and highlights the particular contextual contingency of the practice as well as the specific aspects of relaxation and receptivity as they pertain to the thesis theme of *dancing materiality*. These introductory sections are quite extensive because *Amerta* is a fundamental influence for most of the contemporary work that I have engaged with for the research and are therefore relevant across the thesis. Aspects of *Amerta*, such as receptivity, are furthermore core ingredients for working with intermaterial confederations in dance, and therefore pertain to the thesis as a whole. The second part of the chapter delineates two basic notions on things, objects and materials that I have distilled from my engagement with *Amerta* and that I have termed *all has being* and *all has fact*.

Importantly I was introduced to *Amerta* in the context of dance, rather than self-exploration, therapy or spirituality. All these element play into in the practice of *Amerta*, however in this context my main concern in dealing with this body of work is movement practice.³⁴ This reflects on the one hand my

³⁴ Lavelle specifically asks: “What is Amerta Movement, meditation, healing, art or something else?” (2006: 223 ff.). She answers this question with “[...] Amerta Movement can be seen to be a unique physical expression. [...] It is best understood in the same manner as the individual student, i.e. by not being compared to anything else but its own measure” (2006: 238). Lavelle further proposes that to place *Amerta* within the performing arts “might be more appropriate in the West than in Java” (2006: 7). Because it requires no classical skills based dance training, she suggests that it is not easily accepted for example as ‘dance’ in Java (2006: 7). However, I suggest that this may have changed since the research phase of her thesis, that attends primarily to the years 1986 – 1997. Meanwhile, a point to which I return, the original name *Amerta Movement* has changed to *Joged Amerta*, incorporating ‘dance’ more specifically in the name. Suryodarmo further organises as well participates alongside his students in large performing arts festivals in Java,

personal background but also the intention of this thesis to situate outdoor movement practices such as Amerta in the context of contemporary dance, asking what their specific contributions might be to this field.

The main empirical base forms my participant observation of the six-day workshop *The Ecological Body* that Suryodarmo co-led with movement artist/researcher and therapist Sandra Reeve in June 2011 in West Dorset (UK). In addition to my participation in the workshop I conducted a public interview with Suryodarmo during this week, for which all participants were invited to be present as well as encouraged to ask their own questions after the main interview was completed. To situate *Amerta* more broadly I further draw on the first edited collection on *Amerta* with writings of his students, published as *Embodied Lives. Reflections on the Influence of Suprpto Suryodarmo and Amerta Movement* (Bloom, Galanter and Reeve 2014) as well as two doctoral theses published in relation to his work. These are *Amerta Movement of Java 1987 – 1997. An Asian Movement Improvisation* (Lavelle 2006) which offers a thorough examination of the early years of Amerta and the cultural context in which this work was seeded, the Indonesian island of Java, and secondly *The Ecological Body* (Reeve 2008) a practice-as-research thesis on Reeve's movement practice *Move into Life* which has strong roots in *Amerta*.

Section One: Introducing *Joged Amerta*

Roots and History

Joged Amerta is a movement practice that has been developed since the early 1980s by Indonesian movement artist Suprpto Suryodarmo in a unique intercultural setting between Java, Indonesia, where Suryodarmo is based, and Western Europe as well as to some extent North America, where many of his students are based. Reeve describes *Amerta* as “a somatic and performance practice” that, amongst other specifications “pays attention to environmental

such as Srawung Seni Candi held at the Candi Sukuh temple, that celebrated its 10th year at the turn of the year 2013/2014.

embodiment and attaches crucial importance to the mutual interdependence and co-creation of organism and environment” (2010: 189 – 190)³⁵. I have experienced it as a practice that invites dancers to cultivate a highly differentiated ability to follow movement as it emerges in relation to the site of practice and current inner and outer conditions as well as to simultaneously give it form. This includes practising to lessen what might inhabit such a process, for instance movement habits, expectations, judgements, fears, hopes, plans and so on. It is, as I will discuss with more depth below, a practice that is highly contextually contingent, or as Lavelle writes “site specific and person specific” (2006: 1). Unlike traditional Javanese dance *Joged Amerta* is a non-stylised movement practice and Lavelle positions Suryodarmo as having been “more interested in developing dance as a contemporary performing art incorporating cultural roots than in Javanese classical dance” (2006: 4, FN 11). Suryodarmo himself explains that one way in which his work differs from the traditional Javanese dance heritage is that he does not work with pre-defined compositions and rather begins with the “informal, from your organism having organisation” (fieldnotes 09.06.2011). He further explains: “This is the main core of this work. We have no certain kind of technique, we start from informal. The form later is your own unique and your creation” (fieldnotes 09.06.2011).

The name of the practice has shifted slightly over time. Suryodarmo first called it *Amerta Movement*, which is often referred to as meaning ‘the nectar of life’ movement (e.g. Bloom, Galanter and Reeve 2014: 308). Lavelle translates *Amerta* as “non-death” or “life” and suggests that it “refers to the traditional Javanese concept that human life has a spiritual origin coming from and returning to an everlasting living essence” (2006: 5). According to Bloom, Galanter and Reeve, Suryodarmo shifted this name in 2010 to *Joged Amerta*. They suggests that: “This change was due to his feeling that his moving being had also become a dancing being ‘*moving dancing, dancing moving*’ and he wanted the name of his work to reflect that development” (2014: 308). Lavelle

³⁵ Key sources on *Amerta* include: Bloom, Galanter and Reeve (eds.) 2014, Reeve 2010, 2008, Bloom 2006, Lavelle 2006, Bauer 2005, and Poynor 1986.

translates *Joged* with “dance” (2006: 336) and *Joged Amerta* with “Amerta dance” (2006: 261); Reeve translates *Joged Amerta* with “the moving-dancing nectar of life” (2010: 189). This shift thus gave dance a stronger presence in the name and further made the term *Amerta Movement* available to be used as a more generic term for work that is influenced by Suryodarmo (Bloom, Galanter and Reeve 2014: 308-309). The name *Joged Amerta* already appears in an email by Suryodarmo from 2002, published in Lavelle (2006: 260), to which I return further below. This suggests that the name shift had already been in the works before 2010. In this thesis I use *Joged Amerta* when speaking about the practice in direct relationship to Suryodarmo and *Amerta* or *Amerta Movement* when referring to the wider context of the practice and practitioners who have integrated it into their own movement work.

Since 1986 Suryodarmo has been developing *Joged Amerta* at his school Padepokan Lemah Putih in Central Java, as well as travelling several months a year, predominantly to Western Europe and the US, to share his work.³⁶ Suryodarmo’s travelling phase officially ended in 2011, however, after a three-year pause Suryodarmo returns to teach workshops in the UK, the Netherlands and Germany in July and August 2015 in celebration of his 70th birthday. This travelling tradition draws on the early intercultural gestation of *Joged Amerta* that began with contacts Suryodarmo established in Cologne on his first journey to Europe with the Indonesian Sardono Dance Company in 1982. Rooted in this first meeting and another journey Suryodarmo took to Switzerland in 1983, the so called ‘pioneer group’ that consisted of three Germans and one Swiss, namely Christina Stelzer, Christian Böhringer, Susanka Christman, began to work with Suryodarmo in Java in 1984. “Thus began an avid exchange of movement practices, of attitudes and approaches to life, an in-depth process of meeting between East and West that lasted for over three years” (Bloom, Galanter and Reeve 2014: 308). In close exchange these pioneers, along with a few others, developed their own movement practice in this time,

³⁶ In Javanese, *Lemah* means earth and *Puthi* means white. This name had already been given to the land on which Suryodarmo built his school before he bought it. *Padepokan* refers to a centre for spirituality as well as a private arts centre. See Lavelle 2006: 10, especially footnote 25.

alongside Suryodarmo's emerging practice. Further details of these beginnings can be found in an online timeline that was published online in conjunction with *Embodied Lives* (Stelzer n.d.).

Working in relationship to the natural environment is a core feature of *Amerta* and before the more explicit gestation phase described above, Suryodarmo had already begun to develop his movement practice in the 1970s through spending extensive time moving outdoors. In the interview he recalls:

I much practice in the nature, in the beach, always the waving, changing, undercurrents, currents, [inaudible] unpredictable wave. Or in the river, with the sounds, the wind and the star. The full moon before raining, still practice and then rain, practice, and then the rain pass and the shining again, you know? This is, give me, a little bit influence in instinctive the time of nature. Not only human, but human-nature-time. How I saw the nature as a family. (Public interview 09.06.2011)

Suryodarmo relates here how he developed and formed his practice first and foremost through direct and extended practice in the natural environment. Duration is of central relevance here, as he was practising within a setting whose conditions are shifting and changing over time. As Suryodarmo explains in the quote, it is extended exposure that gave him a sense of understanding for the rhythms of the natural environment in relationship to his own as well as a sense of “nature as a family”.

One of my core interests in the interview with Suryodarmo was to gain a better understanding of his reasons for working in the natural environment. Prior to going into any details he clarifies in his first reply that it is “not only the nature” we are talking about, but “the cultural nature”, which he further defines as part of his being in his culture (public interview 09.06.2011). This statement suggests an understanding of the natural environment not in separation but in relation to urban, cultural or societal environments, an understanding that positions self and surrounding as intricately connected. Throughout the interview Suryodarmo's terminology that describes the natural environment varies significantly, moving from “cultural nature”, to “nature culture” (a term I

introduced in a question and that Suryodarmo picked up subsequently), to “society nature” and “society human nature”. These variations speak to a view that simply does not separate and divide between human, nature, culture and society, but rather considers all these to exist in interrelation. None of these terrains are separate, sterile or static, as Suryodarmo explains: “You can feel more how is the fertility of trees, garden, of flower, or the wind, all this. Shining, changing, grow. You know. Warm, and so on. We are in there. It's not sterile” (public interview 09.06.2011).

Suryodarmo’s work in the natural environment has strong roots in his early biography, which he partially recounts in the interview. He explains that from his childhood onwards, spending time in the natural environment was paramount. His parents took him at least once a week to natural sites, often ones of spiritual significance, such as a particular cemetery or shamanic site, sometimes travelling quite far to reach a location. He specifically shares the story of his father taking him to the holy Mount Lawu (3,265m) when Suryodarmo was around ten years old.³⁷ He was deeply impressed by this mountain, beginning the ascent at 4 o’clock in the morning, walking in the cold and a friend of his father carrying him when he could no longer walk. The site continues to be relevant for his teaching practice until today, from his school the “majestic bluish silhouette of Mount Lawu” (Lavelle 2006: 21) is visible on the horizon and Candi Sukuh, a Javanese-Hindu temple its slopes is one of the places to which Suryodarmo regularly takes his students to practise movement since the late 1980s. Suryodarmo’s parents also took him to their neighbour, a teacher of traditional Javanese Sapta Dharma mysticism, whom Suryodarmo began to study with at the age of ten and early on began to teach “this kind of messages and way” (public interview 09.06.2011).

These stories transmit on the one hand the deep familiarity he has with the natural environment as a place to engage with, summarised in his words with “[...] that’s my life since child [...]. Go to the nature” (public interview 09.06.2011). On the other hand his stories point to the relevance of spiritual or

³⁷ According to ancient Javanese mysticism Mount Lawu is the place that physically marks the “mythical beginning of Java” as the *Jakart Post* titles in 2008 as it is thought to be the place where the Gods descended from heaven (Sari 2008).

sacred dimensions for his work, which is closely related to Suryodarmo's movement work, though the work is not as such positioned as a specific spiritual practice. Rather than classifying his work as Buddhist for example, when asked by a workshop participant during the interview, he underlines the "Javanese approach" of his work (interview 09.06.2011). I propose here that it is mainly through Suryodarmo's own deep involvement in spiritual practices that his artistic work carries aspects of spirituality.

Noticeably the multi-faith orientation of Java more generally shines through his work, which Lavelle attends to as the "religious plurality, the spiritual diversity and tolerance characteristic of Central Java, in general, and of *Amerta Movement*, in particular" (Lavelle 2006: 20). In relation to Suryodarmo more specifically shamanic and traditional mystic spiritual practices were formative in his childhood and later on he was deeply involved in the practice of meditation, both *Vipassana* (Buddhist) and *Sumarah* (traditional Javanese) (public interview 09.06.2011). Suryodarmo was initiated as a Buddhist monk in the *Theravada* tradition in 1974 (Lavelle 2006: 5). However, he then decided to focus on artistic work and developed his movement practice instead of living as a monk.

In the interview Suryodarmo proposes a connection between his meditation and movement practice that is also anchored in a childhood experience. He recounts that his father had taught him to meditate as a child and although his father proposed a sitting position, he began to experiment with lying down whilst meditating. He figured as a child that: "But when I am meditation lying, maybe it's okay" (public interview 09.06.2011). He further explains:

So in that moment clicked me that I can change any position.
And with all my believing I go to you God, must be right.
Whatever I have position. You understand? [...] That the God will
care me. [...] This is very strong, I still feel this – in, now. And this
is free position for, for meditation or in meditation or you can say,
'Now it's in the movement'. (Public interview 09.06.2011)

Joged Amerta thus does not constitute a meditation or spiritual practice per se, but understandings and experiences Suryodarmo drew from meditation have

had a strong influence on how he developed his work and how he teaches it today.

Basic Practices

My first personal presumptions on Suryodarmo's work, developed in the late 1990s, were based on very few verbal accounts of practitioners that had worked with him in Java and Europe. My impression at the time was that the work had a strong mystical or spiritual quality that seemed to inspire but also confuse those who engaged with it, in my understanding offering something 'magic' but also a sense of lostness in the complexity of the work. At the time I did not feel like I had the base to encounter such an amount of intangibility and made a very conscious decision to not study with Suryodarmo directly. I also felt uninterested to join what I at the time felt was a group of white Westerners, mainly women, on an exotic trip to the East searching for meaning. Instead I felt better placed in the context of Mainz's work in Berlin, a dancer trained in the Netherland (i.e. close to my 'home'), who is part of the early generations of Suryodarmo's students. Mainz had already undergone a process of translating her experiences of studying in Java in the early 1990s when I met her in 1998, a distillation from which I felt I could only benefit.

My first encounters with Suryodarmo then resulted in a very different experience of his work than my first presumptions suggested and my understanding of it, including my perspective on these early impressions, significantly shifted. I first saw and moved with Suryodarmo in the early 2000s during the open day of a workshop held at tanzfabrik Berlin, in which we as visitors were invited to witness but also to join the movement practice. I was impressed by very clearly sensing a connection to Suryodarmo in the space in specific moments, for example when crossing paths. I also felt robust, vigorous and daring in my movement, which surprised and delighted me as I was still new to the context of movement improvisation and not used to moving in front of a public of advanced practitioners which was the case in this setting. However, my leaning towards the familiar persisted and I felt I was learning

what I needed and wanted to learn at this time with Mainz as well as in the Contact Improvisation and BMC® ‘scene’ in Berlin, rather than wanting to begin to study with Suryodarmo in Java.

I then met Suryodarmo again during a *MAM* (Movement Arts Meeting) in Amsterdam in 2009, a yearly meeting of mostly advanced *Amerta* practitioners to which Mainz took me during a rehearsal phase of a duet we were working on. During this encounter I had a significant experience of my body as three-dimensional in the space, which Suryodarmo facilitated by accompanying my movement with light and continuous touch on parts of my body that I seemed to leave behind or forget. It was through this movement experience that I felt curious about what there was to learn from Suryodarmo and simultaneously noticed that I now had a base in my own movement practice from which I felt ‘ready’ and interested in working with him directly.

Contrary to my early presumptions *Joged Amerta* did not manifest to be an intangible and mystical spirituality, but a movement practice with spiritual aspects in which the tangible, i.e. the human body, is one of the core sites of practice, or, as movement psychotherapist and early student of Suryodarmo Katya Bloom writes about Suryodarmo’s work, “the source of his approach is the human *organism*” (2006: 38, original emphasis). In a studio conversation during *The Ecological Body* workshop Suryodarmo asks: “Why we need liberation? In fact we are not free, we are in our system – we are in our body” (fieldnotes 09.06.2011), thus pointing to the corpo-reality to which we are bound and from which we move, live and create. Suryodarmo proposes: “Be stimulated by your organism. Its move you. [...] Not only seeing but sensing. From there how you can have organisation. Like the tree, how does the tree organise the leaves?” (fieldnotes 09.06.2011). Lavelle similarly highlights in her thesis on *Amerta Movement* that: “It is physically based. It is not instigated by imagination or association or by acting out feelings and mental concepts in a direct way” (2006: 9).

These suggestions position the body as the initiating ground from which movement develops, rather than as a tool we master in order to fulfil our movement ideas. The encouragement here is to trust our capacities to sense

and put forth (i.e. “organise”) with and through our bodies rather than privileging our intellectual capacities or what Suryodarmo calls “abstraction” when suggesting to “[...] organise from own body, not from abstraction” (fieldnotes 09.06.2011).

At the same time Suryodarmo invites an integrated presence of the mover’s rational abilities rather than suggesting to ‘cut off’ of or turn away from the mind in favour of the body. In my understanding *Joged Amerta* instead works towards non-duality more generally, with specific attention to the familiar split in Western philosophy between body and mind. In the final circle of the workshop a participant shares that “she felt she had experienced moments of dancing without thinking”. In response Suryodarmo suggested that maybe she had “experienced non-duality. So that thinking can still be there when you are dancing, but not in a duality” (fieldnotes 12.06.2011).

Suryodarmo’s work invites to combine and integrate different dispositions, counterbalancing for example what he refers to as “over-view”, a sense of coming from above, from the mind, from thinking with “under-standing”, a sense of coming from below, as practiced in traditional Javanese or African dances, in which the knees are bent and the ground is near. He further invites the consideration of trees as having “roots under themselves on which they stand”, offering access to “under-standing” that we need as much as “over-view”. Suryodarmo’s teaching practice and its philosophical outlook thus foster the incorporation, integration and interconnection of aspects of life that often seem to fall apart or to dominate each other.

Contextual Contingency

Whilst I work towards both a contextualisation and distillation of Suryodarmo’s work – in the specific relationship to the thesis theme of *dancing materiality* – this process is bound by my concrete experience and interaction with Suryodarmo in a particular way. It is true for all my engagement with movement practitioners in the framework of this thesis, that my notions are formed through my experiences and understandings, mediated by my cultural

and professional imprint. Yet in relationship to Suryodarmo an added layer comes into play, that I call *contextual contingency*. I consider this contingency to affect various layers of *Joged Amerta*, such as Suryodarmo's way of teaching but also the wider organisation of the practice, which I both attend to in this section.

I note in my fieldnotes on Suryodarmo that "I think he might answer the same question very differently depending on who is asking. Even if it concerns basic principles of his work" (fieldnotes 13.06.2011). The observation of a contextual contingency of Suryodarmo's responses is shared by the writer Shantam Zohar who highlights the inter-subjective nature of Suryodarmo's responses to questions with stating: "I believe that Prapto answered, first of all, to the person at hand" (2014: 100). Mainz similarly states that Suryodarmo's

responses are contextual. They can vary with any new situation. They are built on knowledge and experience which increase with any response given and they follow a strong intuition. (2014: 81)

These quotes support my observation that Suryodarmo offers very specific insights, proposals and movement dialogues in interdependence on his counterpart. Just as Thrift argues for intelligence to be "a property of an organism *and* its environment" (2005: 464, my emphasis) rather than of an organism alone, I consider the principles and practices of *Joged Amerta* to emerge in relationship and interdependence to the particular situation and the individual who is engaging in the practice or conversation. The propositions on *Joged Amerta* that I draw out here are therefore in a particular way and more so than in other contexts, dependant on contextual contingency and the inter-subjective processes through which my understandings of the practice have emerged.

Suryodarmo himself describes this aspect of *Joged Amerta* as a resonance and a tuning that is "different for each person and for each culture" (Suryodarmo 2014a: 311). He further underlines the relevance of practising a "tuning with each other and with the situation, like instruments in an orchestra; same tuning but also different" and proposes that: "This really needs to be understood by all, otherwise the reaction is "I've got it! – what Prapto says

is like this' and the practice becomes a monolith" (Suryodarmo 2014a: 311). The contextual contingency of *Joged Amerta* therefore conditions direct encounters and dialogues with Suryodarmo but also ensures that the practices continues to bear responsive qualities, rather than becoming a set of rules.

This does not imply that the practice is diffuse or without principles, after many years of a strong oral tradition these are meanwhile also documented in writing, accessible for example through the website of Suryodarmo's school Padepokan Lemah Puti (Suryodarmo 2014b) and reflected throughout *Embodied Lives* (Bloom, Galanter and Reeve 2014). However, I do consider the contingent nature of *Amerta* more generally to be both its blessing and its curse – on the one hand, it results in the possibility of bringing forth a highly individual and individually relevant movement practice. Apart from generally responding contextually contingent, Suryodarmo encouraged the workshop participants repeatedly during *The Ecological Body* to "grow" our "sense original" in the movement and invited us to attend to our way of moving, for example: "How you crawl, how you lying, how you walk" (fieldnotes 09.06.2011). I suggest that this attention to the individual ways of moving speaks of Suryodarmo's and *Joged Amerta*'s intention to support a full kind of "blossoming" of each individual, practiced through movement work but intended to inform the practitioner beyond dance.³⁸ This, in the best case, results in bringing forth particular and individual movement qualities, and supports a wider process of growing into oneself. For those who teach *Amerta*, this also includes the development of an individual approach to integrating and teaching practices of *Amerta*. This is a very different approach from training a dancer or dance teacher to master a specific technique or movement phrase with least divergence from an original idea, so that a choreographer's or movement practitioner's work can best be realised.

³⁸ The term blossoming draws on Suryodarmo's teaching vocabulary here and is a term he uses frequently. Reeve, Galanter and Bloom describe it as "an enlivening experience, which Prapto calls *blossoming*" (2014: 2). During *The Ecological Body* Suryodarmo used the term predominantly in a series such as: "There you have being & breathing, and hopefully blossoming & blessing" (fieldnotes 06.06.2011). I use blossoming in relationship to Suryodarmo's work as a way to express qualities of opening up towards and becoming oneself in and through movement practice. Whilst the focus may be on the individual here, the basic orientation of *Joged Amerta* is always inclusive of the environment, the movers and materials present on site, cultural, historical and spiritual aspects, atmospheric textures and so on.

However, the openness and unfixedness that forms part of this contextually contingent way of working also extends to the wider organisation of the practice, which results in some difficulties in the professionalization and certification of practitioners who have trained with Suryodarmo. The practice as a whole is ultimately highly practitioner dependant, or as I have quoted Lavelle further above, “person specific” (2006: 1). This contextual contingency of *Joged Amerta* also makes the practice somewhat nebulous in terms of what it actually is and how it can be passed on, beyond working directly with Suryodarmo. Whilst an international list of currently 24 “teacher and dialoguers” is available online, there is no uniform certification pathway according to which these individuals appear on this list (Suryodarmo n.d.). Bloom, Galanter and Reeve state:

Unlike most similar practices, Amerta was never meant to be passed down to students in the more formal, teacher-student style of pedagogical training, which he [Suryodarmo] refers to as a ‘pyramid approach’. Although there is a series of courses that comprises the framework of *Joged Amerta*, and a logical progression from one course to another, there is no formal training to become a teacher. (2014: 309)

Who is on this list is therefore a subjective decision of Suryodarmo, which he acknowledges and explains in an email to international *Amerta* practitioners organised under the header of *Sharing Movement*:

Whom I asked to put their name in my list, that’s really my subjective from the sense of human work, creativity, commitment, professional and of course sense friend family. From my work *Joged Amerta*, not from *Sharing Movement* criteria, not from your sense of your professional work. That’s mean I hope you understand that my criteria it is so different. (Suryodarmo 2002 in Lavelle 2006: 260)

Whilst this may – from a Western perspective – seem hierarchic and intransparent, it is moreover part of a practice that is not rooted in a Western educational system. From Suryodarmo’s point of view, as stated in the quote above, it is a formalised teacher-student system that he considers to be a hierarchic “pyramid approach” (Bloom, Galanter and Reeve 2014: 309), whereas

he understands his own proposal to be a non-hierarchical “gardener approach” (e.g. Reeve 2010: 196 and also p. 103 of this thesis). Suryodarmo’s process of appointing teachers is further deeply rooted in the Javanese culture that is structured towards inclusion rather than exclusion, a point that I cannot expand on here, but that is discussed by movement artist Christina Stelzer, who belongs to the so called ‘pioneer group’ of the first Westerners to study with Suryodarmo (2014). She describes for example the leaning towards hearing rather than looking and focusing in Javanese culture, in order to not exclude and create boundaries (Stelzer 2014: 32ff). These factors play into the process of becoming a teacher of *Amerta*, which is fluid and “person specific” (Lavelle 2006: 1) rather than based on a set of fixed rules. My understanding is also that Suryodarmo’s subjective approach of appointing teachers accounts for the highly differentiated backgrounds and capacities that individual *Amerta* practitioners have. Rather than having fulfilled a particular number of hours or courses, it is a question of having integrated the practices’ main proposals into one’s own work and life that seems to define readiness for teaching.

Joged Amerta is therefore not only a practice that is contextually contingent and person specific, but until today it is still quite Suryodarmo-centred, a constellation that results in a plurality of work that is *Amerta* influenced but also in some degree of uncertainty as to how this movement practice lives and can be passed on beyond its founder.³⁹ Whilst a few individual practitioners such as Reeve, Poynor or Mainz have been able to sustain a movement and teaching practice that is deeply informed by *Joged Amerta* and located in the field of performing arts, this is not the case for many of Suryodarmo’s students. This, however, also has to do with the high diversity of his students, many of which are active in non-dance/performing arts professions including fields such as archaeology or law (e.g. Miller 2014, Slidders 2014). Whilst some of them teach *Amerta Movement* they don’t rely on a certification because their professionalization and main income lies elsewhere.

³⁹ Lavelle describes the complexity of this problematic and the various informal structures that exist in relationship to *Amerta* with more depth in a section on educational criteria (2006: 259 – 261).

In the field of contemporary dance, however, I argue that whilst the contextual contingency of *Joged Amerta* has much to offer to the individual, it is also one factor that results in *Amerta* remaining a niche practice that currently does not reach a wide public.

Relaxation and Receptivity

This section now attends to the specific emphasis of *Amerta* on relaxation and receptivity and the invitation to soften what may be structured by physical, mental or emotional patterns of holding. It considers in particular how these aspects relate to the wider concern of this thesis with material agency and intermaterial confederations. In a description of *Amerta* Mainz suggests that

In my understanding of this multifaceted work, which is based in Javanese culture and philosophy, the body, besides its quality of expression and personal growth, is seen as our instrument of reception. [...] Relaxation within the body, a release of holding and identity, of focus and fixed concentration in our mind, brain and nervous system, is one practice to increase our potential for receptivity and communication. (Mainz 2011: 145)

Particularly noteworthy in the context of this thesis is Mainz's emphasis of the body as an instrument and locus of both relaxation and receptivity here. In the work of Suryodarmo, receptivity is closely related to the ability to relax and let go within the body. In my experience relaxation is not used in the sense of 'releasing' or sending something 'out' of the body nor in the more colloquial (Western) use of 'collapsing', but rather speaks to a process of opening up with and within the body. Practiced together, relaxation and receptivity mutually support each other, allowing habitual patterns of activity and control to soften so that more information can enter our sensory-perceptive system. As I have previously argued, practising receptivity "allows for the multiplicity of agents in our surroundings to come towards us, thus 'arising' rather than focusing on the notion of having to reach out, notice, pin down or – foreclosing even more information – understand all that is going on" (Kramer 2012a: 86). My

engagement with *Amerta*'s emphasis on receptivity and relaxation thus suggests that these practices allow the more rationally oriented attitude of knowing what to do next and keeping things under control to recede into the background and for a softer, multidimensional and multisensory orientation to flood in.

Relaxation and receptivity are undercurrents that are present in the general attitude and atmosphere that Suryodarmo fosters in the workshop space, but these are also resonant in specific movement cues such as: "Stop, feel your form, relax in the form, but stay with the form" (fieldnotes 07.06.2011). This quote speaks to the claim made above that relaxing is not collapsing but rather a practice that fosters the dancer's ability of being aware of his or her form and position in the space without hardening or restricting ones movement and emotional capacities. The emphasis here is on relaxing and opening towards what is, so that a deeper emotional and sensory response from one's own body is possible.

In relationship to working with receptivity in an outdoor context, the beginning of a score given by Poynor may serve as an example: "Face in four directions, with pauses, letting what is in front of you come to you" (score transcript 19.05.2011). Suggestions such as this one offer a very different engagement with a site than directing our (visual) attention forward and outward, focusing on something specific. Here the attention is 360° and in a non-discriminatory way the movers are invited to let whatever they notice to come toward them. All these are ways to invite what is present around or within us to affect our movement making process and dance is invited, understood and supported to come about in what I call intermaterial confederations. A description of receiving by *Amerta* practitioner Una Nicholson may serve as another example here:

For me, receiving starts with stopping. If I stop 'doing', whether that's thinking or sensing or attending to something, and let myself be quiet, I can begin to receive myself. I might notice a tension in my shoulders or behind my eyes or an emotion, but I settle, feel my feet touching the floor, and wait. Gradually I find that I have a softer and quieter feeling of empty receptiveness and

connection. My focus broadens and I am aware of other sounds such as the movement of trees in the wind outside, the quality of the light or the texture of the carpet. I become aware of what I am already receiving and am in connection with. (2014: 176)

This description again highlights the connection between receiving one's own materiality and noticing for example physical patterns of holding or tension. As these tensions soften, more sensory information becomes available to the dancer, allowing for noticing the materiality we are surrounded by, such as "the quality of light or the texture of the carpet" mentioned here. In relationship to the wider theme of this thesis I argue that relaxation and receptivity are relevant precursors to a dancers work with materiality.

Suryodarmo emphasises that as a support for the dancer's practice of relaxation and receptivity a sense of feeling "safe" is paramount rather than what he calls "throw yourself" (fieldnotes 09.06.2011). It is a proposal that suggests that we grow through safety, rather than challenge: "Sense, confident, in me trust, yes. [...] from that sometimes it can be surrender, relax total. Sometimes" (fieldnotes 09.06.2011). Importantly relaxation and receptivity are coupled with a continued attention to the dancer's ability of embodied articulation that takes place at the same time as he or she receives the world with all its changing and shifting aspects and atmospheres. Suryodarmo asks: "With all things changing, can we still be there, in softness, receptivity, but still our original, and dancing? With unpredictable water, weaving, always changing, undercurrent, shadow on the beach, shadow on the water" (fieldnotes 09.06.2011). Sensing, relaxing and receiving thus does not imply stillness, falling asleep or being rendered immobile. The invitation Suryodarmo formulates instead is one of "doing in surrender or surrendering in your doing" (fieldnotes 09.06.2011).

Section Two: Developing the Notions of All Has Being and All Has Fact

Drawing in particular on *The Ecological Body* workshop, the following sections develop and discuss further specificities of Suryodarmo's teaching practice in relationship to things, objects and materials. After introducing the

workshop setting, the first dimension I turn to is Suryodarmo's suggestion that *all has being*, which as its main move positions things as "subjects". Subjects that "speak", that make "offerings" and have "needs" that are independent of the human. Subjects that have being and partake as active collaborators in our living and working environments. The second dimension I consider is Suryodarmo's notion of things, objects and materials to have *fact*, which allows, as I will argue, to work with the possibility of direct contact between mover and material.

The Ecological Body Workshop

The Ecological Body workshop forms part of Reeve's regular training programme. It was developed in 2009 in response to her PhD (2008) carrying the same title, with the intention to reintegrate her research back into the practice format of a workshop. The first edition of this workshop was by invitation only and Reeve had invited Suryodarmo as a co-teacher, responding to the theme from the background of his work. In 2010 Reeve taught the workshop alone because Suryodarmo's visa was rejected, such that in 2011 the second edition of this teaching collaboration took place. Since then Reeve has further developed the workshop on her own and whilst it has always taken place in the movement garden of her home in Westhay, it travels to a new location for the first time in 2015 and is held in Sligo, Ireland (Reeve 2015).

The main part of the 2011 iteration of the workshop took place in Reeve's movement garden, but we also used the village hall of the nearby village Wootton Fitzpaine as an indoor base. In addition to the garden and the hall we spent one afternoon moving among the works of sculptor Greta Berlin, exhibited on her land in an ample sculpture garden. Further parts of the workshop programme were two collective meals, one at Westhay and one at a nearby organic farm, as well as an open day with workshop performances for an audience on the last day held in the movement garden.

Working with things, objects and materials formed an integral and central part of the workshop. One of the first impressions of the village hall that

I record in my fieldnotes reads: “In the far corner to the right LOTS OF STUFF. Things! Materials! Many different brightly coloured pieces of fabric” (fieldnotes 06.06.2011). We specifically worked with chairs, but also fabrics and the many items found in and around a big garden with a farmhouse - a ladder, a wheelbarrow, old windows, a car tyre, gardening tools and a big fire, sometimes lit.

This item has been removed due to data protection. The unabridged version of this thesis can be viewed at the Lanchester library, Coventry University

June 2011, Movement Garden, Westhay (UK)

During the workshop Suryodarmo positions the work with things, objects and materials as offering support to the mover. In a conversation on performance he suggests that “working with objects and making constellations. [...] helps you” (fieldnotes 12.06.2011), when one of the participants expressed a sense of ‘standing outside the room’ during performance, a feeling of losing the thread or being lost.

Three areas of the movement garden of Westhay were titled with different themes on the second day, these were “daily life”, “therapy” and “performance”.⁴⁰ Over the days groups formed that particularly worked in these locations. Additionally each dancer identified his or her “niche” over the course of the first few days, to which he or she returned regularly and in which a small performance was offered on the open day at the end of the week. Niche here defined a geographical location in the garden, but was also introduced as an

⁴⁰ The appointing of names to particular areas in an outdoor movement space is part of *Joged Amerta* since its early beginnings. Lavelle, who focuses on the time period of 1986 – 1997, for example writes about “special practice-&-theme areas” on the land of Suryodarmo’s school. “Each of these is of a specific physical form and material and each is connected to one of three Amerta Movement categories, Human(ity), Temple and Nature, as well as the three overall themes Physical/bodily expression, Prayer and Purification” (2006: 14).

ecological concept for which Reeve draws on zoologists G. Evelyn Hutchinson's work of the late 1950s, quoted here in an excerpt of Reeve's PhD thesis:

Niche, as a concept in ecology, was defined by Hutchinson (cited in Begon, M., et al., 2006: 31) as: the ways in which tolerances and requirements interact to define the conditions and resources needed by an individual or species in order to practise its way of life. The niche of an organism describes how rather than where it lives and it is multidimensional. (Reeve 2008: 82)

The workshop had a significant genealogical aspect for me personally as two of my main movement teachers, Mainz and Poynor, also participated; Mainz for the whole duration and Poynor as an invited guest for a day. Further visitors to the workshop included two Buddhist monks and a Buddhist novice nun, who joined the group for two full days. The presence of teachers as co-participants slightly unsettled me at first, but developed into a very generous and supportive working atmosphere. This also found a performative expression in the trio 'tauschen, täuschen, tauchen, teachen' that Mainz, Suryodarmo and myself performed during the open day.⁴¹ Several overlaps of teacher-student relations were present in the group, as well as several generations of Suryodarmo's students, supporting and evidencing the 'gardener' approach of *Joged Amerta*. The idea of "gardener or shepherd" (public interview 09.06.2011) refers to a sense of passing on practice by tending to a garden or caring for a herd rather than teaching through structured top-down, teacher-student relationships. Whilst I have described the problematic that coincides with the lack of a clear certification structure of Suryodarmo's work further above, the aspect of 'gardening' vs. 'teaching' highlights the positive aspects of this un-structure, that in the best case allows for the 'growth of a diverse garden'.

Most of the participants (with the exception of two locals) stayed in a cluster of holiday cottages that Reeve had booked in the vicinity of the village hall, some sharing a room. All these details allowed for the work to extend beyond movement into areas such as farming, eating, living, community,

⁴¹ 'tauschen, täuschen, tauchen, teachen' literally translates as 'swapping, tricking, diving, teaching' and draws on the sounds of the words as well as their meaning, with 'teachen' being a so-called 'denglisch' (deutsch (German) and englisch (English)) neologism.

healing, performance, spirituality, lineage or visual art. In chapter four I have already mentioned such extension as a connecting thread to outdoor movement practices that were gestating as part of the early developments of modern dance and I return to the relevance of such a widened framework in chapter eight.

All Has Being

One of the main propositions of Suryodarmo's work in relationship to things, objects and materials is his positioning of things and objects (again I do not fundamentally differentiate here) as subjects that have being and make offerings, something he suggests we can acknowledge or forget (public interview 09.06.2011, fieldnotes 06.06.2011). In working with us and during the interview Suryodarmo suggests that: "Tree [...] or stone [...] is not only material. This is subject" (public interview 09.06.2011). He further proposes that this perspective extends to man-made objects, such as a chair, which he also considers to make active offerings. He suggests that "the chair is speaking through its form," adding that "the chair has an intention, it makes an offering, it says 'sit down please'". He further continues with the remark that "we just sit on the chair, we don't sit within it, we only use it. Elements, space, earth – we forget, it's always in offering" (fieldnotes 06.06.2011).

Crucially Suryodarmo differentiates between respecting or valuing something and considering something to make an offering. He explains:

[...] we can still respect to the things, to the object. But this is not offering. [...] Only human giving value. This is respect. But is not offering. [...] So this is the mind-set of nature as a being and the nature as material. Is like you can say offering from the rice or you respect to the rice. (Public interview 09.06.2011)

When respecting or valuing something, agency remains with the human being, who grants respect or gives value rather than perceiving that an offering is made. If we assume of things to make offerings, agency can spread across species and materials, a suggestion that is strongly argued for in the work of Bennett (2010, 2012, 2015) as laid out in chapter two. Suryodarmo's perspective

further makes space for a Harmanian understanding of non-human autonomy and independence when suggesting: “The land, the stone, the flower - what they need is not what I need” (fieldnotes 09.06.2011), a stance I have equally introduced in chapter two and return to in the following section on *all has fact*.

Interestingly, in the interview, Suryodarmo occasionally differentiates between “material” and the “aliveness” a being has, for example through juxtaposing “nature as being” and “nature as material” in the long quote above or when stating, as quoted in the beginning of the section, that the stone is “not only material”. I suggest that Suryodarmo here speaks to what could be considered the ‘general’ Western perspective in which material equals dead matter, in order to highlight the aliveness of things, objects and materials he passes on through his work. I contend that this does not contradict a shift he seeks to bring forth in our relationship with things, objects and materials, because he ultimately suggests: “But is the material having own story. So we need to know that first. That is the fact of this nature. And they have own life” (public interview 09.06.2011). Using the vocabulary of current materialist and speculative realist philosophy I thus suggest that Suryodarmo’s work supports a notion of independent, agentic and autonomous materiality. A further differentiation that is relevant here is Suryodarmo’s contention that the thing itself is what has being or is alive, not the spirit or soul or something that could be understood as separate of the thing or material. He explains: “It’s just a tree or something there, alive. [...] It’s not only the spirit of something in the tree but the tree itself is alive” (public interview 09.06.2011).

In summary I thus argue that Suryodarmo offers a perspective that considers things, objects and materials as alive and agentic and suggests that *all has being*. Suryodarmo makes no distinction between things, objects, materials or human beings in terms of how we move with each other - nature, a chair, a cup, a wind, a tree, a dancer – but rather suggests that all has being, all are making an offering and what is more – all are family and in relationship. He emphasises for example that “the wind is my brother or the fire, the water, the earth - it’s my brother” (public interview 09.06.2011). Suryodarmo’s work in this sense offers a practice ground for the philosophical proposals of a ‘vitality’ that

extends beyond the living organisms (Bennett). Suryodarmo's work thus allows for the exploration of a differently ordered system that releases the human from the position in the philosophical centre in movement practice. I further illuminate these aspects throughout the following chapters, but also in this specific context through discussing "Moving with a chair and 5 objects", a movement score Suryodarmo proposed during *The Ecological Body*.

This score begins by choosing a chair and a minimum of 5 objects, which we are asked to gather outdoors or in the hall. Suryodarmo then encourages us to place the objects as we are moving, asking them where they want to be placed and at the same time not forgetting any parts of our bodies. As discussed above, these objects are considered as subjects, which Suryodarmo underlines by saying: "Speak to me, not only I speak to them" (fieldnotes 09.06.2011). Central to this movement phase is the idea of moving objects in a kind of co-directive process between dancer and object, that I read as an example of what I call intermaterial confederation.

This is how I note Suryodarmo's words in my notebook:

*How I put, how I pick, how I bring, carry, how I choose the place.
That is connecting all of the movement.
I try to aware it. Where do you want to stay? [He is asking the stone]
Feeling it.
How can I put this, the landing of the stone flying.
How can I let it be?
I like to hold it.
I like to hook it, I look to be hooked by it.
Why not create a book that I can read and then I can cook!
How to let, how to bring and to put.
Daily gesture – giving sense – feeling it – how to dance moving it.
How I can feel my moving-dancing connecting the constellation.
I always remember of the god and I forget my human.*

How I can have human sense in the placing of the unknown that is my problem too.

How much I go there, how much I will forget. Minimum my back, or my environment sense. [...]

How I still have space and time?

I am still included, sum of my constellation, we also need to check it.

Overview to understand the constellation.

How my overview, my over-feel, my under-feel still included in my constellation.

Is my chair still included in my composition? (Fieldnotes 09.06.2011)

Suryodarmo weaves a poetic field here that calls the dancer into a multidirectional and open attention, allowing the body to move in a wider constellation of time and space and in response to what an object might have to say. The dancer attends to being “included” into the constellation, but in a way that allows for “cooking”, thus the creation of something new, rather than “hooking” which stands for determining and holding on in a way that stalls movement. Suryodarmo further calls on the bodily material of the dancer, by speaking of the “human” that we need to remember, calling to our attention basic aspects like “my back”. What I understand him to suggest here is that it is easier for us to get caught up in imagination than to attend to our bodily material at hand. But the question here is to work out through movement practice how can I grant objects agency and work among them as one among many, in time and in space.

All Has Fact

All has fact is another proposal that I draw from working with Suryodarmo. I suggest that it allows for working with things, objects and materials in a way that cuts through the levels and layers of meaning that form an inseparable part of any thing, object, being, material or action. It does not deny the simultaneity of meaning and material nor does it indicate an essential truth located in the material. It rather opens what I consider to be a possibility of direct contact in movement practice, a way of permeating the layers of meaning inscribed in things, objects and materials by asking in the manner of choreographer Deborah Hay’s (2000) well known “What if?” questions: “What if I could make contact with this tree (rock, tire, stick, cup) directly? What if I could touch its facticity? (Rather than manoeuvring through my expectations, imaginations, opinions or memories).” My proposal is that this possibility can be explored and made use of in dance practice, which I work out in relationship

to Suryodarmo's teaching principles of "dream world" and "reality world" here.

Asked by a workshop participant to speak about these terms Suryodarmo explains that reality world has to do with "connecting with root, gravity, idea 'it is what it is', no imagination, just be there [...] connecting with the law of physics, the law of nature, very simple understanding". Dream world on the other hand is introduced in this instance as "the place that is a symbol, [...] of language. This body, this face, this gesture, as symbol that speak to you, to me, have meaning" (fieldnotes 09.06.2011). Bloom summarises reality world with "physical, material existence" (2006: 38) and performance artist Sally Dean explains in her writing: "Fiction/Dream refers to 'the imagination, the symbol' while Fact/Reality refers to 'the concrete'. [...] In general, when approaching an image, symbol or metaphor (or even an object or person) we can consider both its Facts (the function, colours, texture, orientation, location, weight, shape, etc.) as well as its Fictions (associations, meanings, metaphors, feelings, characters, etc.)" (2014: 121/122). Drawing on these definitions I thus use Suryodarmo's "reality world" and "dream world" as pointers towards what I have referred to as "matter and meaning" with Barad (2007) in chapter two. Suryodarmo himself suggests that: "This is the basis of Joged Amerta, combining the World of Nature Reality and the World of Symbol, the Reality world and the Dream world in human movement, nature movement, space and time" (Suryodarmo interviewed by Butler 2014: 315).

Other examples pertinent to this wider argument are the suggestions Suryodarmo made as we were working with Greta Berlin's sculptures on her land. Suryodarmo suggested: "Sculpture – give association that is dream world. But if sculpture is suddenly struck you, that is reality world" (fieldnotes 10.06.2011). He later added: "Good artwork, the sculpture itself it speak" (fieldnotes 10.06.2011). In my understanding of Suryodarmo's work one central intention is to foster a participant's ability of working with the combination of what he calls reality world and dream world, that is with both what is materially present to the touch, the matters of fact so to speak, as well as with the interconnected layers of meaning. As a modus of practice, however,

Suryodarmo's work also allows for a separation of the two and the possibility to let go of the dream world and to practise instead "no imagination. Sometimes it's just see and imitate. [...] Let go of the image but still be in the fact. And then you can see about imagination" (fieldnotes 09.06.2011). Or in another instance he suggest: "First I work with reading, not my interpretation. Interpretation it's jumping from the fact" (fieldnotes 10.06.2011). Reading here suggests a sensorial encounter with the environment rather than an interpretative one.⁴²

The examples given thus far show that Suryodarmo's work supposes a level of facticity to be available for the dancers to make use of, he proposes that *all has fact*. This is a radical departure from theoretical proposals such as Barad's (2007) that emphasise a total entanglement and mutual bringing forth of matter and meaning. Suryodarmo instead suggests that it is possible and useful to deal with 'facts' in movement, that is the material properties of all that surrounds us, the forms, textures, temperature, densities and so on. I have found Harman's philosophical work helpful here, because contrary to Barad it allows for a "reality" of objects, that he considers to be independent of what humans know about or assign to it (e.g. Harman 2011a, 2015). As I have suggested in chapter two, Harman's philosophical perspective on reality departs from the view that reality can only exists in correlation between human perception and world. I thus propose a productive resonance between Suryodarmo's and Harman's notions on reality here, even though the latter is concerned with reality as withdrawing from human access and the former offers practical work that is concerned with being in contact. However the two conjoin in arguing for a reality that exists independently of our minds. Translated into dance practice this allows for working as Suryodarmo suggests with "no imagination" and invites a way of dancing that speaks to and from materiality. Trees and tar, dancer and rain can then be invited into a direct and unmediated contact with each other.

⁴² More on the use of 'reading' in relationship to *Amerta* can be found in Lavelle 2006: 47 – 52.

Suryodarmo further suggests that reality world and dream world also conjoin and in a way steadily grow into each other. An example he offers here is the connection between sound and language. He proposes that “from the sounds, reality, can become voice, can become word, can become language” (fieldnotes 09.06.2011) thus suggesting that the connection between the material and the symbolic is processual, and reality in this example gradually interlaces with the level of symbol, metaphor or meaning. Taking the various examples given thus far together, I propose that Suryodarmo’s practice offers a productive space for both separation and interdependence, and thus for matter to exist both apart and in interrelation with meaning. As I have already touched on in chapter two, this points to Suryodarmo’s notion of inter-independence, that offers a third way rather than speaking of either independence or interdependence, as would in the theoretical field be the case of Harman ‘contra’ Barad. Suryodarmo further proposes that it is our activity and experimentation that allows for the co-presence of reality world and dream world when stating: “Me, my approach, not through speaking” (fieldnotes 09.06.2011). It is thus through practising and moving that the co-presence of “dream” and “reality”, of “fiction” and “fact”, of “imagination” and “direct contact” can be made sense as well as made use of.

I consider Suryodarmo’s proposals relevant both to dance practice and the theoretical field I have engaged with. As argued above I consider his work to offer a conjunction of work such as Barad’s and Harman’s that is otherwise unthinkable and therefore noteworthy in relationship to current theory building. In relationship to contemporary dance practice I consider his work and his emphasis of “reality world” to support dancers’ engagement with materially. His practice significantly attends to the bodily materiality dancers need to articulate their art form but also, as worked out further above, as an “instrument of reception” (Mainz 2011: 145). Suryodarmo’s work strongly emphasises the turn to the material itself: “The form. The form speaks. The mouth of the finger, the mouth of the wrist. [...] ‘not energy’, let your body speak” (06.06.2011). This encourages the dancer to turn towards his or her materiality as a corpo-reality, fostering dancer’s sense of facticity and

placement in this world and enabling them to trust in and rely on the body and its abilities of both reception and expression. I consider these proposals to invite the dancer to practise suspension, akin to a phenomenological epoché, in terms of dealing with meaning, judgement or interpretation. Instead the possibility is opened to attend to materiality first and foremost, with and without the layers of symbolism and meaning.

Chapter Summary

This chapter introduced and contextualized the movement practice *Joged Amerta* of Suryodarmo, with particular attention to its contextual contingency. It then drew out the basic principles of relaxation and receptivity, especially in their relevance and relationship to working with materiality in outdoor dance. The chapter has further developed two specific aspects of *Joged Amerta* with regard to working with things, materials and objects, which I have termed *all has being* and *all has fact*. Here I argue that through highlighting the capacities of being and the facticity of things, objects and materials *Joged Amerta* allows for them to be ‘real’ as developed by Harman and to speak for themselves rather than only through human assignments of meaning. Things, objects and materials are thus understood to make offerings that participate in our movement practice and can hereby be positioned as active agents and participants in intermaterial confederations, as argued for by Bennett.

These aspects are now further developed in the following two chapters, the first of which develops the relevance and capacities of the material body and possibilities for working across materials more thoroughly, the second of which attend more closely to practices of physical exposure and working with intermaterial confederations.

I touch body, I touch sand, I touch water, algae, stone.
(Fieldnotes 03.04.2011)

6. Working Across Materials

Introduction

This chapter draws on my practice-as-research engagement with the work of movement artist Helen Poynor over the course of two years, beginning with a workshop in March 2010 and ending the active research phase with a workshop in March 2012, whilst continuing to occasionally communicate with Poynor about my research throughout the entire unfolding of the thesis.⁴³ During the active research phase I conducted three interviews and attended four workshops, one of two and three of three days, as well as participated in the foundation year of Poynor's *Walk of Life Training Programme in Non-stylised and Environmental Movement*. A close engagement with Poynor's teaching practice through participation and fieldnotes recorded conversations about her work in general as well as material published by Poynor herself together form the base of analysis through which the arguments of this chapter are developed. Poynor's body of work further includes performance and film work as well as her practice as a dance therapist, which all lie outside of the scope of this project.

The first section of the chapter offers an introduction to Poynor's teaching practice *Walk of Life*, outlining her workshop and training programme and her ways of working with scores, as well as establishing the focus on the body in her work. In the second section I develop the proposition of *working across materials*. I firstly consider the grounding capacities of turning towards the material body more generally, for which Poynor's work offers pertinent examples. I then introduce two strands of working across materials – the first emphasises *differentiation*, for example through an accentuation of a sense of boundary between two materials, the second invites *intermingling*, a way of working that focuses on the interrelation and folding into each other of materials. Overall I suggest that neither strategy fosters a sense of antagonistic

⁴³ Poynor's work continues to evolve and this writing therefore particularly pertains to this time period and training year (autumn 2010 – spring 2011).

othering. On the contrary, both build on and emphasise a shared sense of materiality and propose the positioning of materials on a spectrum of densities rather than assuming clear-cut separations between them. Here I suggest that in the light of Poynor's work materials as diverse as body and space can be understood to be located on such a spectrum. Whilst one is less and the other is more permeable, both are material. I situate and discuss some of these propositions in the context of the work of Barad, whose notions on 'entanglement' have been helpful in shaping my understanding and framing of intermaterial relationships as I discuss them here.

Section One: *Walk of Life* – Helen Poynor's Teaching Practice

Poynor runs her workshop and training programme *Walk of Life* on the Jurassic Coast in South-West England, in and around the villages of Beer and Charmouth. She currently offers a variety of two to four day workshops throughout the year, which are roughly oriented around the seasons and take place in relationship to particular outdoor sites. Poynor tends to offer one three-day women's workshop each year and some workshops are taught in collaboration, integrating for example Sumarah meditation or the somatic practice Feldenkrais®. Most years she teaches a workshop which focuses specifically on 'Movement Ritual', a bodywork movement sequence developed by Halprin. For those wanting to study more regularly and deeply with Poynor she offers the *Walk of Life Training Programme in Non-stylised and Environmental Movement* since 2007, which is divided in three year-long training cycles - a foundation training, a continuation training and a year of mentorship. The foundation and continuation year each consist of three five-day movement blocks, two individual sessions with Poynor or a peer group meeting between the blocks and the commitment to move one hour in the studio and one outdoors each week for the duration of the programme. The mentorship programme is slightly different and strongly determined by individual projects the participants bring to it. The group size is significantly smaller (max. six) and the blocks are slightly shorter in comparison to the first

two years. The participants further meet in between blocks both with Poynor individually as well as with their peer group and the individual practice is developed according to the needs of the specific project.

Workshop and training groups otherwise tend to have around ten and at most twelve participants and places of practice are both village halls and schools – i.e. indoor, studio spaces – and a variety of outdoor sites. The outdoor sites include several different coastal sites on the beaches of Beer and Charmouth, but also wooded sites such as the two Iron Age hill forts Lambert's Castle and Blackbury Camp or sites above the shoreline, such as the top of Chardown Hill. Poynor has been living and teaching in Beer since 1991 and whilst the sites she works on do shift occasionally, she has a deep familiarity with all of them. All sites form part of a particular workshop or training for specific reasons, such as “the 360° vista” on top of Chardown Hill or “the three dimensionality and unpredictability of the earth” of an under cliff site with many earthen hummocks nearby (personal conversation, 16.09.2014).

Workshop and training days tend to begin with one to two hours of studio work and then transition to one of the outdoor sites – sometimes on foot and sometimes by car. During the training, which is a more intensive format, the group most always returns to the studio for a last round of movement and/or closure, often orientated towards working with other members of the group (personal conversation 14.01.2015).

Working in the studio constitutes an essential part of Poynor's teaching practice, functioning as a support and preparatory practice that lays the foundations for the outdoor work that follows. Poynor says of her studio practice that it “exists in its own right” but is also positioned and composed as a pre-cursor and support for the outdoor work (fieldnotes 18.05.2011). When I first joined Poynor's workshops I first felt less interested in the studio work, having been used to working only outdoors which is the territory in which my own work unfolds. However, at the end of participating in her foundation training programme I note that:

I really understand now how the 'lab' situations in the studio lay the foundations, offer the possibility to build a physical

understanding of the qualities in the body and mind that then offer a base to move from in the environment. (Fieldnotes 22.05.2011)

Though I have not yet attempted to integrate this kind of studio practice into my own teaching, I notice how it has supported my own physical integration as well as my understanding of Poynor's working practice.

Central to Poynor's teaching is her working with scores – a kind of verbal package given to the dancer filled with orientation points of 'how to proceed', which draws on her training with Halprin. In close collaboration, Halprin and her husband, the landscape architect Lawrence Halprin (1916 - 2009), developed the *RSVP Cycles* as a specific way of thinking about and working with scores, which continues to be highly influential for Halprin's work and teaching practice. RSVP stands for resources, score, valuation and performance. Taken together, these form a working process for creative practices, which can be engaged with in any order (Halprin 1970: 2).⁴⁴ In the present context I only attend to the aspect of scoring.

The word score in the field of dance draws on the use of the term in music, here referring to sheet music or any kind of representation used for musicians that defines a set of rules for a piece of music. In dance the use of the term is prolific and has a wide range reaching from open suggestions such as "do what you need to do" to following a particular set of rules or a specific sequence of proposals. Scores can be oriented towards movement directly, as much as towards the imagination or the sensory system of the dancer, which in turn affect his or her movement practice. In short, scores are what the movement practitioners who devises them makes of them. Halprin has proposed a scale of one to ten to delineate if a score is open (one) or closed (ten). In their book on Halprin, dance scholar Libby Worth and Poynor detail: "An open score contains a minimum of instructions leaving the participant free to explore, while a closed score consists of detailed, precise directions predetermining much of the action [...]" (2004: 74). I consider the scores

⁴⁴ More information on RSVP can be found in Lawrence Halprin's original book on the topic *The RSVP Cycles. Creative Processes in the Human Environment* (1970), in Anna Halprin's book *Moving Towards Life: Five Decades of Transformational Dance* (1995: 124 – 126) and also in Worth and Poynor's book *Anna Halprin* (2004).

devised by Poynor to be positioned somewhere in the middle range of this spectrum. Used both indoors and outdoors, Poynor's scores tend to propose a specific sequence of what to do, yet she always emphasises that scores do not need to be completed in a specific time, nor be completed at all. In a score that works with the layers of space, to which I return further below, she suggest for example: "It's not a race, and you can come back and forwards between the layers" (fieldnotes 22.05.2011). Whilst Poynor's scores stem from a profound engagement with a specific topic and/or site and follow a specific rationale, she also notes and knows that movers might need to or choose to deviate from a suggested score. However, the main intention is quite focused on finding "oneself and the freedom within them" (personal conversation 02.04.2015), rather than deliberately or inadvertently changing a score.

In my experience the outdoor scores stand out specifically because they form the only moment of verbal teaching on site and are communicated prior to moving, usually repeated twice with time for questions in between and the second round being a summarised version of the first explanation. Indoor scores, on the other hand, tend to be communicated throughout a movement session with Poynor giving suggestions or proposing different stages of a score whilst the dancers are moving. It took me a while to get used to receiving this kind of packaged up-front information for moving outdoors, which I often felt made me try to remember the order of things and generally felt somewhat disembodied and mind focused to me. However, over time I began to trust my own remembering of the score more deeply and began to appreciate that this process allows Poynor to hand over (without stepping out of her responsibilities towards the group) to the environment as a teacher, a theme I have already discussed in the context of Suryodarmo's work in the previous chapter. She thus offers a kind of distillation of her experiences on and knowledge of the sites as well as a specific teaching intention, but then allows the movers to go on their own journey, working with the residue of the studio practice, their own history and experience that is always present, as well as the particularities of a specific location and a particular moment in time.

The Focus on the Body in Poynor's Work

I have found Poynor's teaching practice to be particularly clear in speaking to the material body of the dancers and ultimately to all materials present on site, which led me to intensify my engagement with her work over the course of my practice-as-research period. When analysing Poynor's teaching terminology in my fieldnotes I noticed that she most often uses the word "substance" (23.01.2011) when speaking about the materiality of the body, whilst also using "matter" (23.01.2011), "the physicality" (24.03.2012) or "our material selves" (22.03.2010). In a conversation with Poynor on this particular topic she added that she further differentiates between "substance" and "structure" in her work, both of which pertain to an overall focus on materiality. Whilst the former speaks to the muscular or fleshy 'substance' of the dancer's bodies, 'structure' focuses on the skeleton and the material interconnections throughout the body (personal conversation 02.04.2015). However, rather than delving deeper into this differentiation between substance and structure, this chapter considers Poynor's overall focus on materiality, which includes and particularly attends to the dancer's body.

Poynor's work positions the body as a foundation that is always available to the dancer, offering a fundamental source for the dancer's work. In a workshop she might suggest, for example, that "to come back to the physicality of the body" (fieldnotes 24.03.2012) is always possible, that "[i]f we get lost, if we don't know what to do" (fieldnotes 24.03.2012) the body is still there. My research suggests that the focus on materiality in Poynor's work begins with the human body, but does not end there. It is rather that human physicality is understood to be the embodied sensorium with which we engage with other materialities.⁴⁵ Once dancers are able to sense their own materiality, they are also enabled to meet the materiality of the world through their bodies and can use the body as a tool for interrelation or, as I will expand in the following

⁴⁵ With sensorium I refer to the combined perceptual and sensory capacities of a human body, akin to anthropologist Kathryn Geurts who employs sensorium to speak of "the whole sensory apparatus of the body" (2003: 253). The term is much employed and discussed in the field of sensory anthropology, inspired for example by Stoller (1989, 1997) and Ong (1991).

chapter, confederation. Vice versa the materials of a site affect the dancer and can support or heighten the sense of his or her materiality. The agency thus goes both ways.

In an interview Poynor speaks about the process of her own practice growing to be more “body based” over the years, which she attributes particularly to her time of training with Suryodarmo.

I think the work is stronger physically. More body based. Which is interesting. Because Anna [Halprin]’s work is very kinaesthetically based. But I think I got another layer of my own body working with Prapto, given that he was training very much from *Body Body* at the time when I was there. (Interview 13.04.2011)

This focus on the body in Suryodarmo’s early years of teaching is also reflected in Lavelle’s study on his work between 1986 and 1997, in which she observes that a group of students “practiced to be ‘at home in the body’” and notes that “Suprapto stressed what he called [...] ‘listening’ to the body’s physicality” (2006: 72). Poynor has further articulated the focus on the body in her work in a recent article entitled ‘*Body Body*’ (Poynor 2014). Here she reflects extensively on the influence of Suryodarmo’s body-based way of teaching when she trained with him, which she describes as “intensely physical” (223) as well as taught less through words and more through movement. She explains: “[...] *Body Body* sums up the tenor of his teaching at this time. In Indonesian, repeating a word serves to emphasise it or render it plural” (223, emphasis in original). She explains that in her own work

The starting point is the body itself rather than a concept, theme or image. From my perspective there is a tendency for these mental functions to elicit a cerebral response that is enacted by body rather than arising directly from it. This may result in a gap, however slight, between stimulus and expression. (227)

I’m particularly interested in Poynor’s statement: “I got another layer of my own body” in the interview, which she specifies in a later conversation to indicate that: “Working with Prapto landed me more securely in my body, giving me a fuller sense of embodiment” (personal conversation 02.04.2015).

These comments, as well as Poynor's working practice, suggest that this sense of landing in one's body, which Poynor also refers to as "inhabiting" one's body (personal conversation 02.04.2015), is on the one hand fundamentally relevant for dance practice, but further affects life beyond dance. Poynor thus concludes the cited essay with: "*Body Body* is an approach to movement practice which, through focusing on the physical, allows the whole being to ground itself in the walk of life" (229).

My research supports and builds on these considerations, arguing that attending to the body allows the dancer to develop a base and a sensorium through which she or he can productively draw on materials more generally, both for dancing as well as expanded in chapter eight, for living. As I develop here most specifically, a sense of one's own body facilitates what I call *working across materialities*.

Section Two: Working Across Materials

Grounding

This section begins with considering more specifically the grounding capacities of turning towards one's own materiality as a dancer, which I contend is a crucial prerequisite for working across materials, especially so when working in wide open locations, surrounded primarily by the highly permeable materiality of space/air. I then distinguish two strands of working across materials, firstly an emphasizing on sensing boundaries, that I call differentiation, and secondly an emphasizing of folding into each other, that I call intermingling. My proposal is that both aspects allow for working across materials and foster an understanding of materials of different orders, such as 'body' and 'space', as placed on a spectrum of densities rather than constituting separate antipodes.

Poynor's studio work serves as a kind of 'lab' here, in which the turn towards the body is firstly practised. These foundational practices then support the outdoor work, during which this orientation towards materiality is

furthered in relationship to the materials present on site. Poynor often begins by attending to the whole physicality of the dancer's body here, rather than its intricate details. As a warm-up score of a day that focused specifically on bodily substance I record for example the instruction for a back rub in pairs as: "this is rubbing the substance, no prodding or poking around, no massage: rubbing!" (fieldnotes 23.01.2011) in my notes. In another studio score Poynor speaks of a "Whole body change, no thinking, the whole body changes" (fieldnotes 19.05.2011). The dancer is asked to move and sense his or her complete substance here, not yet going into intricate movements of single body parts. My general suggestion is that a good part of Poynor's work is made up of supporting the dancer in sensing his or her own substance and learning to work from substance rather than ideas or concepts about what the physical body should be able to perform. This substance then functions as an instrument for working across materials, and is positioned as an open sensorium rather than a closed-off entity. Poynor describes this aspect in an article written shortly after her first time working with Suryodarmo in Java as being "at home in our body but with the doors and windows open" (1986: 4).

Another way of turning the dancer's attention towards their bodies happens through studio scores that highlight the body's physical interconnection in movement. These scores are often based on walking as a practice of arriving and progress through the whole body. They might begin with attending to the head or face, with Poynor guiding the mover in working through the whole body down to the ankles and feet (fieldnotes 21.01.2011). Such a sequence could also move the other way, from the feet on the floor up to the skull (fieldnotes 25.03.2012), or begin in the pelvis, move down from the hip joint towards the feet, then up from tail to head through the spine and outwards from ribcage and shoulder blades to the hands (fieldnotes 24.03.2012). I also understand such progressions as a first calling into awareness of the body's materiality through naming and making felt the body's parts, articulations, connections, directions, sensibilities. As these warm-up, moving-walking scores travel through the body, established relationships between points of attention (often the articulations) tend to be kept, so that slowly the

whole body as connected is foregrounded with focal points that vary across scores.

The dancers are almost always asked to continuously move through space as the attention of the score travels through the whole body. However, just as important as moving is stopping and paying attention to one's positionality. Cues include "stop, feel where you are, notice your position in space, let go of any unnecessary tension, continue" (fieldnotes 21.01.2011) or "stop where you are, feel yourself as an anchor point in the space, see who is near you" (fieldnotes 18.05.2011). Such suggestions of stopping stem from Poynor's time of studying with Suryodarmo, who frequently give this cue, as noted in the previous chapter in relationship to the practice of receptivity in his work. These moments of stopping and sensing serve to foreground and bring to the movers' attention the materiality of the body and its positionality in space. Here I am, what is here, how am I positioned, how does it feel, how do I move on, what am I made of – these are things that I physically notice as a dancer in these scores. The awareness of my three-dimensional positionality is heightened in these moments of stopping, in a way my reservoir of self-awareness is being filled and it becomes easier for me keep this raised level of sensing myself as I continue to move. What the mixture of motion and stopping develops is a way of grounding oneself in movement, rather through stillness (personal conversation 02.04.2015). In summary the studio scores thus foster a sense of the body as three-dimensional, multi-directional, internally and externally connected, located, articulate, and vital – a living, breathing, sensing, material and moving being in space.

After warming-up with a back rub as mentioned above, we transition into a score that I call "hands on matter" (23.01.2011) in my fieldnotes of a day that as a whole focused on substance. Poynor instructs us to:

Put your hands on your body and move from there. Like a sculptor sculpts the clay. *Really feel the substance of your body, the stuff you are made of, your matter.* The hands slide along the body rather than changing the position by lifting them from the body and putting them down again in a different position. (Fieldnotes 23.01.2011, my emphasis)

This score addresses the materiality of the body through a combination of touch and verbal cues that highlight the body's physicality, "the substance of your body, the stuff you are made of, your matter", encouraging the dancer to turn his or her felt-sense towards this territory. Substance is further invited to come to the forefront of the mover's attention through the use of uninterrupted touch of one's own body, with the instruction to "sculpt" and "slide" along the body rather than changing the position of the hands through lifting them off the body. I notice a movement quality emerging in the room that I describe as "earthy" and observe movement that is "heavy but with agility, with weight but not rigid" (23.01.2011). In my own movement I observe that I use less "high tonus, strength and effort" than had been my habitual tendency of activating the materiality of my body. In my fieldnotes of that day I look back at my very early training in outdoor movement practice with Mainz and "I remember being in the sand and finding this deep, deep strength in me, with Bettina or someone else trying to bring me down" (fieldnotes 23.01.2011). I thus note a development in my practice, reflected in a greater ability of nuancing and modulating my body's tonus. My movement experience suggests that in the process of substance work more and more of a dancer's materiality becomes available and the capacity of nuanced modulation continuously expands.

I remark feeling "strengthened from the 'substance' work" (fieldnotes 23.01.2011) and note that "[m]y voice is there [...] deepened, grounded" and when speaking "in the circle, that I speak clearly and straight out" (fieldnotes 23.01.2011). A couple of days later I record: "I feel now that my landing in the group and my ability to speak started with the substance work, there was a deep-seated and lasting shift there" (fieldnotes 25.01.2011). This points towards the wider capacities of this kind of 'substance' work, such as bringing forth a materially grounded self. Firstly, the physicality of the dancer is gathered, becomes available and begins to appear, often with the literal effect of the dancers becoming more visible in the space. During a workshop Poynor for example says to me: "I can really see you in the space" (fieldnotes 25.03.2012) in the context of a score I discuss with more detail below. This kind of visibility

often points towards an anchoring or landing of the dancer in his or her body, supporting the ability to articulate and modulate movement.

Secondly, the emotional aspects of the dancer's inner life are offered a physical base to ground themselves in through Poynor's substance work, a material location for anchoring and integrating the intensity of feelings is developed. Movement artists and trauma therapist Beate Stühm, who is also one of Suryodarmo's early students, expresses this in a reflection on her own practice as: "Our physical presence, being rooted and grounded in the body, is our base, our home" (2014: 14). Through this grounding the dancer becomes capable of working with whatever arises and feelings can be present without taking over the dancer's work. Movement artist Monika Förster, who also studied early on with Suryodarmo, notes that: "We stay present in our bodies, sometimes expressing, sometimes just listening; and through this, we develop the priceless ability to engage with, in productive ways, whatever presents itself" (2014: 39).

Differentiation

I now turn to 'differentiation' in working across materials in the context of movement work, by which I seek to delineate a positive notion of boundaries. I suggest here that a (often temporary) sensing of separation is relevant and often a useful step in movement practice. Thus, rather than problematizing boundaries and understanding them as serving exclusionary purposes as Barad's work (1998: 89) suggests, I propose – drawing on movement practice – a more positive notion of boundaries. Whilst Barad aims "to displace the very notion of independently existing individuals" (2012c: 54) my research suggests that a temporary focus on boundaries can support the working processes of outdoor movers. Similar to a clarification of one's own substance, a sense of boundaries supports grounding the mover through fostering a sense of emplacement and positionality – a temporary sense of 'this is where I am, here is where I end and here is where something else begins' in movement. At the same time, an emphasising of the shared material qualities of diverse

substances allows for a working across and sense of relationship, rather than suggesting fundamental separation or othering.

Poynor explains in a studio conversation during the foundation training programme that “without substance no connection to space is possible” (fieldnotes 19.05.2011). However, for this connection, a sense of boundaries is paramount. Poynor for example begins a score on a wide-open hilltop with focusing on one’s substance, also using touch, and guides the mover in extending into space only once “you have a sense of clear body” (score transcript 22.05.2011). We are further encouraged to develop a sense of our body “as clear where it meets the air as it is where it meet the earth” (score transcript 22.05.2011). Poynor is quite adamant here that a differentiation between materials can be sensed and is further helpful for the mover. She thus suggests in the context of the hilltop score during which we were standing in a wide-open space with a strong wind blowing:

So it's not that you ignore the wind. *But you know it's not you.*
You know it blows through the gaps or whatever - you can feel it.
It can maybe also help you feel yourself. *But it's not you, it's something different. You're made of something different.* (Score transcript 22.05.2011, my emphases)

I suggest that these examples offer a slightly different slant on Barad’s proposal that “[b]odies are not objects with inherent boundaries and properties; they are material-discursive phenomena” (2008: 141). I contend that bodies might very well be material-discursive phenomena, yet they still possess boundaries and properties that can be experienced and that offer footholds for working in the context of outdoor movement practice.

Yet whilst boundaries are emphasized so is their shared materiality that ultimately invites *working across materialities*. As examples I have chosen two outdoor scores, the first is an arrival score, given for the first on-site practice of a five-day long training. Here Poynor suggests

[...] when you feel you’ve arrived enough in walking the site, here, in your body, in this site, I'd like you to stop and land in any position facing the cliff. [...] And I'd like you to have a sense of landing in that position, that means that you really arrive in your body, in that shape, in that form, in that place. You drop into it.

Drop is not the same as collapse, but it means that you're not flying around everywhere, and that you have a sense of your body and the body of the cliff [and the space between them]. (Score transcript 18.05.2011, addition in brackets by Poynor 14.01.2015)

It is notable that again the dancer's bodily material is a primary focus, in this case called upon through inviting the dancer to sense the position, shape and form of her or his body as well as the idea of "dropping into" the body, which further suggests that there is 'something' – our material – to receive our coming into ourselves. Two material entities – the dancer's body and the cliff – are the two main elements of this opening phase of the score, with the invitation of beginning in a vis-à-vis position in which the dancer works on having "a sense of your body and the body of the cliff". Whilst 'body' and 'cliff' are called upon here as separate entities that one can sense in a 'I am here and you are there' kind of way, a shared notion of materiality is also communicated as something that connects rather than separates across species and materials – the dancer has a body and so does the cliff, which suggests a commonality that cuts across separations that categories such as organic – non-organic, or human – non-human suggest. Here Poynor's work corresponds more closely with Barad's proposals, for example in the fundamental posthumanist questioning of the "givenness of the differential categories 'human' and 'nonhuman'" (2008: 126). In the dynamic of creative movement work one can then, for example, lean into the other (figuratively or in actual fact) and the dancer can draw grounding from his or her own material substance but also from the vast material presence of the cliff.

I further suggest that this proposal of a common materiality includes the whole spectrum of densities and permeabilities, for example through an equal positioning of rock, sand and wind. In a score Poynor suggests for example to "sense weight, have a sense of the form of your body in space and the forms in the environment, and of your contact. Body to body. Body to rock, body to sand, skin to wind" (score transcript 19.05.2011). Here materials of various kinds are placed with equal focus next to each other, allowing the dancer to sense these separate entities that are, however, in touch and contact through their very

boundaries. I thus suggest that one way of working across materialities relies upon the sensing of boundaries and differentiation, with a shared materiality constituting its foundation.

Intermingling

A sense of folding into each other and an intermingling of materials delineates another strand of working across materials. This idea of intermingling is closely related to Barad's suggestions on 'entanglement' that are introduced in chapter two, yet I choose the term intermingling here to also speak to the slight differentiation between her suggestions and my findings. Entanglement suggests an all-encompassing and ever-present (yet constantly shifting) state, or as Barad words it: "To be entangled is not simply to be intertwined with another, as in the joining of separate entities, but to lack an independent, self-contained existence" (2007: ix). Intermingling as I use it here is not as sceptical of self-contained existences and rather seeks to describe a way of working that emphasises intermateriality, but is not exclusive of a positive notion of boundaries.

In the context of Poynor's work I develop this notion of intermingling through looking particularly at how she invites engagement with the territories of both body and space. Practising the scores I introduce here and later reflecting on them in the context of the thesis is at the root of the suggestion that I bring forth in this chapter, which proposes that materials are organised on a spectrum of densities, rather than separable in antagonistic entities. Poynor generally works with and speaks of space in a way that opens up the possibility of conceiving of space as material and felt, rather than empty or intangible. She employs for instance terms such as 'layers' or 'strata' when speaking of space, words that interfere materiality and hapticity.

An example for this is a score in which Poynor asks the dancers to imagine the space to be organised in roughly 25 horizontal layers through which we move from being on two feet to lying on the floor and back up again, paying attention to continuously stepping when going down and getting up

through shifting weight (fieldnotes 25.03.2012). During this score Poynor also employs the word strata when speaking of these layers, a geological term that draws on the cliff formations that determine much of the coastal sites she works on. Poynor also uses the term ‘layer’ to refer to space as it expands around the body, beginning with a most intimate layer touching the body and extending further out from there. I return to this second notion further below, and firstly attend to the “25 layers” score.

The dancers are encouraged here to attend to both the material structure and the material substance that constitute and connect the body with reminders such as “the upper body following through” or “sensing the whole body, the front, the back” as well as the suggestion to let each shift of weight affect the whole body as the dancers are moving towards standing again. Yet through the proposition of moving through 25 layers of space, the attention is simultaneously drawn also beyond the body and into space. The score was repeated three times with a fourth one in slow motion, demanding attention to detail whilst letting go of “planning” and “knowing” (fieldnotes 25.03.2012)

I remember a very high focus spreading in the studio and my notes reflect an experience of my material form and weightedness intricately coupled with the ability to both modulate and sense my movement with fine attention to detail. I notice that

I could be soft, but that didn't imply that I was totally losing my form or clarity in the space. [...] It also allowed me to experiment with different gradients of softness and strength, I began to add strength and tension here and there but could take it away immediately when it got too much, without going limp or losing my focus. (Fieldnotes 25.03.2012)

My argument here is that this experience stemmed from directing my attention towards my physical materiality but relating it quite specifically and with detail to a more permeable but also material substance such as ‘space’, the latter inviting lightness and movability. In another instance, around a year prior to the one just referred to, I record a similar experience, in which I speak about “porous substance” that I felt in an instance of working on a hilltop, very exposed to the wind:

Then I also work with the sense of easy substance, or porous substance, substance that doesn't tighten, maybe 'relaxing into substance' could be the right word? And it's quite a pleasure. To not just go against the wind and claim my place, but to be with breath and soft lightness and to still be! (Fieldnotes 22.05.2011)

These examples point to the potential that becomes available to the mover but also to wider considerations of intermaterial relationships. I argue that the positioning of both body and space as material allows for their positioning on a spectrum of densities rather than as antipodes of which one is present and the other absent or empty. This kind of shared materiality in turn invites what I call working across materials in a way that focuses on the intermingling of different materials. Through such scores, body and space can be experienced as affecting each other, the bodily substance of the dancer becoming “easy”, “porous” or “relaxed” in the process and space something to lean on, be in, work with – something present or “alive and happening” as Mainz calls it (Kramer 2012b: 157). The mover's awareness in such instances is invited to spread both inward and outward and becomes active across a wide spectrum of materialities.

I now turn towards a score that works with the layers of space as they extend around the body that had offered me significant felt experiences of the intermingling of body and space, which is why I offer quite a close reading with extensive fieldnotes here.

The score begins with the dancers closing their eyes and choosing a position that is neither standing nor lying, but somewhere between. In this position we settle and cease to move. The task is to inhabit this form, to fill the body from bones to skin, clearly feeling the shape in the space. Feeling where we touch the floor and where we touch ourselves. Feeling our breath and how our lungs expand towards the space (fieldnotes 19.05.2011). Again the score begins with a turn towards material substance, the dancer's body, bones to skin. The mover's attention is firstly directed towards ‘filling’ the physical form of his or her body, sensing its shape in the space and noticing where dense material touches dense material – such as the body touching the floor and the body touching itself. The intermingling with more permeable material, in this

instance ‘space’, is then established through directing the dancer’s attention towards the rhythm of breathing, the continuous in and out flow of air, the expansion of the lungs towards space. The lungs and the breath offer an anatomical base for the intermingling of different materials here, of space extending into the body and the body extending into space.

The score continues with very slow shifts between positions, staying in each for a significant amount of time, a quiet rhythm of whole body changes establishing, coupled with noticing the breath. As a next step we attend to and begin to move continuously in “intimate space” (fieldnotes 19.05.2011), the layer of space that extends directly around our bodies, about two-inches as Poynor suggests. The eyes are invited to begin to open, with vision and movement staying near, cradled within intimate space. My experience includes feeling the density and palpability of this near space, a protective wrapper around me, rather than a vast nothingness.

Gradients of space. Close, close to the body, opening the eyes, looking very near ourselves. My eyes open only a flicker, only a shimmer of light comes in, I see skin, gnarled movement of the hands, the dark green of my linen pants and the floor in my memory is sort of greyish. [...] The layer of space around me takes on a colour of ochre, and is so clear, has a clear density, is palpably there, the space directly around me, a wrapper, an extra layer, such protection, such movability [...]. We move this for quite some time. (Fieldnotes 19.05.2011)

I notice in this writing specifically my perception of details such as “gradients of space”, “a shimmer of light”, noticing colours and entering into a kind of synesthetic experience of space (which I usually do not have) and according a colour to the space around me. All the sensorial details above offer insights into my experiencing the materiality and hapticity of space.

As a next step, after quite some time, we are invited to extend our movement into the space of roughly the width of a hand span around our bodies. I record “totally different movement” and I experience this layer overall as distinct from the first, of a lighter colour and with less density, more open but still offering a container in which I can move “without losing myself”:

The next layer is much bigger (15-18 cm), different vision, totally different movement. A bit less density and heat, a bit looser, colour maybe light green, opening out around me, allowing for movement without losing myself, [...]. (Fieldnotes 19.05.2011)

We then extend further into the space, which is again differently coloured in my perception, my movement and the space opening alongside and into each other.

Then the next layer, which appears to be light blue in my imagination, light as the sky, open, open, movement, but no stress, from the beginning, even in the form 'holding', there was a lot about unnecessary tension which we could let go. In the face, around the eyes, jaw, fingers. (Fieldnotes 19.05.2011)

I note moving without stress or tension in this layer, which I connect back to the beginning, where even as our bodies were keeping a specific form, we were invited to let go of holding, for example in face or hands.

As we extend fully into space I note that “my everything” is still with me, pointing to the grounding capacities of the substance work. Again a movement quality emerges that I describe as easy, soft and relaxed but still “there”, suggesting again the intermingling of body and space, a way of working across the spectrum of densities with tangible intra-actions:

The protection, the ease, and even then when totally out, I had my everything with me. And such ease of movement, like there were no worries AT ALL, as it was simply the space I was moving. [...] And the softness of the movement impressed me, that I was still there, even though I was also softening and relaxing. (Fieldnotes 19.05.2011)

My experience of this score offers quite detailed insights into the tangible effects of the intermingling of materials. Space affects the substance of my body, my movement and my perceptions change. The score allowed me to experience and understand the density and permeability of both my body and the space, as I note for example in the beginning that the most intimate layer of space has a “clear density, is palpably there” or later on noting again the softness in my movement that I have discussed further above as related to the intermingling of body and space.

The examples discussed here have delineated the aspect of intermingling as one strand of working across materials. It brings forth a notion of materials as positioned on a wide spectrum of densities, rather than constituting separable antipodes. Nonetheless this section as a whole does not argue for a total entanglement of materials all the time, but rather proposes a more differentiated notion of the interplay between boundaries and interminglances of materials.

Chapter Summary

In summary this chapter argues that the movement experiences and the specific movement qualities described here arise from attending to materiality. The turn towards the dancer's bodily material supports a sense of embodied emplacement and provides a valuable precursor for attending to materials more generally. The analysis of ways of working across materials has then affirmed the relevance of both differentiation and intermingling. As I have shown, a sense of boundary between materials offers a way to clarify the positionality of the dancer among all kinds of materials.

What is emphasised in both strands is the shared materiality. I thus suggest to position materials such as 'body' and 'space' on a continuum, as materials of different orders that are located on a spectrum of densities, rather than constituting separate antipodes. I contend that this shifts concepts based on otherness and ranking of materials, such as the hierarchic distinction between human and non-human materiality, towards ones that builds an understanding of shared properties and agency.

Turning towards and attending to the intermingling of materials is therefore not contradictory to attending to boundaries, it is rather 'just' a different tuning or emphasis on the same spectrum. Both attending to boundaries and intermingling thus offer ways of working across materials, which I will further develop in the following chapter under the notion of intermaterial confederations. Fundamentally I propose that both strands can be considered to be simultaneously present, and that it is a question of which

aspect is specifically highlighted in a score or practice. The interplay offers valuable instruments for dancing that foster both clarity and malleability in the dancer's movement

Ontologically the suggestion of a simultaneous presence of differentiation and intermingling in outdoor dance practice proposes a slightly amended perspective on the mutual exclusion of the object-oriented philosophy perspective of Harman that grants autonomy and independence to things, objects and materials and the Baradian proposal of total entanglement and continuous intra-action. Whilst these philosophical strands stand apart, my analysis of dance practice suggests that they are not as mutually exclusive as it may seem. With Suryodarmo I consider this proposition to be one of “inter-independence” (a term I introduce in the thesis introduction), which offers space for a partial autonomy and independence of materials, whilst also allowing for what I call intermingling here.

7. Physical Exposure

Introduction

This chapter predominantly draws on the movement and performance practices that I have developed and carried out in conjunction with the present research project, most specifically the making and showing of *body, trees & things*, the practice component of this thesis. Its proposition is to position *physical exposure* in outdoor dance practices as a key tactic for “cultivating an ability to discern the vitality of matter” (2010: 119) that Bennett argues for and for making dances in and through intermaterial confederations. It thus returns to the work of Bennett and her proposal that the world may not be filled “with ontologically distinct categories of beings (subjects and objects) but with variously composed materialities that form confederations” (2010: 99), a proposal, I suggest, that can be experienced and made use of in making dance work.

I differentiate between three practices of physical exposure here, which I term *walking, dwelling* and *moving-dancing*. I move freely between these three practices in my working rhythm and consider them as intricately connected and of mutual influence. I thus use this differentiation as a tool to allow different aspects of physical exposure to come into view whilst arguing that intermaterial confederations as well as modes of performance making happen within and across these practices.

Having worked with and through physical exposure before entering the PhD-specific period of practice-as-research, particularly in the preparation of teaching workshops, it is difficult to declare in retrospect exactly how certain commitments or ways of doing things came about. I suggest that it is a combination of working with Mainz, Poynor, Whitehead, Reeve and Suryodarmo that have opened the possibility for me to trust and rely on practices of physical exposure throughout a complete cycle of making and showing work, rather than only in the context of teaching workshops or specified moments of a rehearsal process. All five practitioners have inspired me to understand the site as a partner, teacher or co-choreographer in the

context of movement work and have enabled me to work through exposing myself to what is present on site rather than predetermining movement material, a particular narrative or spatial arrangements. From these roots and encouragements I have developed my own ways of doing things, as I propose is a general feature of *Amerta* informed work (see chapter five). I thus draw on the work of multiple practitioners in the context of this chapter and situate my working through physical exposure in relationship to their work.

The first section of this chapter begins with a closer tracing of these roots and main influences on my movement and performance practice and then outlines the preparatory process leading up to the more specific making of *body, trees & things*. The second section then attends to the making and performing of *body, trees & things* and develops the proposition of *physical exposure* as a fundamental aspect of working with things, objects and materials in contemporary outdoor dance. Through this close analysis of my working process and its outcome I further develop the positioning of materials as having agency, an agency that presents itself through intermaterial confederations that impact dance making and life beyond.

Section One: Framing *body, trees & things*

Roots of my Movement and Performance Practice

The base of my movement and performance practice forms working with dancer and choreographer Bettina Mainz in and around Berlin, whom I began to study with in the spring of 1998. Our connection has undergone many transformations since. Initially, Mainz was a movement teacher whose class I had randomly joined. Slowly (over the course of five to seven years), she became the teacher I continuously returned to and worked intensively with. In 2007 she choreographed a piece (and then others) in which I performed and until today she remains a mentor as well as close collaborator and friend. Such long lasting teacher-student relationships are common in the field of dance and somatic practices and often students continue and develop the work of their teachers over several generations. This is for example the case with the work of

pioneers of Laban/Bartenieff (Laban/Bartenieff Movement Analysis), Elsa Gindler (Gindler and Jacoby Association), Merce Cunningham (Cunningham Technique), Anna Halprin (Life/Art Process) or Bonnie Bainbridge-Cohen (Body-Mind Centering®). One reason might be that dance and somatic practices are one of the few remaining skills that are still mainly passed on through direct teacher-student relationships and require co-presence in the same space or setting. Teaching and learning rely on physical presence, human touch and moving together, one has to be there in order to learn and a “face-to-face sharing of information” (Sennett 2008: 73) is just as relevant for dance and somatic practices, as for skills related to craft and trade, as argued by Sennett in *The Craftsman* (2008). In the context of training, close relationships are often built over time, particularly in somatically-informed movement practices, which take account of rather than deliberately exclude life beyond the dance studio. Dancers are invited to be present and engaged with their personal histories and current conditions as part of their creative practice. Over time this allows for a profound knowing of each other, which supports long lasting student-teacher relationships as well as friendships and professional collaborations between participants who take part in the same training or study with the same teacher in a particular time-period.

The relationship between Mainz and myself is further influenced by the ‘gardener approach’ of *Amerta* that I have discussed in chapter five. Mainz further describes a “vast element of not knowing” as central to her way of teaching, which is “not reduced” and “not neglected” but instead “met with much respect” (personal email 09.12.2014). She explains that “Inside of or within this vastness everyone - including the teacher - can find some knowing and every knowing can find a place or its place” (personal email 09.12.2014). This is thus not a placement of a teacher as someone that knows more and transfers this knowledge onto his or her students, but rather that both enter a shared process of exploration in which “knowing” can happen. Mainz further suggests that:

[...] this attitude allowed the teacher student relationship to navigate through so much change and transformation as there

was never really a fixed point of heading for, nor a preconceived manner how to achieve something, but a sharing of the interest, research, questions and not knowing. It opened a field of experimentation and allowed a wisdom implicit in mankind to appear in moments. It is shared wisdom. It is not mine, not yours. (Personal email 09.12.2014).

Drawing on my experiences of working with Mainz as well as her reflections quoted above I consider her work and teaching practice to offer and maintain a rare openness. Rare because it implies a significant risk and exposure for the teacher to work from a premise of a shared “not knowing”, yet through the sustained experience that forms the background to her work, Mainz can offer what I would call a responsive setting (rather than a set response). In this setting her students can find guidance based on and through the shared practice in the movement space. The work thus does not outgrow its relevance and whilst students move on to develop their own work, they still continue to work with Mainz just as she herself is still in the resonant field of Suryodarmo’s work – as a programme organiser and colleague, and also still, on the occasion, as a student. The same applies for Reeve and Poynor who also have long lasting relationships with their student cohorts. Reeve in particular is still actively involved in Suryodarmo’s work, through her publications (e.g. 2010, 2014), through taking her students on study trips to Java (for example in 2013, email invitation 21.03.2013) or through co-teaching workshops with him as mentioned in chapter six.

During the first years of studying with Mainz I was still immersed in my under- and postgraduate studies of political science, at a time in which she offered classes in the recreational sports programme of my university. We were moving with the world from the start, working in odd locations such as school yards and sports gyms and under thin pine trees growing in the limited spaces of the city. My fellow dancers were students of philosophy, cultural anthropology, Latin American studies, theatre studies, psychology or archaeology. Each semester a newly composed group signed up for what was then called ‘experimental movement’ and each time the same few of us remained. The freedom and experimentalism of Mainz’s classes seemed to

startle most students and deeply attract those who stayed on. Here we were, moving-being awkwardly, excitedly, late in the evenings, after our study load was done. Drinking the air when cycling home all across the city in the dark, feeling alive and bewildered and tasting unknown strands of freedom in movement. Sometimes we ventured out for weekend workshops around Berlin, moving-dancing in sand, corn fields, gravel-pits, pastures or woodlands, but also swimming, cooking, eating, sleeping – living. My work as an outdoor dancer began then, at first almost unnoticed. I was enrolled at the university and did other dancing alongside, mainly Contact Improvisation, Body-Mind-Centering® (BMC®) and Klein Technique™. I had also always been outdoors a lot and thus touched many stones and sands before I began to move outdoors as a dancer. But slowly this particular engagement with the outdoors through a dance practice that allowed me to find my own way of moving began to occupy a central place in my life, offering a context in which I could attend to and be with the world through my body in a way that I experienced as direct and meaningful. It was a way of not only acknowledging and theorising about the body, which I did excessively in my postcolonial and feminist leaning university curriculum, but of engaging my body directly. To notice it, follow it, trust it, express it, use it. To expose it, ultimately, to the things, objects and materials that comprise our world and be involved with this abundance in and through creative practice.

During the course of the present research project Poynor and Whitehead further impacted my practice and thinking about contemporary outdoor dance in the natural environment. My experience of Poynor's work and the effects it had on me has been discussed with detail in the preceding chapter (six). In summary Poynor's work supported me in a deeper inhabitation of my own material body and in trusting the possibility of working through physical exposure in all phases of making a piece, which I expand on in this chapter.

In both the present and the next chapter I further thread in my engagement with Whitehead's work as another strand that has practically and conceptually impacted my movement practice and research. I conducted two conversations with Whitehead during this research process, participated in two

of his workshops in 2011 and took account of books on his work he (co-)published (2006, 2007, 2008).⁴⁶ The first conversation with Whitehead remained unrecorded and took place in November 2010, walking along the sea shore of Aberystwyth, witnessing the starling murmuration and later sitting in a café. The second was a recorded interview a few weeks later (December 2010) at the Arts Centre of Aberystwyth University.

Whitehead's work brought to my movement and research practice ways of engaging with and thinking about walking, time, location, human-non human relationship and community rituals such as eating or fasting. I thread his influence into this chapter particularly in the section on walking, where Whitehead's reflections on his practice helped me to locate and define my own.

trees, ... the preparation series

I now turn to the wider process of making of *body, trees & things* in which all of these various influences were drawn together. A year-long process between February 2011 and February 2012 preceded the making of this final performative event connected to this thesis, which I summarise here as *trees, ... the preparation series*. During this time I worked on a singular site and offered three informal sharings entitled *trees,- collective inauguration*, *trees,- absolute soloist* and *trees,- a winter triangle*.⁴⁷

I began my work on site not yet concerned with producing any kind of performance. Instead I met with musician Michaël Lacoult whom I knew from a Coventry-based music and movement improvisation group (informally called *The Wednesday Group*). We were interested in collaborating and Lacoult was curious to join me working in the natural environment. The site I chose at random, it was simply one of the few places I was familiar with around Coventry as someone new to the area. Looking at a map and considering our

⁴⁶ The workshops I participated in were *4x4 Dance, Body and the Environment* (18. – 29.04.2011, I was present until 26.04.2011), which took place in the eco-village Findhorn and on a large forest restoration area on Dundreggan Estate in Glen Moriston and secondly, in July of the same year, Nr. 22 of Whitehead's locator series (16. – 19.07.2011), entitled *at SEA* and located in the Preseli Hills in West Wales.

⁴⁷ This series is documented in booklet No. 1 entitled *trees, ... music & movements, seen and unseen* (Appendix) as well as on the DVD.

cycling radius I had once taken a friend there in search for a green space. Knowing of no other place I guided Lacoult to a field with trees and a creek, expanding on the side of a road, near the city of Coventry and right by the village of Stoneleigh in Warwickshire. I now refer to this site as *The Chestnut Site* because it features several impressive and significantly old, half-burnt chestnut trees that were probably struck by lightning. The very first time I came to the site (that is before taking Lacoult there) I had, however, not even noticed this assembly of trees, which is curious in retrospect as they are hard to miss and both Lacoult and myself were immediately drawn to them as we began our working process.



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15.04.2012, Stoneleigh (UK), Chestnut Site and map of the area

This group of trees then became a place that we regularly returned to, working at first every few months, then every few weeks. The only thing that remains of these first meetings is our email communication to agree on a date and time to meet. We then slowly established a working rhythm of Lacoult driving to Coventry from Birmingham, picking me up and whilst chatting and sometimes listening to music, driving out to the chestnut site.

We then took time to do whatever we needed and wanted to and at some undetermined point meeting to chat and then improvise in a duet of music (Lacoult playing double bass and various percussion instruments) and movement. As I write in documentation booklet No. 1 of that phase: “different trees in focus, different atmospheres, different time of the year. movement, sound, song, music. wind in the trees. birds. chestnuts growing, chestnuts falling” (page 5, Appendix A). Our main means of working was exposure – of ourselves to the site, to the weather, to our current conditions and to our

respective practices. This notion of working through physical exposure is fully developed in the second section of this chapter.

We both much enjoyed the collaborative working process and the site and began to think about organising a performative event there, possibly ending with roasting sweet chestnuts together, which were abundant on the site. I also began to feel so familiar with and interested in the chestnut site that I began to consider it as an option for performance work related to my PhD. However, it also became clear to me that these were two different things, one a rather informal collaboration, the other a process in which I wanted to continue and expand the practical exploration of the particular themes and questions of my thesis. For the latter I envisioned working most likely as a soloist exposed to a wide variety of non-human materials, honing my long-term practice and exploring pathways into performance for work that draws on intermaterial confederations. I spoke with Lacoult about such a co-optation of the place we had worked on free of purpose thus far and he encouraged me to proceed. To mark this transition point we decided to stick with our idea of organising an event for friends and colleagues that offered a collective celebration of this site we both cherished. We thus planned an event for October 8, 2011 that consisted of a performance, of time for joined improvisation with our guests and a collective meal under the trees in the end.⁴⁸

In preparation we considered the title *ploughing the field* for the event, alluding to the notion of preparing this site for something new and marking the transition from a purpose-free to a performance oriented working process. However, because the strong agricultural reference did not fully work for our site, we settled on *playing with trees* instead and further called it an “informal performative gathering amongst old sweet chestnut trees” (invite, personal archive, created on 10.09.2011). This seemed to reflect most accurately our collaborative practice and intentions for the event. Immediately after the event another name seemed more fitting for archiving it on my website and in a

⁴⁸ Audio- and video documentation as well as photographs of the event are located on the DVD under the menu item *trees, - collective inauguration, 8 oct 2011*.

‘friendly takeover’ I re-named it *trees,- collective inauguration*. The strongest intention and residue for me had been to have a diverse group of people on the site that collectively marked the end of one and the beginning of another phase of practising and performance making on this site.

A group of around 25 people came to this *inauguration*, adults and children, attentive and dispersed. After performing for the audience Lacoult and myself invited all present to join us in moving and sound making. During both phases the audience members had been encouraged to attend to their own needs, watching from whatever angle and position or not watching at all. In the end we ate chestnut soup, home made sourdough bread and drank elderberry punch, with both soup and punch having been made with fruits from the site.

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08.10.2011, Stoneleigh (UK), Chestnut Site

In retrospect I have many good and colourful memories of the event. At the time though I felt stressed and distracted by the scattered attention our various invitations to “do-whatever-you-please” had caused. Too much had been going on simultaneously for my capacity to retain focus as a performer and the moments of engaging with the materials and site at hand in the quietly indeterminate and explorative manner Lacoult and myself had previously practiced went somewhat unnoticed. Building on the knowledge gained through my wider research process I suggest, that the human intrusions and impacts on the site and on myself in this instance were so varied and dominant that I could not quite gather my focus and attend to the human and non-human materials present in a way that would allow for my work to begin to speak, noticeably and satisfactorily for both myself and an audience.

This collective-participatory event was followed on November 23, 2011 by *trees, - absolute soloist*.⁴⁹ Two main intentions guided this edition. Firstly, I wanted to invite my supervisors out to the site, which was beginning to be very tightly connected to my research and they had both not been present at the *inauguration*. Secondly I wanted to create a setting that allowed for a stronger presence of non-human materials and thus sought to limit human presence on site to a minimum. I therefore opted to produce a version for a micro audience that I could completely undertake alone, including transporting all things needed on my bike. This included working without external documentation and with fixed cameras set on self-timers instead. A photograph was taken every 45 seconds and the video camera on a tripod filmed throughout.



23.11.2011, Stoneleigh, (UK), oak tree on the field with bush

I thus set parameters conducive to a collectively focused atmosphere, in which the potentiality of intermaterial confederations had a better chance to begin to speak and be heard. Whilst I kept human presence on site minimal, the proposal that audience members could change their viewing position remained, coupled with the invitation to come closer if they wanted to. This was a more restricted version of changing positions that did not disturb my working process. I offered it as a possibility for audience members to also notice their own material bodies and ensure that they could act on impulses to change their position or view from a different angle, be these impulses physically motivated or otherwise.

Three people were present to witness the *soloist*, and after I had finished we drank hot tea with elderberry juice from *The Chestnut Site* and spoke about the

⁴⁹ Video documentation and photographs of the event are located on the DVD under the menu item: *trees, - absolute soloist, 23 nov 2011*.

performance. In my notes I record that “I find more satisfaction” and that I particularly “enjoyed the moment of suspension, of lightness, when I was supported by just a tiny little branch and so unbelievably lightly floating upward, symbolizing and story telling about my upside down tree” (fieldnotes 23.11.2011, see last twenty seconds of the video documentation for this particular piece). In this moment the branches – to my own surprise – supported me in such a way that allowed me to be in an upside down position with me feet floating upwards. I refer to “my upside down tree” in the quote above because in the preceding year of outdoor movement practice I had found that being upside down seemed to be the most adequate way for me to be with trees, rather standing on my feet with my arms raised, which might be a more classical human ‘enactment’ of or being with a tree. This experience suggests in my reading that material engagement with a site allows for movement to emerge that diverges from what a mover may have expected. Intermaterial confederations are at work here and can bring movement forth that differs from what a mover might have imagined from a distance. Because movement and insights can come to the fore that would not emerge in this way from a distanced position I argue that the work with physical exposure is a central aspect of working with material agency and intermaterial confederations more widely.

In the conversation after the performance the following observations were made in reference to the big oak tree in the background:

A: Although it kind of feels like it has an energy in it even though it's dead, isn't it?

B: The forms of those branches and ...

A: It's sort of purposefully dead, it sort of has this thing about it, it's not withering and falling, is it? It's sort of quite strong in its ...

(after performance conversation, 23.11.2011)

Noteworthy for the development of my argument of material agency here is not if the tree is dead or alive (which it partially still was) but the proposal formulated here, that the form of its branches and its overall material presence give it a sense of being “purposefully dead”, which is a way of alluding to the

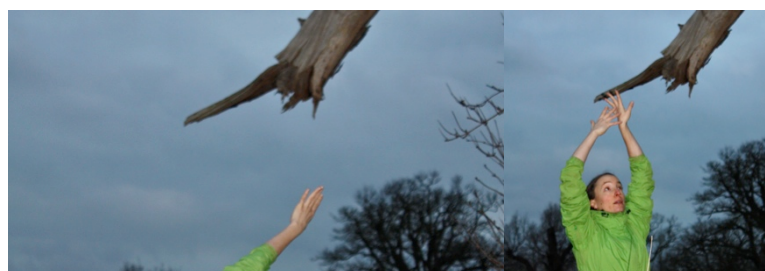
efficacy and agentive potential of a 'dead thing'. In the same section of this conversation speaker "A" further notes that she feels the objects that were suspended from the tree (a white cloth and a large ball of string) "invoked life into a tree that's not [alive]" (after performance conversation, 23.11.2015). Interestingly it is here the 'dead' objects that are perceived as invoking life in the (not quite) dead tree. Part of this equation, unmentioned here, is of course the trace of my human hand that hung them there. But even without such a human hand Bennett argues, things have power and can come to life, sometimes by way of their arrangement such as the often quoted assemblage of trash one in a Baltimore gutter ("one large black work glove, one dense mat of oak pollen, one unblemished dead rat, one white plastic bottle cap, one smooth stick of wood", e.g. 2010:4, 2012: 238,) which co-initiated Bennett's writing of *Vibrant Matter* (2010) through letting her catch "a glimpse into a parallel world of vibrant, powerful things" (2012: 239). What the observations of the audience members therefore allude to is their noticing of material agency (Bennett), "this thing" that in this case the tree has "about it" (after performance conversation, 23.11.2011, see above). It is this 'thing', this agency, thus goes my argument that dancers in the natural environment are exposed to and can make use of for their work.

The third and last edition of this series took place on February 15, 2012 and was entitled *trees, - a winter triangle*.⁵⁰ The title drew on the chestnut's arrangement in a triangle – which, despite having worked on the site for quite some months we only noticed in the winter when the trees were bare. To our surprise, the site revealed itself yet again differently. For the performance I decided to work with the three trees that defined the outer edges of this triangle. Again I was envisioning a small-scale event, however this time I wanted to experiment with co-performing with Lacoult again, as I was still determining if and how our collaboration would play into the final event. For

⁵⁰ Video documentation and photographs are located on the DVD under menu item: *trees, - a winter triangle, 15 feb 2012*. The evening light proved difficult for the photographer so the number of photographs is quite minimal. The video material of the second tree was also of poor quality and is therefore not included on the DVD.

body, trees & things I then invited Lacoult to be part of the installation on the chestnut site, playing with the first tree of this winter triangle. This seemed to best reflect our collaboration that was closely connected to this site and was an important part of the process leading up to *body, trees & things* in its final form. I had also invited a photographer to witness and document and for further documentation had a video camera on a tripod, which I moved from tree to tree. Having hardly advertised the event we remain in this trio of dancer, musician and photographer.

In my movement experience I am especially taken by the last of the three trees. In my notes I write that: “There’s something very specific and space-giving about dead wood, [...]. There’s somehow a different sense about it, hard to say what it is, a different soul resides here [...]” (fieldnotes 15.02.2012). I further write that this tree draws me into dancing: “It’s the tree where I actually dance, I take off my shoes [...] Michaël begins to play on a dead branch with the bow, [...] it truly feels like the sound is emanating from my body” (fieldnotes 15.02.2012). I argue that again these notes speak to material agency and intermaterial confederations. The specific constellation of materials such as a dead tree, the atmosphere of a cool February evening, the sound developing from the friction of bow to dead wood, the feeling that the dead wood resonates in my body bring this dance to life.



15.02.2012, Stoneleigh (UK), Chestnut Site, third tree

The main aim of this phase was to get to know the site and experience how it functions under various performance conditions. All my moving at the time was guided by the principle intention to listen to the material I was working with in any given moment. On the whole I was applying aspects of the movement practices I have discussed with depth further above, such as *Amerta's* receptivity (chapter five) or the profound trust and appreciation in

materiality, my own and beyond, that I had become acquainted with through studying with Mainz and deepened in the context of Poynor's work (chapter six). As described above moments of intermaterial confederations did rise to the fore and become describable, although like capturing the movement of wild animals I noted that the setting, which performance makers can partially influence, is relevant for their tangibility. I have found that the reduced influence of humans and a clearer setting of the overall piece in the two micro performances that followed the *inauguration* were conducive for my working with material agency and intermaterial confederations. I argue that in movement work that relies on materials, the material setting of an event also plays a crucial role and influences how the agentive potential of materials comes to the fore in a process of dancing and dance making.

With the *winter triangle* the year-long phase of preparatory work on this site ended. A few weeks later I began to work on *body, trees & things*, which I attend to in the following section.

Section Two: Making *body, trees & things*

Working With Physical Exposure

My work on *body, trees & things* began on March 27, 2012 and ended with a public performative afternoon on May 10, 2012. I discuss it here as an example of working with physical exposure throughout a complete cycle of making a piece. As is apparent from my descriptions of the preparation series above, the event draws on spending significant amounts of time on the performance site. Similar to my work during the preparation series, at the base of all my doings were everyday movements and activities and the commitment to work with and from the materials on site as well as following my body, not working against its needs. From this basic orientation I generated both the wider structure of the event as well as the specific movement material, which I now discuss under the notion of *physical exposure*.

This term and what I seek to express with it is resonant of Poynor's words and ways of working, which she describes in the context of an interview:

I don't initially start [...] from an idea. I start by moving. Or going to the place. And/or moving in the place. And then the content comes from that. [...] Sometimes I'll start, I'll be in a place [...] [and] I'll have an image [...]. So I start from that. But I don't find it's helpful to start from an idea because all that happens then is that I work from my head. And then I make a piece that's very not embodied. It needs to come from a physical encounter with the place. Even if what comes then is an image. And the same in terms of working in the studio, if I'm making a piece. (Interview 13.04.2011)

This conversation with Poynor forms one of several moments of finding encouragement for working directly from and with the site through what Poynor terms physical encounter, beginning with the basic act of going there and moving. I have chosen the term *exposure* instead of encounter here to highlight a quality of yielding and to suggest a vulnerability of the human dancer in relationship to the site he or she is working on. This is particularly obvious in severe weather conditions or working environments such as mountain ranges or cliffs and boulders by the sea, which immediately position the human being as exposed and vulnerable and only marginally relevant to the larger scheme of a particular weather or geographical feature. Exposure further suggests that I consider my humanness to be open in a way that allows the site to affect my system. Medievalist Eileen Joy calls this “self-donation, making ourselves hospitable so that things and events can take place in and with and around us, so that the world can happen *to us* for a change” (2012: 170). I find resonances of this consideration in Bennett’s hypothesis stemming from her research on hoarders in which she suggests, that “thing-power works by exploiting a certain porosity that is intrinsic to any material body” (2012: 254). Whilst Bennett suggests that hoarders are so sensitive to material agency that they basically become over-powered by it, I consider outdoor dance practice to offer a less pathological site to practise tuning our susceptibility to what Bennett refers to as “the call of things” (2010, 2012). Using *body, trees & things* as an example I position physical exposure in this section as a practice that allows the human to work in contact and confederation with the efficacy and agency of materials and atmospheres present on site.

The final event consisted of four elements: a walk up to the performance site, an outdoor installation with things, objects and materials that spoke of the process of making, a solo performance and a collective meal at the end.⁵¹ One of my main collaborators was a large ball of string, to which I return with detail in the following chapter.

Most of these structural elements had been determined through the wider practice-as-research process, which had led me to work on the chestnut site and which had influenced the decision to incorporate an installation, a moment of ‘proper’ performance and a shared meal at the end. Installations had been a research and dissemination method central to this project on the whole (discussed in chapter three). A moment of ‘proper’ performance I included to ensure that I engaged with this central form of communicating dance, as well as to emphasise the place of outdoor dance in the wider field of contemporary dance. I use ‘proper’ here to refer to a moment of moving for an audience and in distinction to the many kinds and moments of performance in Schechner’s (2003) sense at work in the wider event. The decision to eat together in the end stems from my general commitment to community practices in my work that I turn in chapter eight. All other elements, such as the weaving together of these structural elements, the addition of a walk, all concrete physical locations and the specific movement material, were developed through being and working on site and exposing myself to it.

An example here is the process of determining the physical locations for the different elements of the event. On the fourth day of working on site I note that it “feels like I will not perform in chestnut site. It could be central gathering site with exhibit & then eating” (drawing pad fieldnotes 01.04.2012). I was quite taken aback by the feeling that I would not ‘use’ for the ‘proper’ performance what I considered to be the most spectacular and most familiar site in this wider territory. But this was the decision I took in the end and it became the central gathering site rather than the central performance site it

⁵¹ This second working phase is documented in booklet No. 2, entitled *body, trees & things - preparing performing* (Appendix). Audio- and video documentation as well as photographs of the event are located on the DVD under menu item: *body, trees and things, 10 may 2012*.

had been in the prior process. After several more days on site I began to set the 'proper' performance on the open field, in relationship to a mid-size singular oak tree and a group of three small oak trees planted in a triangle around a large root that was left after cutting an old tree. Day by day the whole event was pieced together in this way, moving in many locations, physically testing their viability, listening to what emerged, working in dialogue and confederation with the site. Humans also contributed, for instance a pilgrim who was following a map with suggested hikes around Easter, who inspired (alongside my experiences of Whitehead's walking practices and my own affinity to walking) the inclusion of a walk the audience took from the village church up to the site.

In a parallel process to physically working on site I gathered information about it and covered the larger territory around it. Though none of this was expressed specifically in the performance, I had visited the church in Stoneleigh village after chatting with the pilgrim, and it became the meeting point for the performance and the beginning point of a walk. I had also cycled to Stoneleigh Abbey at some point to speak to a local historian and learn more about the chestnut site, but ended up not meeting her and instead was directed to what is said to be a 1000 year old oak on the Abbey land. I had further covered the way between home and the site in various ways – walking, cycling or taking the bus. Whilst I did not include this material in a narrative structure in the performance I suggest that these practices supported my becoming familiar with the site and its wider surroundings, which in turn allowed for a greater settling and more nuanced physical engagement with the site. It is a way of seeking and allowing for the presence of all kinds of information, whilst continuing to work through direct physical exposure and allowing movement to express information I have gathered in its own, non-literal way.

Importantly I argue that consider physical exposure is not only a practice of making, but extends into performing. After the showing of *body, trees & things* I note "how new pieces come, can come, still and even in performing, how life is revealed in the doing, how the dance comes about in the dance" (reflective documentation of performance in drawing pad, undated, May

2012). Whilst I had prepared and practiced extensively, a core element of my performing was to keep my pores open, so to speak, and continue to physically expose myself to the site, to myself, to the audience, to the performance – in this specific moment in time. Open to notice the shifts, changes and liveliness of the various material confederations present on site, making offerings that allow realising aspects that have not been realised in previous instances of practising or performing. Physical exposure thus remains current, also in the moment of performing.

Walking

The first practice I now introduce as belonging to this wider field of physical exposure is *walking*, which in relationship to *body, trees & things* comprises the process of getting to the performance site as well as walking and roaming the site. I understand both as part of the process of performance making rather than separate from it in this I draw specifically on the work of Whitehead here.⁵² Working on an outdoor performance begins for me with getting ready and going to the site. Preparatory activities include getting dressed, considering the terrain and the weather, most often putting on some layer of rain gear to facilitate moving on or near the ground. I gather food and water as well as something to write or draw. For the process of making *body, trees & things* I also always took a photo camera to further document my working process. To understand the beginning of work as leaving the house is resonant of Whitehead's commitment to and ways of working with and through walking (evident throughout his work, two easily accessible examples are his books *Walking to Work* 2006 or *Crwydro/Marcheur des Bois* 2008). Whitehead describes walking as something he does almost obsessively, both at day and at night, which is one of the things we speak about in our first and unrecorded conversation (fieldnotes 23.11.2010) and which we also practice in the context of his workshops.

⁵² Whilst I situate 'walking' as a practice of physical exposure here and draw primarily on my engagement with Whitehead's work, this strand belongs to a wider body of theory and practice on 'walking' brought forth through the work of Dee Heddon, Carl Lavery and Phil Smith in Mock (2009) or Ralph Fischer (2011).

In an interview with US-American movement artist and writer Melinda Buckwalter in 2009 Whitehead speaks about his walking practice and the making of work through walking when he first moved to rural Wales from London in the early 1990s.

The first thing I did was walk a path in the winter from my door up the mountain each day, and by walking, making a physical path that was reclaimed by the mountain in the spring when the grass grew back. [...] I think the walking was the first, instinctive response. Early in my life here in Wales, I made a dance piece that emerged from walking the coast (littoral) close to my home each day over a season. I collected artifacts on the walks (an old caravan amongst others) and placed them in the performance space. (Whitehead and Buckwalter 2009: n.p.)

Whitehead's walking is presented here as a physical way of dealing with a new place and landscape, of getting into contact and beginning to make work by stepping outside. It is a direct exposure of the physical self to the immediate surroundings, which Whitehead frames as an instinctive response. Walking here functions as a practice of arrival, as a way of making contact with one's material context and as a process for making work. Whitehead describes a physical conversation with the natural environment here, a dialogue he enters by marking a path in the winter, which the mountain takes back through overgrowth in the spring. I consider this an intermaterial confederation that expands across seasons in which both human and mountain speak, act or engender change.

In my own work leaving the house to begin working on a new piece or to return to a site that I am working on marks a shift in my way of being in the world. I begin to tune into and attend to my moving body as well as opening my perception to my environment in a way that I would describe as wider and less discerning than when I am out to complete a predetermined task like getting to a place and running a couple of errands on the way. This attitude continues on site, often beginning with a roaming process. In a hoarder kind of way (Bennett 2012) I begin to tune my perceptual system for the call of things, objects and materials around me.

On the first day of making *body, trees & things*, for instance, I sat down and took notes in the central *chestnut site*, drew, slept, ate and dwelled there, but mainly spent the day walking around what I considered to be the borders of the wider field, spending time just beyond a visible treeline that frames one of its sides (along with a river). This was a territory that I had never been to prior and did not return to throughout the whole process. I thus suggest that one of my beginning gestures was to mark the wider border of the site through opening fully to the possibilities of this wider location and exploring uncharted territory. This walk was interspersed with both dwelling and moving-dancing, as I occasionally stopped to draw, gaze, photograph or move/dance. The material features of the site guided my route through visible borders, treelines, blossoms, roots and a river to which I respond with walking, dwelling and moving-dancing in my process of re-charting the territory of the wider side. Again I was affected by and working with intermaterial confederations.

A further aspect of walking that draws on working with Whitehead is the experience that walking helps me to get a sense of my own materiality. In the context of his workshops I sometimes struggled with working with much fewer practices that support landing in my material body, as I knew them from working with Mainz or Poynor. However, I also realised that a kind of sheer exposure to working outdoors also bears fruits. With ample time spent in motion outdoors and in direct contact with outdoor materiality such as water, rock, heather, wind, tree, rain and so on, a sense of arriving in one's own body happens almost on its own, aided by the time spent in exposure to the abundant presence of materials.

It is through the daily rhythm of spending extended time in motion outdoors in Whitehead's workshops, with large amounts of walking and running, that I have experienced a slow adaptation into what I would call my *outdoor body*. This adaptation is a process that takes a few days and is a slow kind of morphing, that also has to do with a growing 'fitness' and becoming more comfortable with being outdoors in all weathers and circumstances. During the 4x4 workshop in Scotland I experience a significant shift from first feeling overwhelmed and exhausted by all the outdoor walking time to being

drawn to the outdoors more and more. I am familiar with this shift also from extended hikes, when after a few days of walking and sleeping outdoors, indoor spaces and a sedentary lifestyle begin to seem like far removed realities. During 4x4 I write on the eighth day of the workshop:

Since the day before yesterday I can really feel that I only want to be outside. That's when I was lying in the garden in the afternoon break and now also I sit outside to write. [...]. Inside [...] the social energy somehow culminates or is denser than outside and that combined with the weather and the light really draws [me] out. (Fieldnotes 26.04.2011)

I thus understand practices of walking to offer a way of arriving within a geographical territory whilst simultaneously arriving in the territory of one's (outdoor) body. An unknown area is made familiar through moving within it and at the same time the physical material of the body that enables this movement begins to rise or to speak.

Dwelling

The second exposure practice that I now turn to is *dwelling*, a term that is prominent in the work of philosopher Martin Heidegger (e.g. 1971) and that Ingold (2000, 2005, 2011) extensively engaged with. I use dwelling here not in direct relationship to these bodies of work, but rather to delineate activities that I carry out on site that are more of a sedentary than of a transitory nature, such as eating or sleeping but also documentary practices such as drawing, writing or photographing. Often after a first scan of and walk in, across and around a territory, but sometimes also prior, I settle into a site and 'dwell'. Specific dwelling routines in the making of *body, trees & things* included taking a first photograph of the chestnut site after entering the field through a gate just off the road from Stoneleigh⁵³. I had also tied twelve small ribbons on various branches on the fourth day of working on site to document the growth of the leaves during the phase that I worked there. At some point of each site

⁵³ These arrival photographs can be found in *booklet no. 2*: 3-5, Appendix)

visit I took a photograph of each of them, documenting the passing of time as materialising in their growth.



06.04., 15.04. and 30.04.2012, Stoneleigh (UK), Chestnut Site

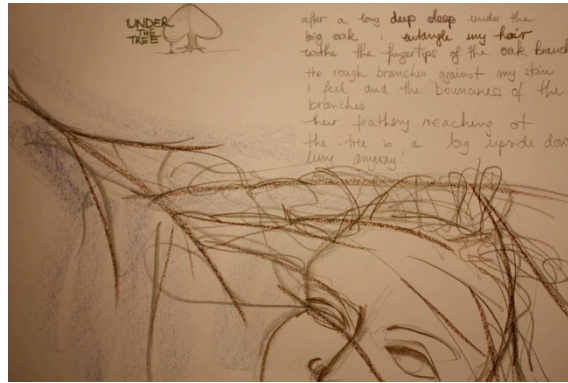
Every day on site I took several breaks to eat and drink and almost every day also to sleep on site at some point, sometimes sitting, sometimes lying down. Sleeping became part of my routine based on the commitment that I would not fight against my body when working, which also entailed sleeping when tired. Being pregnant at the time may have heightened my need for sleep in particular.⁵⁴ But beyond this following of basic needs I further consider and experience sleeping on site as a way of relaxing that supports my integration into the materiality of the site. As discussed in the chapter on Suryodarmo's work, I position relaxation as a "practice to increase our potential for receptivity and communication" (Mainz 2011: 145). I develop this notion with regards to sleeping further below, after firstly introducing fieldnotes that speak to this subject, stemming from my second day of working on site:

*i don't know when i got here and how much time passed then,
but i may have slept a good hour. deep, heavy, full sleep. not just
a little rest. sleep-sleep-sleep-sleep.*

*sleep under the big oak tree, sleep under the huge oak tree,
branches wide and strong with fingers and feathers moving in
the wind.*

*the big trunk in which i can rest, offering many niches. i am not
sure i can dance here, but i can sit and i can sleep both of it
really well. (Fieldnotes 29.03.2012)*

⁵⁴ I have decided to not specifically reflect on my pregnancy in the context of discussing and analyzing *body, trees & things*. Throughout the process I have thought of and attended to my pregnancy as part of my condition and material presence, belonging to and being a part of all material presences around and within me. It thus had an impact on the piece as everything else did, but not in a way that would call for a discussion on its own.



29.03.2012, photograph of drawing pad

In my drawing pad I sketch and write:

*after a long deep sleep under the big oak i entangle my hair with the fingertips of the oak branches. the rough branches against my skin i feel the bounciness of the branches their feathery reaching of[u]t. the tree is a big upside down lung anyway.
(Drawing pad fieldnotes 29.03.2012)*

Described in these notes I find rather tender intermaterial confederations between fingertips, hair and branches. Human hands and hair intertwine and confederate with tree hands and hair, human branches confederate with tree branches, human material confederates with tree material. I argue that these confederations are supported by just having slept. I often begin moving right after waking up, having settled deeply into my material body when sleeping and harvesting upon waking a profound physical relaxation, accompanied by a momentary cancelling out of all prior activities and imaginations. Depending on how soundly I have slept I also note an overall softening of the exact discerning qualities of my mind and sometimes being working in a transition state between sleeping and waking.

I thus argue that not only motioning but also resting, eating or sleeping – what I summarise as *dwelling* here – support a material landing and integration into a site, fostering intermaterial confederations in the process of movement making.

Moving-Dancing

The third and final practice of physical exposure that I develop here is *moving-dancing* which in this case I connect to the process of generating movement material for what I have termed ‘proper’ performance above. The term moving-dancing draws on Reeve’s literal translation of Suryodarmo’s *Joged Amerta* as “the moving-dancing nectar of life” (2010: 189) as well as on Suryodarmo’s teaching practice in which he often uses this combined term, saying for example, as quoted in chapter five: “How I can feel my moving-dancing connecting the constellation?” (fieldnotes 09.06.2011). I make a distinction here between moving-dancing and task oriented daily life activities to which walking and dwelling bear a closer connection, without however suggesting that moving-dancing is the only moment of performance making. The wider performative event comes into being through all three practices of physical exposure, yet when moving-dancing I drop the pen and take off my shoes so to speak, i.e. I fully strip myself of daily life intentions, objects and tasks for a moment, so that I can re-engage with them differently and through movement practice.

As I have shown in chapter six discussing Poynor’s work, one way of working with materiality in dance is to begin with practices that support the dancer in sensing his or her own materiality and to thereafter open into working with the materials of the wider environment. Informed by Poynor’s work but also my previous studying with Mainz, this way of working informs my moving-dancing that is based on attending and yielding to materiality, often beginning with my own. I then aim to leave all assumptions on what should happen to the side, comparable to a phenomenological epoché or bracketing that the phenomenology of Husserl has brought forth (e.g. Ravn 2009: 42f) and work with the attitude of Hay’s “What if?” questions (e.g. Hay 2000) that I have already referred to in chapter five on Suryodarmo’s work. “What if my body could touch materials directly? What if sensing the different qualities of contact, temperature or texture could inspire and guide me?” The possibility of direct contact builds on Suryodarmo’s notion of *all has fact*, the

assumption that all has its own “reality” (Harman), which I can and cannot make contact with, beyond (but not ignorant of) the multiple layers of meaning, knowledge or mythology. As I have argued in a previously published essay and drawing on the work of Harman, autonomy forms part of this reality which allows all entities (human and non-human, animate and inanimate alike) to “have a strong presence of their own, partially beyond human access, whilst [...] being in relationship with and available to be sensed and known by humans – just not entirely” (Kramer 2012a: 84). Harman suggests, that “we can never do justice to the full reality of things” (2015: 12) and in my moving-dancing among materials I find solace in the notion that I can be in contact with and influenced by the reality of things, materials and objects, but do not have to claim neither complete contact nor full separation.

I suggest that in moving-dancing, things, objects and materials make themselves felt and impact our movement choices and qualities. Non-human materials affect and resonate in the human dancer and through intermaterial confederations the dance comes forth. It is therefore not only the human dancer that is making the movement, but it is through attending to materials and their effects on me that allows for movement to emerge in confederation. I further illuminate this suggestion with an example from making *body, trees & things* that I have previously discussed in ‘Bodies, Rivers, Rocks and Trees: Meeting agentic materiality in contemporary outdoor dance practices’ (2012a):

As I lie down in the grass I can work with the sky moving. My back in the grass, my hair getting wet, I move sideways with the clouds [...] there is a lightness I can draw from, a distance, a cloud texture, [...] shades of grey moving, for a moment the rain has stopped, the air is cool against my wet face. (Fieldnotes 25.04.2012)

A witness was present with me on site on that occasion and this particular movement section emerged as she was witnessing one of the first run-throughs of the ‘proper’ performance section. I was positioned near the old root in the triangle of small oak trees, and whilst everything until that point that I had performed for her had been somewhat settled, I was now entering territory that I as of yet had less clarity about. But here a distinct movement quality emerged

which then became a part of the final performance that I felt particularly clear about. In my essay I have reflected on this instance as follows:

I am exposed to rain, my feet are soaked and the grass is entangling itself with my body, hair and skin. [...] This combination suddenly has me notice and acknowledge the sky, as both immaterial and distant, as well as filled with material and movement qualities that, together with the surface contact to the ground, directly affect my body. I am no longer 'alone' in producing movement but can feel both ground and sky rise towards me, allowing me to leave all questions behind, all lostness of what might come next, and inviting instead the pleasure of 'just moving'. (Kramer 2012a: 89)

Both this moment of moving-dancing and my previous writing about it speak of intermaterial confederations in outdoor movement practice: movement develops through rain, grass, ground and sky rising towards me and directly affecting my corporeality.

The role of the witness here is relevant in so far as I suggest that heightened attentiveness on the part of the dancer can aid the sensing of and corresponding with material qualities and textures. The presence of a witness can support such heightened attention, but so can, as I have argued elsewhere, severe weather conditions or particularly difficult territories to work in, all through placing a call a "demand" on the dancer: "The topography of the land, uneven features, thorns, animals, infrastructure, vegetation, refuse, darkness, buildings, weather, other humans – all place an immediate demand of attentiveness on the mover, thus activating the perceptual system" (Kramer 2012a: 85).

Chapter Summary

This chapter firstly traced the roots of my movement and performance practice and analysed the preparatory phase of making *body, trees & things*. A few examples of material agency and intermaterial confederations were distilled from this time period, for example being supported by small branches in a precarious upside down position and sensing the space-giving materiality of a

dead tree when dancing with one. The chapter then turned to making and performing *body, trees & things* and developed the notion of physical exposure as a practice that allows material agency to affect dance making and intermaterial confederations to emerge. Here I differentiated between the three exposure practices *walking, dwelling* and *moving-dancing*. I suggest that all three practices are responsive ways of working with material agency through physical exposure that show that it is not the sole artist, human or choreographer that brings about movement work, but rather that it is through intermaterial confederations that we live and create.

In summary I suggest that working with physical exposure is an example of what Ingold calls thinking through making (2012, 2013: ix). In a lecture of the same title he gave in 2012 in Finland, Ingold suggests that making through thinking is a way of “projecting form onto material” whereas thinking through making is based on what he calls a “joining with movements of materials and awareness as they feel their way ahead” (2012: n.p.), thus a process of following along rather than jumping ahead. Ingold acknowledges that “thinking does have a habit of running ahead of making [...] our imagination runs ahead of what we do” however, he suggests that “if we’re working with materials close up there’s a limit to how fast we can move. Materials have their own friction their own drag, they hold us back” (2012). I argue that many of the examples of the chapter have shown how material ‘drag’ has impacted my dance making, be it the commitment to sleep when I needed to or the way in which the details of the event were pieced together in a slow confederation with the materials on site. Whilst my mind made projections into the future, it still took many walks and times of dwelling and moving-dancing on site to finally determine what would happen where.

I suggest that this impact of materials that Ingold describes with friction and drag is also noticeable as residue that remains in my body after working with physical exposure among materiality. This residue informs my choices in performance making but also more generally affects my sense of being in the world. During my regular movement practice I note for example that “even if movement is ephemeral it is still there. not like a chair but more than a

computer day” (drawing pad fieldnotes, 26.08.2011). This describes material consequences of working with practices of physical exposure, the sense of something remaining and manifesting in the body. Whilst hours spent on the computer have the potential to leave me with a feeling of emptiness or not having done anything, I notice that movement practice leaves a different kind of feeling and sense of accomplishment, even if nothing in particular was produced and no trace of the actions are left. In another instance I note for example that “egal was ich da mache im wald danach habe ich ein bisschen mehr luft + platz in mir” (drawing pad fieldnotes, 04.11.2011) [“no matter what I do in the woods, I have a bit more air + space in me after” (my translation)]. This suggests an impact on my corporeality as I have a sense of having more space within me, space to breathe and to expand into.

In summary I thus suggest that repeated practices of physical exposure described in this chapter, practiced in this case as walking, dwelling and moving-dancing, led to a slow adaptation and confederating with the site in an almost inescapable way. Because our bodies are porous and permeable, as argued further above, we cannot but notice material agency and intermaterial confederations at work, when exposing ourselves to a site. The following and final chapter extends this argument beyond creative practice and into life at large, suggesting that if we attend to material agency and intermaterial confederations, a decentralising shift of the human positionality is the consequence.

8. Corresponding With Life at Large

Introduction

The three preceding chapters have drawn out a variety of ways of conceptualising and attending to materiality in contemporary outdoor dance practices. These included the capacities for being and the facticity of materials as discussed in chapter five on Suryodarmo and *Joged Amerta* and the relevance of receptivity and relaxation as practices of opening towards materiality developed in the same chapter. Another strand, developed in chapter six, was to further highlight the relevance of turning towards materiality, including and often beginning with a dancer's own bodily material, in processes that work *across materials*. Additionally chapter six proposed to position materials on a spectrum of densities rather than as separate antipodes. It suggested that for working across this spectrum the recognition of and sensibility towards both boundaries and intermingling is of relevance. These suggestions drew on my engagement with Poynor's teaching practice *Walk of Life*. Additionally I have shown that practices of physical exposure are central for working with things, objects and materials in a way that is responsive to their liveliness and agency and open towards the possibility of dance unfolding through intermaterial confederations. These aspects I have developed through an analysis of the process of making and performing *body, trees & things* in chapter seven.

After this specific focus on materiality in dance making, the perspective of this chapter now opens towards life at large. I argue that outdoor dance practices *correspond* with life at large and can be positioned as a *practice grounds for philosophy and living*. My use of the term correspondence draws on Ingold (2013: 105 – 108), who positions the term in relationship to communicating with handwritten letters and summarises that: “To correspond with the world, in short, is not to describe it, or to represent it, but to *answer to it*” (2013: 108, original emphasis). In this way I understand outdoor dance practices to listen to what the world has to say and correspond with it through making dances.

With Bennett I highlight the importance of developing such correspondence and communication, even across divides that seem impossible to bridge, such as the one between humans and nonhumans. Bennett argues that we need to:

[...] devise new procedures, technologies and regimes of perception that enable us to consult nonhumans more closely, or to listen and respond more carefully to their outbreaks, objections, testimonies, and propositions. For these offerings are profoundly important to the health of the political ecologies to which we belong. (2010: 108)

This thesis argues that the contemporary outdoor dance practices it has engaged with offer a territory in which to practise such “new regimes of perception” as Bennett calls for, a territory in which to practise communicating across divides. A territory, which might contribute to “creating alternative, less harmful ways of being together” (Lavery and Whitehead 2012: 118) as Whitehead suggests in a text he co-authored as a dialogue with theatre scholar Carl Lavery.

This chapter now turns to human dealings with things, objects and materials more broadly and asks what outdoor dance practices offer in correspondence with the current economic, ecological and political crises of life at large. With theatre scholar Kershaw I propose that performance work that is immersive rather than “sealed off from the environments it is aimed to ‘model’” (2007: 304), might be a particularly relevant here. Kershaw suggests that:

Immersive performance events which are articulated directly to what’s left of the ‘natural world’, unlike theatre, may have the capacity to collapse that disjuncture, to suture more fully human ‘nature’ with nature’s ‘nature’. (2007: 318)

With Kershaw I therefore argue that the practices this thesis draws on provide such an immersive quality and direct contact with “what’s left of the ‘natural’ world” and are therefore a valuable territory to turn to with regards to the crises and questions that govern our current daily lives.

The chapter begins with charting this territory through highlighting the permeability between dance practice and daily life through a return to *Joged*

Amerta. It then develops the potentials of outdoor dance through considering community practices in dance that combine spaciousness with care and open the possibility for *being differently social*. It further turns to the qualities of things as *material companions* and *intermediators* rather than objects of consumption and domination. In conclusion this chapter gathers these various strands to position contemporary outdoor dance practices as *practice grounds for philosophy and living*.

Permeability: Dancing in the Face of the World

This section develops the notion of permeability between dance practices and life at large. It shows that contemporary outdoor dance receives significant input from sources that lie outside of dance and reciprocally invites a close engagement with life at large, which I will show through further analysis of *Amerta Movement*.

Prior to that, I turn to the wide array of influences that impact contemporary outdoor dance more generally. Whitehead writes in a personal email that his “formative introduction to 'outdoor' work was through bird watching, sport and running as a child” and that his “dance training was characterized by the longing to be outdoors and to escape the studio...!” (personal email 16.02.2012). Working outdoors as a dancer thus began for Whitehead more generally with *being outdoors*, bird watching or playing sports. It also began with walking a significant distance to school from the age of eleven, exploring the greenbelt hinterlands of Leeds and the housing estates around his school, saving the bus fare along the way, as he recounts in the interview (07.12.2010).

Education that lies outside of training in contemporary dance is further relevant for the formation of current practitioners, such as a first degree in geography and sports science in the case of Whitehead, a postgraduate degree in political science in my own life and training in therapeutic, bodywork or

spiritual practices in the case of Poynor, Mainz and Reeve⁵⁵. The wider field of *Amerta Movement* also speaks to the multiplicity of influences and the working contexts of Suryodarmo students go well beyond dance and theatre into visual arts and music as well as therapy, pedagogy, spirituality, archaeology or law, evidenced for example through the varied contributions to *Embodied Lives* (Bloom, Reeve and Galanter 2014).

My argument here is that contemporary outdoor dance practices have a significantly large reservoir of influencing practices from which current practitioners draw, both from within the field of dance and performance but also from without. This multiplicity of backgrounds is one strand that shapes and brings forth the deep involvement of current practitioners with the world at large. Outdoor dance further responds to and intervenes in locations that form part of daily life rather being tied to studio environments that are custom built for specific practices such as dance. Working outdoors therefore exposes practitioners to the world as a matter of course, they necessarily work where life happens and changes in complex arrangements and confederations of materials.

I now turn to *Joged Amerta* as an example for an outdoor movement practice that is particularly tightly connected with life at large, in a way that goes beyond practitioner's biographies, training influences from outside of dance and the general emplacement within the world of outdoor dance practices. Overall *Joged Amerta* is a practice that is both mindful of the somatic experience of the mover and the social context in which this mover is placed.⁵⁶ I consider the first of these two aspects, the turning of the dancer towards his or her body and working in reflection to what presents itself, to be a baseline that

⁵⁵ Poynor trained at the Gerda Boyesen Centre for Biodynamic Psychology (1978 – 1980 and 1981 – 1982) and at Tamalpa Institute (1980 – 1981). She carries a BA in Drama and French (1974) and an MA in Feminist Performance (1998). She is further a Somatic Movement Therapist (ISMETA, 1994) and a Dance Movement Therapist (ADMP, 2003). Reeve is trained in Grotowski-based theatre practice (1976 – 1981) and carries a BA in Theatre (1987). She further completed her practice-based PhD in 2008. She is also a Shiatsu therapist (1987) and a Dance Movement Therapist (ADMP, 2002) and a practising Buddhist. Mainz has completed training in shamanic healing arts with Nayoma de Haën in (1999) and is currently completing a training in the trauma therapy Somatic Experiencing (SE).

⁵⁶ I use the term 'somatic' here to refer to movement practices that emphasise the experiential qualities of the body in movement, rather than classical dance technique. The words 'soma' and 'somatics' were first coined by philosopher and somatic practitioner Thomas Hanna (1928-1990) in the late 1970s to speak about the body as experienced from within, as a "felt, sensed, lived entity" (Garrett Brown 2007: 24).

cuts across somatically-based dance practices. With reference to the work of renowned British movement artist Gill Clarke (1954-2011) this can be considered as prioritising “subjective experience, proprioception, a listening to, and questioning of, movement that [arises] from the body” (n.d.: 2). Such a way of working is for example reflected in the invitation of dancers to follow the needs of their bodies as they present themselves rather than working against them, a notion that was one of my basic premises when making *body, trees & things* (see chapter seven). The prompt to notice my condition is one I have heard many times when working with Poynor, who, as an example, might suggest: “[...] whatever comes, give it house-room. Follow it. Embody it” (score transcript 19.05.2011).

The second aspect I have mentioned above, an attention and connection to the external context in which dance takes place, has for example been termed “Social Choreography” by choreographer Michael Kliën (2008). He suggests that: “The act of choreography is one upon reality, unconditionally bound into the larger fabric of life, making it, at its very essence, a contributor to the Joseph Beuys’ ‘social plastic’ or ‘social sculpture’ and thereby a social choreographic act” (2008: 105).

I suggest that *Joged Amerta*, which influenced work such as Mainz’s, Reeve’s and Poynor’s, is specifically strong in combining these two aspects, the somatic and the social. It fundamentally builds on a dual attention to self and world. This is reflected in cues such as: “This notion of listening also means listening to yourself *and* listening to the environment” (score transcript 19.05.2011, my emphasis). It is similarly present in *Amerta*-influenced movement therapist Susanne Tümpel’s writing about her practice as providing “a space where it is possible to sense one’s own condition, one’s contact to oneself *and* to the world” (2014: 139, my emphasis). *Joged Amerta* and *Amerta* influenced practices open and sustain a broad interface with the world in movement practice through deliberately attending to the complexity of a setting from the outset. This is something I have come to value highly since my first exposure to *Amerta*-informed movement practice. In the early years of working with Mainz I was also involved with political theatre such as Augusto Boal’s (1931 – 2009)

Forum Theatre as well as street theatre for political campaigns.⁵⁷ Over the course of several years I slowly transitioned away from such explicitly political work and fully into *Amerta*-informed movement practices. What *Amerta* allowed me to experience was the dual presence of external and internal information through the intrinsic permeability between dance and daily life in the practice. Whilst I could not name this at the time, I noticed that I had space and time to feel myself, without becoming closed to what was happening around me.

In a text drawing on her first experiences of working with Suryodarmo, Poynor describes this permeability between dance and life in Suryodarmo's work as follows: "A group practising. Practising what? Practising movement ... practising for life. In this work there is no separation between the two" (1986: 3). Since the early days of *Joged Amerta* this intention is of fundamental relevance, which is still reflected in Suryodarmo's current description of his work as "more than an approach to improvisation; Joged Amerta is a practice cultivating an attitude towards life" (Suryodarmo 2014b: 1). Whilst each *Amerta* influenced practitioner develops and offers their own unique emphases when working, the intention of "cultivating an attitude towards life" through dance practice is strongly fostered by practitioners such as Mainz, Poynor and Reeve. On a basic level this is already reflected in the names they chose for their own practices, such as *Walk of Life* (Helen Poynor), *Move into Life* (Sandra Reeve) or *Body of Becoming* (Bettina Mainz).

Further examples of the permeability between dance and life in *Joged Amerta* are the grounding of the movement practice in working with daily life movements, gestures and objects as well as practising movement in publicly accessible locations along with inviting an audience for open days during each workshop Suryodarmo teaches. I now turn to these aspects with more detail, beginning with *Joged Amerta's* connection to daily life movements.

⁵⁷ *Forum Theatre* was founded by Brazilian theater activist Augusto Boal as part of his *Theatre of the Oppressed* (e.g. Boal 1979) in the 1960s and is until today a much applied form of working with theatre towards social and political change. In Forum Theatre instances of oppression are performed in a format that invites audience participation and intervention and thus allows for the direct practice and rehearsal of social change.

Especially early students of Suryodarmo speak of the many hours they spent practising ‘walking’ or ‘crawling’ or ‘lying’. Poynor for example notes Suryodarmo’s early suggestions as: “walk ... crawl ... stay ... crawl ... lying ... walk” (1986: 3). Also today Suryodarmo suggests for example to work with: “Informal, daily movement. From there you can growth of your sense original in yourself. How you crawl, how you [are] lying, how you walk” (fieldnotes 09.06.2011). Suryodarmo also verbally summarised nine postures during *The Ecological Body* workshop that he studies in his work, which I noted down to be:

sitting, lying, yawning-stretching, kneeling, crawling (on the earth and on the air), standing (many standing, many trees have many forms of standing), walking (each people have original walking), jumping and coming up - coming down (when you are flying and you come back to your body sometimes you can feel that, like a lift, up and down). (Fieldnotes 09.06.2011).⁵⁸

The drawing on such daily life movements makes *Joged Amerta* and *Amerta*-influenced practices on the one hand accessible to lay movers of many abilities and secondly shows how theses practices fundamentally draw on daily life and are permeable to the wider territory in which the work of dancers takes place.

Suryodarmo further works with scores that stand in relationship to movements, objects and activities of life at large, such as working with a chair (see chapter five) as well as dedicating a whole area of the movement garden during *The Ecological Body* workshop to ‘daily life’ (see also chapter five). Suryodarmo emphasises in relationship to working with a chair: “please practise with your chair! Because this movement, connecting with daily life. Informal movement. And from this workshop hopefully can give us connecting with our daily life” (interview 06.09.2011). Daily life not only acts as an informant or base for *Joged Amerta* but the permeability goes both ways, reflected here in hope that the workshop maintains a connection to daily life. This intention is also visible in the practice of holding an open day for an audience during a workshop. Suryodarmo explains that it was not easy to

⁵⁸ These are also listed in the 2014 programme of Suryodarmo’s school Padepokan Lemah Putih as “The Nine Basic Movements of Speaking and Saying – in variations: lying, stretching/yawning, sitting, kneeling, crawling, standing, walking, jumping, lifting” (Suryodarmo 2014: 3)

establish this practice when he came to work in Western Europe, as the working processes in the studio were considered to be intimate and private and guests were feared to disturb the working process. But committed to the belief that his work had relevance beyond the level of personal somatic experience, Suryodarmo nonetheless slowly began to establish an open day as part of his workshop structure. He says:

I like that even just one day we have to open. To open day. Why?
Because we need our growing in the society of human. It's not in
the workshop. [...] the workshop is just for supporting living in
human society. (Interview 09.06.2011)

This comment points to a deliberate commitment to what I call *dancing in the face of the world* in Suryodarmo's work. The invitation to individuals into *The Ecological Body* workshop group mentioned in chapter five, such as Poynor and the Buddhists, also speaks of this attitude. Suryodarmo explains that visitors come "with their being, with their eyes, with their mind, energy and so on" (interview 09.06.2011) and these disturbances impact the work of dancers. Movement practice is not conceptualised as cut off from what is present around the mover, but on the contrary a confederate endeavour that takes place in a world alive with the multiplicity of materials.

As described in chapter five, this is how Suryodarmo has developed his work from the start, by moving countless hours in public locations, for example on a beach. In his workshops in Java he still takes the workshop groups to public locations such as Parangtritis beach or temple sites such as Candi Sukuh or Borobudur. He further explains that in Java his "land is open. Pendopo is opening. And my land it's not prohibited. [...] My land is opening for society, village, they can pass [...]" (interview 09.06.2011). A Pendopo is a traditional Javanese shelter structure made up of a roof and pillars, acting on Suryodarmo's land as a kind of studio space without walls, opening directly into his land. Working in outdoor settings in the context of *Joged Amerta* is thus not about retreating, not even to 'nature', in order to get away from the world, but about working *among* this world, to use Reeve's term (2010: 201), and what I call *dancing in the face of the world*. Such permeability shows, that the connection

between dance and daily life is not severed in *Joged Amerta* and *Amerta* based practices. Dance draws from daily life and feeds back into it and is a practice that corresponds with life at large.

Community Practices: Being Differently Social

This section turns more specifically to community practices and asks what contemporary outdoor dance has to offer to the way we live together in this world. I introduce the notion of *being differently social* here, that I develop in relationship to my engagement with Poynor's work. I further look at two examples from *body, trees & things* that reflect a sense of spaciousness that coincides with care, a combination that I position as an aspect of *being differently social*. My examples are a group introduction with which *body, trees & things* began and a walk the audience took up to the performance site.

My interest in groups and social contexts began in my teens when I was trained and working as a youth group leader, influenced for example by Theme-centred interaction (TCI), developed by psychoanalyst and pedagogue Ruth Cohn (1912 – 2010) (Tollman 2010). After this first practical introduction to being among and working with groups I immersed myself in studying the effects of hierarchical and dualist identity construction when obtaining my political science degree. Prior to and parallel with my early involvement with creative performative practices I thus developed an acknowledgement of social situations as everything but neutral and therefore requiring attention and care.

I first formulated the idea of *being differently social* for myself during the year of training with Poynor (autumn 2010 – spring 2011) and in relationship to her work. I had met with two training peers from to move in London and after moving one of us left without much of a good-bye. Whilst this could easily be interpreted as a social mishap it was perfectly fine in the given moment. We were still in communication, just differently, and the missing habitual gesture made no difference to me in that moment. That it had made no difference I noticed once she sent a text message in which she excused herself. In my notes that evening I formulated the idea of dance practice allowing for *being*

differently social. Particularly Poynor's and Whitehead's work have significantly impacted my sense of choice around habitual social situations, which I now understand to be something that can be experienced and cultivated in and through dance practice, specifically one with intermaterial sensibilities, which extends the social far beyond the human. Throughout training with Poynor and participating in her workshops she continuously reminded the participants of each group to always check in with themselves if they preferred to eat lunch alone, to not socialise in the evening or to live alone during a workshop or training. This firstly invites a strong sense of choice around what are otherwise often unquestionable habitual structures. Secondly and in effect this choice allows for experiencing that connection and solidarity can well emerge even if a group is not constantly re-established through the usual social gestures of chatting, sitting next to each other, eating together or sharing housing during a week of training. I consider the above to have aspects of both spaciousness and care, which I propose is a valuable combination for thinking about social situations.

Once I had coined the idea of being differently social for myself, I noted more and more examples for this in the context of contemporary outdoor dance, such as being invited to choose my own route back home but continuing to move in the wider context of the group during the 4x4 workshop (Whitehead and Monson). I swarmed to the fringe of the group but still felt well connected to the other dancers crossing the same territory. I thus had spaciousness, but also care, and did not have to get busy with or side-tracked by finding or losing my way. I recorded in my notes of this instance:

We walk back in silence as a collective. Spreading out and zooming in, being in a group, in small groups, in solo. The possibility of being alone but also being in a group is a wonderful and rare experience (for me, in how the world functions) I notice for myself. (Fieldnotes 23.04.2011)

In the context of making and performing *body, trees & things* I particularly had the audience in view with the question of what I might be able to provide so that being differently social in the sense of having both

spaciousness and care could form part of their experience. Overall I had set up a structure that had the whole group move from micro-event to micro-event (walk, exhibition, performance, meal) in a way that was socially bound and happened collectively (rather than being on a solely individual trajectory throughout) but gave ample spaciousness for individual experience. I also invited spaciousness by inviting audience members to choose their own way of engaging with the materials in the installation and did not assign places from which to view the 'proper' performance. On the whole I wanted to ensure that my audience 'had what it needed' so they were available to attend to the event.

I now turn to introduce two examples to qualify this intention – firstly my decision to begin the event with introductions and secondly a walk the audience took up to the performance site. The first I consider a gesture of care that supports arrival in the social context of audience and event. The second was aimed to allow for spaciousness in which a subtle activation of each audience member's bodily materiality could take place.

body, trees & things thus began for me with cycling downhill from the performance site to the gathering point at the gate of Stoneleigh's village church St. Mary's, a large ball of string on my bike rack. I wore an all-weather jacket and rain pants to cover my costume and basically appeared as 'myself', however with an uncommented but large ball of string at my side. I was also pregnant at the time (known to all audience members) and probably looked like I could have another such large ball under my jacket.

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10.05.2012, Stoneleigh (UK), at the gate of St. Mary's

I marked the beginning of the event with a personal welcome and introduction of the audience members to each other, to the helpers that would

accompany the event and to the overall structure of the afternoon. The transitory and momentary audience-community that had gathered was composed of my supervisors and examiners, the musician and the costume designer that had contributed to the event, a few PhD colleagues, movement peers, Coventry neighbours and close friends from afar that had travelled from Berlin and Barcelona, as well as my partner who had intensively helped me in the last days of making this work as well as having accompanied the process from the start. When I interviewed an audience member five days after the event she highlights and reflects on this moment of introduction:

[...] this idea that you kind of actually named your community or people that had come, that was quite significant for me [...] it kind of reminded me of community and building, and how very quickly, if one is doing that kind of work, [how] that is quite a key thing, of how you invite people in, how you make them feel comfortable with each other and what the thing is. (Audience member interview 15.05.2012)

These comments emphasise this moment as significant in the attendee's experience of the afternoon, suggesting that it offered a way into the event that she came to witness and the transitory community she shared this moment with. Her comments are also in line with my intention of offering a gesture of care. I had decided to meet and introduce the audience to each other to create a first minimal bond between myself and each member of the group, as well as among the group and between group and event. I understand the naming of each person present along with their function – such as supervisor, examiner, friend, partner and so on – to be one way of calling each person into presence. This is a gesture of care that welcomes but also one that slightly shifts how this person is recognisable to the others that are present. Suryodarmo has often encouraged us to “speak” and “name” during *The Ecological Body* workshop, for example naming body parts as we are moving in order to “re-member” them (fieldnotes 06. and 07.06.2011). He further suggests that “we are always in communication [...] ‘conscious-not-conscious’, we are always in communication” (fieldnotes 06.06.2011). I understand his suggestions of speaking and naming as

one way of making this communication explicit and available, functioning as a way of calling into presence what is there.

The second example I turn to now is a short walk up to the performance site that audience members took after the introductions. As stated above I consider this to be a moment that gave spaciousness but also care. It provided a minimal possibility for each audience member to physically land in their own bodies, the site and the event and each audience member also received a 'material companion', an idea I return to in the following section.

After the introductions the group walked roughly fifteen minutes up to the event site whilst I cycled back and prepared for performing. I had thought about asking for a silent walk or spacing individuals in a way that would imitate a solo walking experience, but abandoned both proposals in order to not formalise the process too early on. I was rather aiming for the feeling of talking a leisurely walk. The route led through St. Mary's cemetery and then wound lightly uphill, first crossing a small bridge and then past bluebells tucked in the woods to the one hand and an old farmhouse to the other, eventually crossing a loud road and then a field with the chestnut site already well in view. Before they left I gave each audience member a transparent plastic bag that contained a programme of the day with a map of the walk on the back, a homemade flapjack as provision for the journey, an empty postcard with stamp and my address for sending me feedback as well as a small folded pack with a strip of chamois leather, a strip of fabric, needle and thread. This package was intended to function as a companion for the viewing journey, a notion I discuss more specifically in the last section of this chapter. It contained materials that offer orientation, small sustenance as well as something 'to do' (materials that alluded to handcrafts) and a possibility to respond to the event.

In retrospect I am particularly grateful for two gates that perfectly spaced and arranged the walkers in a way that I had not quite foreseen walking this path on my own. On the one hand the gates asked of each walker to briefly attend to his or her successor, on the other they took care of sorting the walkers in single file and thus giving space for a moment of individual experience in this group setting. Whilst I had intended a single-file and solo

orientated nature of the walk, I had not fully considered the helpful relevance of the gates, which I would now consider more particularly to be one aspect of the wider intermaterial confederations that shaped this event.

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10.05.2012, Stoneleigh (UK), walk up to Chestnut Site

One participant reflected on the walk saying that she “really liked the solo walking but equally [...] enjoyed the communal walking, and watching people have their own relationship to it” (audience member interview 15.05.2012). The dual presence of individual and collective experience shines through her comment here, speaking to the idea of *being differently social* that I have introduced in this section. Both spaciousness and care, as I have shown in this section as a whole, are aspects of such a being differently social, both the possibility of making choices but a sense of being cared for.

Material Companionship: Things as Intermediators

This section develops the notion of *material companionship* and further position *things as intermediators*, as items that actively mediate between various times, territories and materials. The examples from movement practice I draw on here include small packages that function as companions, postcards I sent to my examiners prior to the performance and a ball of string that featured prominently in the ‘proper’ performance as well as in research installations that I have developed alongside the whole research process (discussed in chapter three). My usage of the word ‘thing’ in this section reflects the shared notion of Bennett (2015) and Lepecki (2012) that ‘thing’ differs slightly from ‘object’ in inferring greater freedom, where the ‘object’ is bound in its relationship to a ‘subject’. As I have expressed in the introduction I am otherwise not concerned with such differentiations and primarily attend to the shared materiality of

thing, objects and materials. Yet my specific choice of speaking of a 'thing' as an intermediary here, as well as using 'thing' in *body, trees & things* (rather than 'object') does reflect that I too assign a slightly greater efficacy to things than to objects.

I first began to consciously work with material companions for making and viewing dance work when teaching a movement class for students of Coventry University's MA in Dance Making and Professional Practice. We met to work in Wainbody Wood in February 2011, a small woodland South of Coventry. For this class I prepared little packages that contained a tiny pouch of loose tobacco, a few raisins and almonds, a poem and coloured fabric. A silent walk to enter the woods and a materiality-orientated warm-up preceded my handing out of the packages. The students were then invited to choose their particular site within a predefined area and work with an open score that only suggested to begin with an arrival ritual for dancer and site, which could include opening and engaging with the content of the packages or leaving them unopened. The students were then invited to work with the materials present, such as their own bodily material, the materiality of the site and the package they had been given. The score ended by visiting each site and witnessing each mover work for a few minutes in their chosen location. Everybody was paired with a 'special witness', a member of the group who had had the same colour of fabric and thus the same poem in their package. This special witness first chose her viewing position and all others witnessed from slightly further afar.

The materials I had chosen were influenced by three sources. One is my witnessing of a Native American Sundance on a US reservation in 2006 and experiencing the influences of shamanic training in the work of Mainz. Two others are my participation in workshops with US-American contemporary dancer Clover Catskill and the early outdoor workshops with Mainz, both in the late 1990s. The resonance of Native American spiritual practice is present through the use of fabrics and tobacco, items used to communicate with the spirit world, to mark the four directions and/or to act as prayer flags. I included poems into the packages because I remembered the positive impact of poetry on my dancing when I took workshops with Catskill in the late 1990s in

Hamburg. Catskill has been teaching for 30 years and is rooted in early studies with Bainbridge-Cohen (BMC®) as well as being trained in other somatic practises alongside therapeutic and shamanic work. In her workshops at the time the poems of Mary Oliver and Rumi featured strongly, which both re-appeared when I was working with Poynor, reminding me of poetry as a possible inspirational source for making movement. The inclusion of small food provisions is influenced by my early years of studying with Mainz when a picnic or two on site formed was part of each workshop day. Food and eating also carry symbolisms of family and community rituals as well as highlighting our material boundedness to this world. In this case the food also had a notion of ‘medicine’ or food that could be endowed with special powers. The doses were homeopathic and had a sense of something extraordinary rather than alluding only to feeding ourselves.

The contents of these packages were further materials that appeared across workshops, performances and installations, thus traversing the boundaries of different entities and events that have structured and furthered this research. The only residue of the first iteration of working with such packages are photographs I took of the material traces left by the students. These show small items that have been placed with great care in relationship to the forms and materials found on site.



10.02.2011, Coventry (UK), Wainbody Woods

In an article reflecting on this experience I note that: “a thing can provide a bridge between imagination and reality, an item can support the journey into the space of creative process” (Kramer 2011: 4). I similarly consider the packages I made for the audience members of *body, trees & things* to function as a

material that bridges, accompanies and plays into the creative process that takes place on the permeable border between performative event and daily life.

The following sections develop this notion of bridging through positioning *things as intermediators* that aid in establishing connections between the various participants in the making of movement – such as viewer and work or performer and site. I discuss two specific examples, firstly a set of postcards and secondly my collaboration with a ball of string.

Example No. 1: Postcards

During the six weeks in which I produced *body, trees & things* I wrote six postcards to my two examiners in order to offer them an introduction that spoke of my process of making and positioned the event as one that I prepared through extended exposure to the site rather than rehearsing elsewhere and only performing on site. I chose postcards because I understand them to be familiar and unobtrusive items that are usually sent without the address of the sender and thus allow for being received without eliciting the need or reflex of a response. My intention for the content of the cards was to allow for minimal visual and verbal introductions to the site and my process of making, a material trace that spoke of something happening somewhere. I then asked the recipients of the cards to bring them to the performance where I included them into the on-site installation so all those present could read them as part of my documentation of the process of making. The cards to both recipients were overall similar but not fully identical in text or in image.



09.04.2012, Postcard No. 2

I understand these postcards to function as intermediators that aid in marking relationships, for example between locations, times, people and events. These relationships exist anyway, but through the physical travelling back and forth of postcards they become highlighted. I suggest that it is through this process of marking that the materiality of such relationships emerges. Existing connections are called into presence differently, similar to the processes of “speaking” and “naming” I have mentioned above, which allows for them to become something to build on or work from. Specifically I consider the postcards to connect the performance site with the homes of the recipients, process with product, maker with the audience, and in this specific case, examiners with examinee.

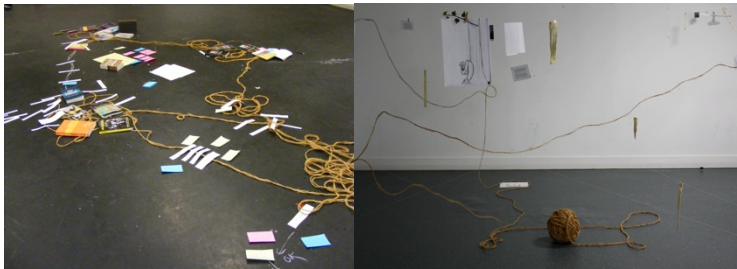
Example No 2: Ball of String

Using a second example, that of a ball of string, the following section further develops the proposal that things can act as intermediators, materially highlighting what might otherwise remain imperceptible. Throughout the research process a large ball of string featured prominently in my work. I had acquired this item prior to my PhD work from the “imaginary manufactory” in Berlin, a workshop and store for products designed by blind makers. On the sidewalk in front of the store I came upon a basket with several oversized balls of string and went in to buy one, simply because I was so attracted to the object. In an interview on her then forthcoming book *Vibrant Matter* (2010) Bennett suggests that

wonder can persist even without the postulate of a God who is actively infused into all facets of the sensible world. Today things can and do enchant people by virtue of their material complexity, or by their sheer this-ness, or by their refusal to fit into the categories we bring to bear upon them. (Kahn 2009: 100)

Drawing on Bennett’s work I understand my buying of the string to be a moment of enchantment, an instance of being drawn towards and attracted by what Bennett calls the “sheer this-ness” of a thing. I then began to work with

the string, in the first instance in the making of research installations, which is detailed in chapter three. The string first zigzagged across the floor and as the installation was lifted into three-dimensional space began to serve as an anchor in the space. I also now think of it as representing all that I did not yet know about my research, all that was still bound and needed to be unravelled. In each iteration the ball of string invited engagement from the visitors and was usually uncoiled and much played with at the end.



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29.06.2010, 17.01.2011 both Coventry University (UK), 28.05.2012, HZT Berlin (GER)

This ball of string then entered my making of *body, trees & things* on 08.

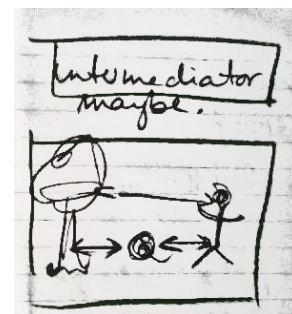
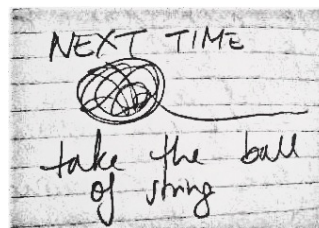
April 2012 when I note in my fieldnotes that

i feel alone in the space
i feel self-conscious
i feel 'just' working with the materiality is not enough but I have
got no other idea.

NEXT TIME
take the ball
of string

a friend i need
a friend

some help an
intermediator
maybe.
(day 10, 08.04.2012)



Through the installation practice the ball of string had already become a very familiar object that I decided to take into my performance making in a moment in which I felt unsure about how to proceed. A few days earlier I had begun to formulate in my notebook that I might not perform in the familiar chestnut site (fieldnotes 04.04.2012) without knowing how to best deal with the wide open

field to which I was drawn for performing. I then took the ball of string on site and began to connect several different trees on the field over the course of several days to figure out a possible constellation and way of working with the string. I eventually decided to use the string for the opening moment of the performance, in which I connected a fair size and predominantly dead oak tree with three small and recently planted oak trees across a large field, slowly unravelling the ball of string over my head as I was crossing the field.

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10.05.2012, on the field, Stoneleigh (UK) and invite

Here the string acted as an intermediary, between large trees and small ones, between materials of different orders such as space, trees, audience, myself and all our moving. It further connected my developing intuitions and ideas for the performance and my practical making of it through its materiality that allowed me to mark a pathway and span a territory that I felt was too large and open for me to span physically, gesturally or symbolically. It also connected various strands of my research practices such as the installations and the performance making as well as my place of home where I had once bought it and the place where I was currently living and working.

A few weeks after performing *body, trees & things* I presented a research installation on the process of making the piece and my wider research practice at the Inter-University Centre for Dance (HZT) in Berlin (2012) as well as more than a year later the installation *The Walk-In PhD* at the Conference for Dance and Somatic Practices at Coventry University (2013). In both cases the ball of string returned to the installation as a veteran item from the performance, visible in a video of the performance that I projected as part of the installation. It continued to

be an attractive, lively, agentive thing in Bennett's and Lepecki's sense and invited much engagement.

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28.05.2012, HZT Berlin (GER), Uferstudios

My overall argument here is that if we understand things as material companions in our process of making that bring their own agencies, trajectories and directionalities the position of the human maker is decentralised. Such a decentralisation is particularly relevant in light of the crises the current *Anthropocene* has brought forth. *Anthropocene* is a term proposed by chemist Paul J. Crutzen to define the age we currently live in as the as a "human-dominated, geological epoch" (2002: 23). This notion implies that the current day crises, such as global warming, are largely human caused, affecting however the whole planet, including all its inhabitants and substances. But rather than focusing on the human for a way out of these crises, I suggest that we need to develop post-anthropocentric perspectives. This stance is similarly proposed in other fields, such as in the writing of political scientist Antoine Bousquet, whose work on international relations suggests that it is only through a "decentring of the human within our worldview that our societies are most likely to endure in the future" (2012: 1). My point here is that an understanding of things, such as this ball of string, as collaborators in our dance making, allows for a repositioning of the human maker of dance works as functioning as part of intermaterial confederations and inhabiting a decentralised position.

In addition I suggest that if we enter such friendly relations with the world of things and by extension materiality we might have a harder time to continue what Bennett calls our "current practice of aggressively wasteful and planet-endangering consumption" (2010: 51). Bennett's research on hoarding suggests that whilst this is an extreme version of being attracted to things, it

might still be of use to learn from hoarders (as well as from artists) about the “somatic effectivity of objects” (2012: 246). Bennett speculates here that both share “something of a perceptual comportment, one unusually aware of or susceptible to the enchantment-powers of things” (2012: 247).

Chapter Summary: Dance as a Practice Ground for Philosophy and Living

This chapter offered several examples for dance’s correspondences with life at large. First of all the delineation of the permeability between outdoor dance and life at large for which I drew most specifically on examples from *Joged Amerta*, but which is a proposal that extends beyond this particular practice. Contemporary outdoor dance’s correspondence with life also resonates in Whitehead’s work, who describes his practice on his website as a “physical engagement with land and the qualities of season, people and place” (Whitehead n.d.). The chapter then turned to community practices and argued that outdoor dance is a territory in which *being differently social* can be experienced and practised, for example as providing both spaciousness and care. Following on, I argued for a positioning of things as material companions and intermediators that facilitate and influence the making and viewing of dance work and decentralise our human position. Viewed through the lens of permeability, both *being differently social* and *material companionship* have the potential to affect our daily lives and the way we interact with one another in a widened social field that includes the non-human. We might invite instances of spaciousness and care into our daily lives and begin to deal with things, objects and materials differently once we open to the possibility of their companionship.

The chapter thus argues to position dance as a *practice ground for philosophy and living*. It aligns here with work of dance scholars such as Anna Pakes or Jane Carr who also look at philosophical propositions through the lens of dance practice and vice versa. Pakes for example explores the “mind-body problem” (2006: 99) and Carr the “interrelationships between consciousness-world and self-other” (2014: 47). Similar to the proposal I make here Pakes

suggests that “philosophy helps grasp what is going on in dance situations, whilst examining concrete dance experience helps ground abstract philosophical reasoning and conclusions” (2006: 99). More specifically I situate that beyond the ‘grounding’ Pakes refers to here, dance offers a territory of practice in which philosophical proposals can be explored, questioned and corresponded with. I further suggest that simultaneous to shifting how we think about life, activities in the territories of dance and philosophy can affect our practices of living. I therefore understand contemporary outdoor dance practice to support our becoming familiar with material agency and intermaterial confederations in ways that spill beyond dance and into life at large.

I draw support from returning to Barad in this context, who speculates that it may take “*facing the inhuman within us* before com-passion - suffering together with, participating with, feeling with, being moved by - can be lived” (2012a: 8, my emphasis). I suggest that what she calls the “inhuman that therefore we are”, which she defines as an “infinite alterity that lives in, around, and through us” (2012a: 9), is related in kind to what I call *the material we are*. Drawing on my research and with Barad I propose that our own materiality offers us a route towards becoming part of the world (again). Because we are of material we are also able to correspond with it, have the ability to respond. This notion of response-ability is one that is shared across territories here and is a term that is used by Barad, (e.g. 2012c: 69) but also by Suryodarmo (Bloom 2006: 38).

I thus contend that a sense of our own materiality as well as experiencing various ways of interrelating with materiality supports our sense of being part of and ingrained with the material world, rather than in separation from and entitled to dominate it. Through an “emphasis on community and context, on being ‘among’ and being ‘part of’, on being constantly in flux in a world that envelops us” as Reeve suggests in the context of writing about her movement practice but which arguably extends beyond, contemporary outdoor movement practices allow for “a sense of belonging rather than longing and a sense of the world as a shared habitat rather than

owned territory. This sense of belonging and sharing is profoundly ecological (Reeve 2010: 201).

A re-positioning of ourselves as part of the material world that is alive thus can impact human activity beyond the specific capabilities of dancing outdoors because it impacts how we position ourselves in this world more generally. In the best case, as Bennett speculates, it could shift our “current practice of aggressively wasteful and planet-endangering consumption” and “animate a more ecologically sustainable public” (2010: 51).

9. Conclusion

This thesis set out to study materiality in and through contemporary outdoor dance practices in the natural environment. It principally asked: *How do materials confederate in the work of contemporary outdoor dancers and what are the effects?* This twofold question arose from sustained involvement with contemporary outdoor dance and scholarly writing prior to and during this research project. As the introduction and the reflections on the roots of my movement practice in chapter seven recount, my interest in materiality was triggered prior to this research project in conjunction with being exposed to the work of Bettina Mainz. The present practice-as-research project then brought forth the specific questions and propositions of this thesis, informed by engaging with the work of other artists as well as new materialist and speculative realist scholarship, by dance practice and performance making, by movement-based writing and photography and by working with installations.

After an introduction outlining the general thrust of this thesis, I provide a theoretical placement in chapter two that traces the resonances of scholarly writings which have contributed to this research. Engaging principally with the work of political theorist Jane Bennett, object-oriented philosopher Graham Harman and feminist philosopher Karen Barad allowed me to find words and understand differently what I knew well through practice but could not quite articulate prior to this research: the close correspondence between contemporary outdoor dance practices and life at large, and the relevant contributions that outdoor practices make to contemporary dance, but also to the way we live our lives. Through engaging with the named theorists I became particularly aware of the practical knowledge of things, objects and materials that contemporary outdoor dance practice has to offer. The contemporary outdoor dance practices that I engaged with encourage the mover to directly converse with things, objects and materials, cultivating mutual exposure, contact and moving *as* and *across* material(s). They therefore allow theorising from a context of immersion or insertion into materials of many different orders.

The theorists I draw on then provided a framework and vocabulary to articulate the agency and liveliness of things, object and materials as well as bridging the gap between humans and non-humans, both aspects I was familiar with through practice but could not quite articulate so. Bennett most particularly offered a way to understand and formulate the “lively force” and “agentive capacity” of materiality (2010: 51) and further provided the key concept of *confederation* for this thesis. Barad helped me to hone my thinking about boundaries and intermingling as well as on the inhuman we are (2012a) that I translated and developed as the *material we are*. Harman’s work in turn gave the strongest impetus to take things, objects and materials seriously and consider also their autonomy. Though more radical than my position in arguing for reality as fully withdrawn (i.e. “reality is so real no knowledge does justice to it”, 2015: 13), his work does allow dancers, roots and rocks to work on the same ontological plane, without aiming to fully know or understand each other. As a dancer, I argue that this frees up potential to engage directly and materially with things, objects and materials in the natural environment and lifts the weight of working with trees in order to ‘reconnect’. This connection is already intact; we are material among material.

After this theoretical placement the thesis turned to the methodological underpinnings that have guided its making and the concrete methods I have applied. Informed by practice-as-research, the methods chapter (three), positions dance and creative practices as loci for embodied knowledge production. It particularly argues for uniting critical thought with embodied experience as well as immersive scholarship that studies from within. It thus builds on Ingold’s notion of “togetherness” (2011: 226) and endorses Garcés’ suggestion of “embody[ing] critique” (2009: 203). Apart from detailing my application of methods from the spectrum of dance ethnography such as participant observation and interviews, the chapter further introduces methods that were developed particularly for and in the context of this practice-as-research project such as movement-based writing and photography and research installations. Movement-based writing and photography allowed me use registers of expression through which I could stay close to rather than

“insulate” (Tamas 2009) myself from my embodied and partially non-verbal experiences. They further created research materials that could be incorporated into the written thesis and leave traces of the multi-modal research practice in the form of images and affective registers of writing. The work with research installations similarly built on the intention to suture rather than separate realms of research such as data gathering and dissemination. The installations have offered a three-dimensional and participatory context through which to present, discuss, disseminate and further this research. As material expression in the space, they stand in particularly close connection to the research topic and offer an example of extending practice-as-research into practice-as-dissemination.

The thesis then opened into a field review with a historical emphasis that draws on the beginnings of modern dance and outdoor movement experiments that took place under its auspices. This chapter (four) particularly argues for the relevance of outdoor practice to the wider development of modern dance as a genre and highlights this aspect in the work of Duncan, Laban and Wigman. Through developing this perspective the thesis makes a case for strengthening the position of contemporary outdoor movement practice as part of the wider field of contemporary dance. In particular, chapter four proposes connections and frictions between the outdoor dance practices of modern and those of contemporary dance. I show that a turn towards the physical materiality of the dancer’s body as well as the permeability between dance and daily life are shared features by contemporary outdoor dance practices and the early experiments of modern dance. Yet early modern dancers worked less exposed to the actual “dirt” of the natural environment and purported a rather stable and harmonious image of the natural environment that is significantly contested by practitioners in the context of contemporary dance that work year round in all territories and highlight the changing conditions of the natural environment and all involved. This field review on the one hand allowed me to position contemporary outdoor movement practice in the historical lineage from modern to contemporary dance. On the other it highlighted the socio-cultural emplacement of each form, reflected in the

different ways of understanding and dealing with their shared location of practice: the natural environment.

The following chapters then turned to three specific contexts of movement practice. These are firstly *Joged Amerta*, the work of Suprpto Suryodarmo, secondly *Walk of Life*, the teaching practice of Helen Poynor, and thirdly my making and performing of *body, trees & things*, the practice component of this thesis. The last chapter then opened beyond dance and asked how contemporary outdoor dance practices correspond with life at large. Because these four chapters speak directly to the research question of this thesis, I present their findings in a summary of my answers.

The central concern of the thesis was to ask how materiality features in and affects contemporary outdoor dance practices. However it also inquired about effects that go beyond dance and touch the way we make sense of and go about our lives. Its research question was: *How do materials confederate in the work of contemporary outdoor dancers and what are the effects?*

To answer the first part of the question I drew predominantly from a combination of dance practices, that of other artists as well as my own, with my reading of the key theorists named above. Drawing on Bennett in particular allowed me to argue that materials impact the work of contemporary dancers by way of their agency and efficacy on (in this case) bodily practices. The integration of receptivity and relaxation into movement practice that I introduced drawing on *Joged Amerta* are further key aspects here. These offer a sense of being and becoming porous to what surrounds us that allow materials of all kinds to affect the dancer. A key aspect here is the turn to the body, which is positioned as an “instrument of reception” (2011: 145) with Mainz. It is thus *through our bodily materiality* that the multidimensional and multisensory qualities of the material world that surrounds us confederate in and with our movement practice. It is further through *embodied receptivity* that we notice the world differently and possibly more of it. With Nicholson I offered an example of the effects of working with receptivity in movement practice: “My focus broadens and I am aware of other sounds such as the movement of trees

in the wind outside, the quality of the light or the texture of the carpet” (2014: 176) and speaking with Eileen Joy, receptivity and relaxation support the idea that the “world can happen *to us* for a change” (2012: 170, original emphasis).

As I have argued in an essay published prior to this thesis, a sense of our own material bodies allows us to “receive, discern and modulate information from [...] [our] surroundings rather than being only ‘so aware’ of the world” (Kramer 2012a: 86). Following on from this, I argue here that a material sense of ourselves facilitates the concurrence of receptivity and embodied movement. Rather than either moving or sensing, inhabiting our bodily materiality with receptivity and being open to noticing material agency enables us to move among and in response to the material world rather than in separation or dominance of it. *How do materials confederate in the work of contemporary outdoor dancers?* I suggest this is in and through our bodies, our “instruments of reception” (Mainz 2011: 145).

Engaging with and drawing on the work of Poynor in chapter six further consolidated the argument that our own bodily substance is a key element of working with and responding to materiality in dance. Through a close reading of her work I showed that our bodies function as a kind of conductor material here – once we sense our own material we can also sense that of other entities and respond to material agency with movement. In the context of Poynor’s work I called this *working across materials*. A sense of our own materiality here features as the ground from which we move, but the material richness that surrounds us also impacts how we move. Poynor for example suggests that rocks “*offer materiality*” (personal conversation 02.04.2015, my emphasis). As argued above, materiality is understood to be active, lively, agentive. In a similar vein several practitioners, including Poynor, position the environment as a teacher, which I discuss in chapter four as a connection with early modern dance experiments. Suryodarmo for example suggests: “The forms of the land inform” (in Lavelle 2006: 21). I further develop the notion of material agency in relation to Suryodarmo’s work through what I call *all has being* (chapter five).

Drawing on my own movement practice the thesis then particularly homes in on what I call *intermaterial confederations*, a term I develop through

drawing on Bennett. In a workshop with Simon Whitehead (co-led by Jennifer Monson) I write after a few days “For me what remains is mainly the strength in the muscles called forth by the mountain. Strong mountain legs that like to walk” (fieldnotes 24.04.2011). This sense of ‘mountain legs’ here speaks to the suggestion that human and non-human materials fold into each other and bring each other forth. Through working and running excessively in a mountainous territory my body, its abilities and how I sensed it had significantly changed. Examples from my process of making and showing *body, trees & things* further include reflecting on the impact that wind, rain and a witness had on my movement or the spacing of the audience on their walk by two gates. Both examples speak to the occurrences of intermaterial confederations in outdoor dance practice.

Drawing on Poynor this thesis positions such confederations as relying on both processes of intermingling and differentiation, and to take place between materials of different orders. In this vein I argue for a mutually constructive and confederate bringing forth of movement between the human and non-human or materials as diverse as ‘body’ and ‘space’. Such intermaterial confederations on the one hand affirm and rely on material agency and simultaneously question the centrality of the human maker of a piece. Rather than directing materials to our needs, I argue that materials affect outdoor dancers through intermaterial confederations and act as co-makers in processes of dance and movement making.

What are effects of materials confederating in outdoor movement practice? One effect is a renewed understanding of materiality more generally, another is the decentralization of the human being. If we position things, objects and materials as having agency, animacy (Ingold 2013) or being (Suryodarmo), and as forming part of our dances through intermaterial confederations, a decentralisation of the human being is the effect. Whilst notions of the activity of materials of all kinds are more easily met with scepticism than affirmation in the context of a Western tradition of philosophy, Bennett suggests that:

Maybe it is worth running the risks associated with anthropomorphizing (superstition, the divinization of nature, romanticism) because it, oddly enough, works against anthropocentrism: a chord is struck between person and thing and I am no longer above or outside a nonhuman 'environment'. (Bennett 2010: 120)

In this vein I argue that the focus on the dancer as moving as material among material, opens a perspective on the human that moves beyond what is currently understood to be the Anthropocene, or the age of the human. This perspective allows for ways of dealing with materiality differently – as something we live with in inter-independence, as something that confederates with our dances and as something that is always already part of us. Barad calls this the “inhuman that therefore we are”, which she defines as an “infinite alterity that lives in, around, and through us” (2012: 9). I call this *the material we are*, a condition we share with all that surrounds us. Drawing on a variety of contemporary outdoor dance practices, the thesis thus proposes that turning towards materiality in and through dance practice offers a territory in which to experience and experiment with a decentralised human positionality.

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08.06.2013, Katja Munker, Düsseldorf (GER)
Workshop facilitated by Wallace Heim and Paula Kramer
Tanzkongress 2013 © Anja Beutler

These proposals then begin to speak to how we make sense of and go about our lives. As I show in chapter eight, two territories that lie outside of the specific parameters of dance practice and could be affected by contemporary outdoor dance are community and consumption practices. As I develop through a return to Poynor's work, contemporary outdoor dance practices offer a space for *being differently social* in communities that include materials beyond the human and invite spaciousness and care. Rituals such as coming

together as an audience, eating or fasting together in a workshop group can all become sites to practise and reflect on how we live our lives. A key characteristic of the researched dance practices in relationship to life at large is the permeability between creative practice and daily life. Daily life movements and concerns influence the movement practice and reciprocally, movement practice has an effect on daily life. This aspect also links contemporary outdoor dance practices with those developed a century ago, when a change of living practices was a principal preoccupation of many of those developing “modern” ways of moving. In the context of chapter eight, as well as throughout the thesis, I argue that if we trust in and expose ourselves to the capacities of things, objects and materials they become companions in our practices of making dances and living, rather than matter and goods for our consumption.

The contributions of this thesis predominantly rest on the expression of embodied knowledge generated through practice-as-research that has not previously been articulated, composed and contextualized in this way. The findings contribute to dance practice and dance scholarship first and foremost through a renewed affirmation of the dancer’s material body. Whilst dance is *per se* a creative practice that draws and relies on the physical body, the proposal of this thesis is to turn to the body as our instrument for reception, as our conductor material and connecting force to the liveliness of things, objects and materials that surround us as well as to consider our own bodily material as already “speaking” (Suryodarmo). This is a fundamentally different stance to understanding the dancing body as having to be moulded through technical training and as speaking through theatrical gestures. Secondly, the field of collaboration in dance (e.g. Ruhsam 2011) is furthered through the consideration of intermaterial confederations that account for the agency and collaboration of non-human materials in dance making.

This thesis contributes to scholarship in the humanities and neighbouring fields by affirming dance practice as a material, empirical and felt-sense base for inquiry. It supports the wider endeavour of positioning contemporary outdoor dance as well as other creative practices as loci of knowledge production. The findings speak back to theoretical proposals on

materiality and offer insights on the simultaneous independence and interrelationality of things, objects and materials. Whilst this thesis does not develop an overarching philosophical proposition such as Barad's *Agential Realism*, Bennett's *Vital Materialism* or Harman's *Object-Oriented Philosophy*, it offers a "diffractive" (Barad 2007) reading of these sources, combined with and explored through contemporary outdoor dance practice, which provides solid leverage for my arguments. Regular and extended physical exposure to all kinds of materials in and through outdoor dance forms the base from which I make my arguments. I consider this to be a rare and needed aspect of new materialist research: to work with materials directly, body to body. Domains of practice that are based on direct exposure to things, objects and materials such as outdoor dance in this case, but also architecture, product design or fine arts, offer highly relevant pools of knowledge that are, as of yet, underexplored in their expertise on materiality.

Future research projects that follow the present one could open into several directions. The focus could be on working towards a more precise and more complexly filled definition of terms such as 'thing', 'object' and 'material' in relation to dance practice. It could further be on human agents and tackle questions of diversity and accessibility of outdoor dance more overtly. A further study could also turn to neighbouring fields of historical and/or contemporary outdoor movement practices, such as the Butoh-based practice BodyWeather or traditional folk-dances that are and were practiced outdoors to examine their respective relationship and definitions of all things material. It could also open into interdisciplinary research and collaborate with fields such as cultural geography or anthropology to research the complex relationships between materials in everyday practices.

What this thesis has brought forth most of all are new ways of conceptualising and working with material agency and intermaterial confederations in and through contemporary outdoor dance practices. What it hopes to inspire are dance practices more broadly as well as new perspectives on practices of living.

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Fieldwork References

Fieldnotes

- 22.03.2010, fieldnotes from *Spring Awakening* 2010, workshop, Poynor
- 23.11.2010, fieldnotes on unrecorded interview, Whitehead
- 21.01.2011, 23.01.2011, 24.01.2011, fieldnotes from second training block, Poynor
- 03.04.2011, fieldnotes from *Spring Awakening* 2011, workshop, Poynor
- 23.04.2011, 24.04.2011, 26.04.2011, fieldnotes from *4x4 Dance, Body and the Environment*, Whitehead, Monson et. al
- 18.05.2011, 19.05.2011, 22.05.2011, fieldnotes from third training block, Poynor
- 06.06.2011, 07.06.2011, 08.06.2011, 09.06.2011, 10.06.2011, 12.06.2011, 13.06.2011 fieldnotes from *The Ecological Body*, workshop, Suryodarmo and Reeve
- 18.07.2011, fieldnotes from *Locator No. 22, at SEA*, Whitehead
- 23.11.2011, fieldnotes, personal reflections after performing *trees, ... absolute soloist*
- 15.02.2012, fieldnotes, personal reflections after performing *trees, ... a winter triangle*
- 24.03.2012, 25.03.2012, fieldnotes from *Women, Rocks and Water*, workshop, Poynor
- 29.03.2012, 04.04.2012, 08.04.2012, 25.04.2012 fieldnotes from process of making *body, trees & things*

Personal Diary

- 15.02.2005, diary entry, Kramer

Drawing Pad Fieldnotes

- 26.08.2011, studio practice
- 04.11.2011, 18.11.2011, outdoor practice
- 29.03.2012, 01.04.2012, process of making *body, trees & things*
- May 2012, reflective documentation of performing *body, trees & things*

Installation Comments

17.01.2011, Coventry University

Score Transcripts

18.05.2011, Score Transcript, Poynor

19.05.2011, Score Transcript, Poynor

22.05.2011, Score Transcript, Poynor

**Interviews, After Performance Conversations,
Personal Conversations & Personal Emails**

07.12.2014, Mainz, personal email on her training background

09.12.2014, Mainz, personal email on her teaching practice

29.06.2010, Poynor, interview

11.01.2011, Poynor, interview

13.04.2011, Poynor, interview and interview memo

16.09.2014, Poynor, personal conversation

14.01.2015, Poynor, personal conversation

02.04.2015, Poynor, personal conversation

09.06.2011, Suryodarmo, public interview

23.11.2010, Whitehead, personal conversation

07.12.2010, Whitehead, interview

16.02.2012, Whitehead, personal email on his training background

23.11.2011, *trees, ... absolute soloist*, after performance conversation

15.05.2012, *body, trees & things*, audience member interview

Workshops & Trainings

19. – 21.03.2010, *Spring Awakening*, workshop, Poynor

24 – 28.09.2010, 21. – 25.01.2011, 18. – 22.05.2011, *Walk of Life Training Programme in Non-stylised and Environmental Movement*, Poynor

18. – 29.04.2011, *4x4 Dance, Body and the Environment Workshop*, Whitehead and Monson et. al

05.06.2011 – 11.06.2011, *The Ecological Body*, workshop, Reeve and Suryodarmo

16. – 19.07.2011, *Locator 22*, at SEA, Whitehead

23. – 25.03.2012, *Women, Rocks and Water*, workshop, Poynor

Appendix: Documentation Booklets

trees, ...

20 feb 2011 - 15 feb 2012

music & movements, seen and unseen

paula kramer & michaël lacoult

compiled by paula kramer

1



2

From: michael lacoult <[REDACTED]>
Subject: **RE: Hi**
Date: 4 February 2011 23:20:36 GMT
To: <kramerp@uni.coventry.ac.uk>

Hi Paula

Great 20th Feb sounds good.

No prob, I could meet you with the car and we could drive somewhere. Or I could pick you up from Birmingham new street and we could drive somewhere. I'll have a think about a location around Birmingham and if you have a think about a location near Coventry See you soon,

Michaël

3

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4

we come to the chestnut site near stoneleigh rather randomly, but are immediately taken.

all of our initial meetings and doings here are undocumented. what remains are dates and our musical-movement-memories. traces amongst the trees.

20.02.2011, 14.05.2011, 03.07.2011, 29.08. 2011, 18.09.2011 ...

we become known to each other. the site, the musician, the dancer.

we develop a routine. michael picks me up, we drive out to stoneleigh. at the site we disperse and do a bit of 'whatever'. we reconvene and meet in improvisation, always different.

different trees in focus, different atmospheres, different time of the year. movement, sound, song, music. wind in the trees. birds. chestnuts growing, chestnuts falling.

5



6



7

we begin to think of a performative inauguration of the site and invite people to join us for 8 oct 2011.

a first witness, ruben, comes out to photograph on 18 sept 2011.

a sunny, peaceful autumn day. in a computer crash almost all images are lost.

8

paula kramer & michaël lacout: **playing**
with trees



sat 8 oct 11
5 - 7 pm

informal performative gathering
amongst old sweet chestnut trees, near stoneleigh abbey

9



10

later i call this 'trees, - collective inauguration' and post on my website in reflection:

Inviting known strangers to be among trees with a performer and a musician. It is early evening, quiet autumn. Not much movement in the atmosphere, but a shift into light and then it gets dark.

Collective procession into the trees. Walking, starting. Many circles. Lostness, anger, pleasure. Quiet. Moving-singing-dancing.

Oh what? Oh what? Oh what? So what? So what? So what?

There is attention and distraction, some concentration and a lot that remains unknown. As audience members join in, the net breaks open even further, yet little universes form here and there. Families in trees. A man tries to walk in circles. A woman sits under a tree. The double bass and his son walk into the field.

"Tonight this little copse is magical. And the elderberries, wow. They look delicious." [Noël Warr]

Night falls. We eat chestnut soup and sourdough bread and drink hot elderberry punch.

11

This item has been removed due to data protection. The unabridged version of this thesis can be viewed at the Lanchester library, Coventry University

12



13

the next edition of this series is 'trees, - absolute soloist' on 23 nov 2011.

my quest is to transport everything on my bike, to have no additional documentation but my cameras on automatic and no music. absolute soloist. and a maximum audience of five.

i later email to michaël [13 dec 2011]:

"[it was] very calm, quiet. three people in the audience. they were sitting on 'assigned' seats at first and then got up and watched from another perspective but all very quiet. maybe it was a little bit like bird watching or so, where you watch intently but quietly. [...] two cameras on automatic, that was also a bit like setting up cameras for a wild animal and maybe it comes by and maybe it doesn't. [...]"

one of the most beautiful moments was to see the audience coming over the hill. i had spoken to them on the phone when they arrived at the parking lot and given them directions to the site. then i started moving and when they came i was lying on my side and could see them [...] three figures emerging from afar. it was a cold and grey day.

14

From: michael lacoult <~~michael.lacoult@coventry.ac.uk~~>
 Subject: **RE: february dates**
 Date: 24 December 2011 16:23:13 GMT
 To: <kramerp@uni.coventry.ac.uk>

Hello Paula,

Thanks for your emails and Merry Christmas to you!

Thanks for sharing your thoughts on your last performance, it was really lovely to read about it, I would have so much liked to see it. I am glad it went so well. I like the way you compare your performance to watching wild animals, as I feel sometimes improvising is a similar process, from a spectator point of view or even performer. Sometimes, something exceptional happens and sometimes you wait and wait and wait for something special to happen but it doesn't. Patience and letting things develop is sometimes the best setting for a wild animal to come to sight.

You said a special moment was when the audience was coming over the hill, and last time, when we came into the woods was also a very special moment, so there is definitely something interesting about coming to the place and leaving the place. Probably because it gives us a sense of space or a sense of travelling... Just a thought.

15



working in the winter we understand for the first time the shape of the site.

it took us a year to see: it's a triangle!

we invite one witness to photograph, as we improvise with each of the corner trees.



19



20

we develop 'trees, - a winter triangle' for 15 feb 2012.

in my field notes after the performance [for one photographer] i write:

"TRIANGLE, TRIANGULAR, this is a magic field. [...] we discover the triangle on Sunday and work with it the first time. This will be gone in May, I think – invisible, as all three of us (Michaël, Liz and myself) have always thought this is a circle of sorts, an egg. [...]"

There's something very specific and space-giving about dead wood, I find it fascinating and would like to take this further. There's somehow a different sense about it, hard to say what it is, a different soul resides here, it's more unknown, therefore possibly more knowable?

[At the last tree] I take off my shoes for the special occasion of today [...] and then the magic begins as Michaël begins to play on a dead branch with the bow [...]. In this I dance with tree in a way that I almost find 'wrong', I mimic, I "take on your shape, tree" – and in my mind think – but is this not what I sometimes 'ridicule' or consider 'not good'?

But there is a moment when I feel [...] the tree coming out to meet me, and myself [...] stepping towards the tree to meet its dancing [...]. The two merge in me and almost like a puppeteer I also have each one in a hand [...] in my gestures they come together, I fan out my fingers and bring the root of my hands together and here they meet, in my gesture they become one.

And in the end I stand and look out into the evening distance, having a broken off branch of the tree right in front of me and a branch to the left, a branch to the right

21



22

trees, ...

20 feb 2011 - 15 feb 2012

Photography credits:

p. 7 & 8 Ruben Kurschat

p. 11, 13 & 23 Liz Bush

p. 17 Canon EOS 450D on automatic
all other images Paula Kramer

23

body, trees & things
27 march - 10 may 2012

preparing performing
paula kramer

1



2



27 mar 2012

04 apr 2012

06 apr 2012

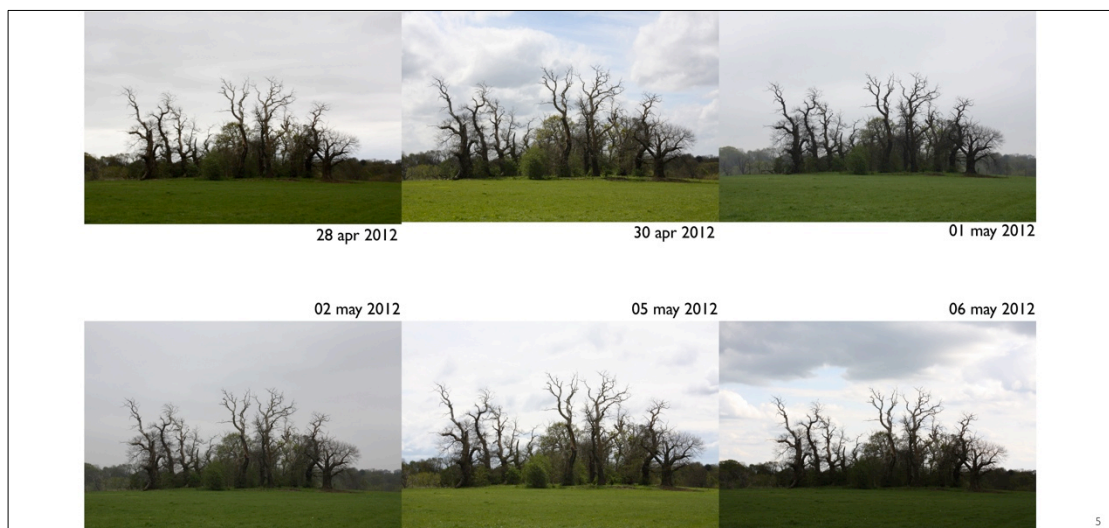
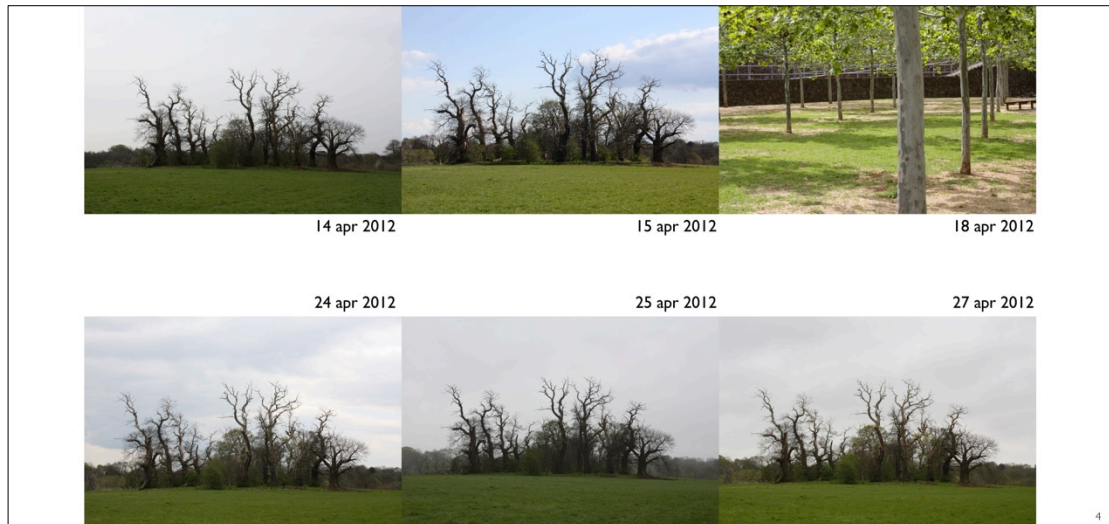
08 apr 2012

09 apr 2012

10 apr 2012



3



i come to this site, again and again and again. mostly i am here alone. there's a rhythm to my coming, but it's varied. a few days in between i spend teaching in spain. city trees.

i come, i eat and i sleep. i sit, i watch and i move. i walk, i write and i think. i take photographs.

most people come here to walk their dogs, there are planes above and cars on the side.

quite some traffic, but a it's a rare occasion that someone enters the chestnut site whilst i am there.

most people orbit around the central spots in which i am working. as i move out of the chestnut site and into the open field, it takes me a while to work in such visibility. but on the whole people ignore my doing completely.

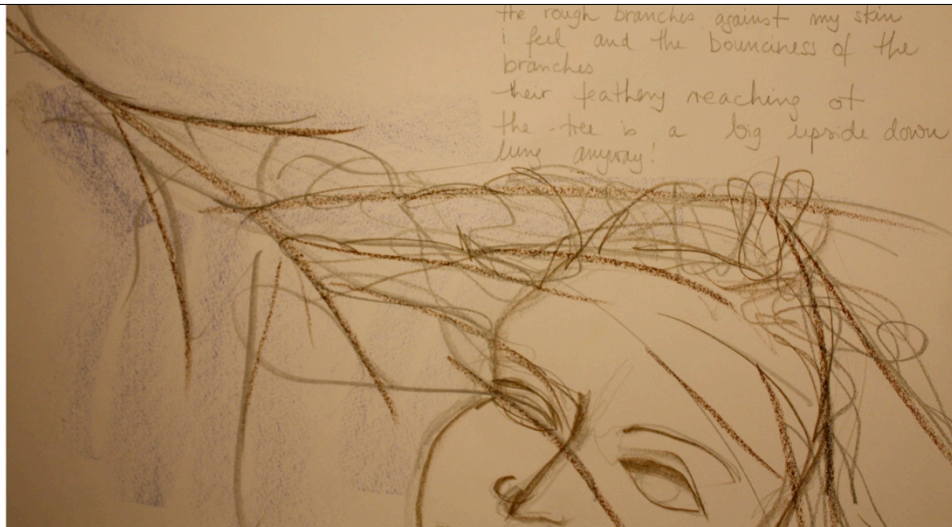
this booklet is a first attempt of looking back.

27 march 12, first day back on site. sunny spring is here. i expect to be very relaxed, but many thoughts circle in my head.



7

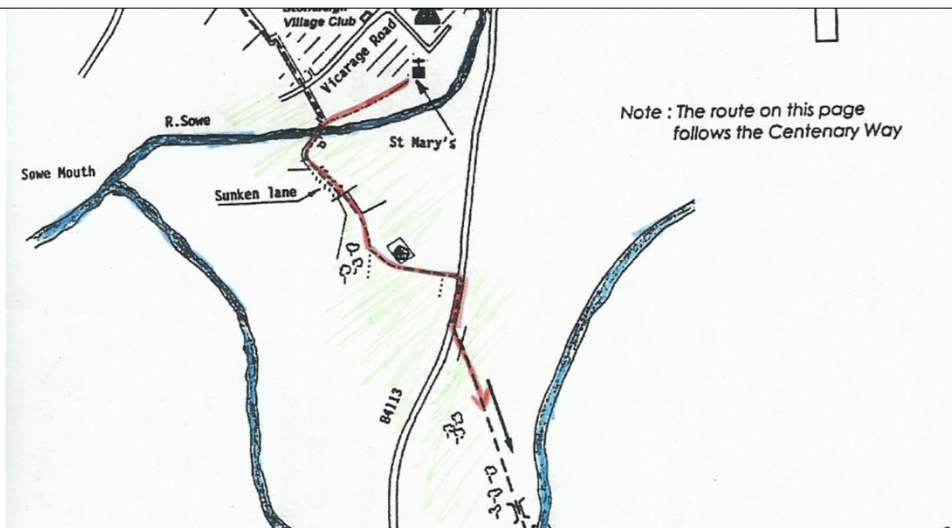
The rough branches against my skin
i feel and the bounciness of the
branches
their feathery reaching of
the tree is a big upside down
lure anyway!



29 march 12, after a long deep sleep under the big oak tree i
entangle my hair with the fingertips of its branches.

8

31 march 12, thanks a pilgrim on an easter mission i discover the
path up from st. mary's.



9



10



01 april 12, bonus day with extra sun. i catch shadows and mark branches to follow the growth of the leaves.

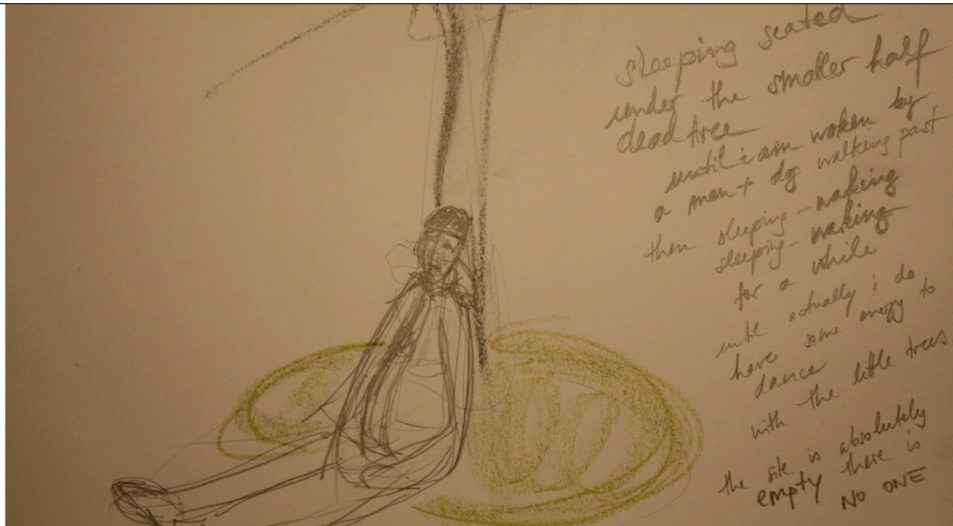
11



04 april 12, out with trees in rain, bus out there, long walk home, wet, exhausted, glad, tired, red cheeked, fired up, cooled down.

12

06 april 12, the site changes, always. the rain has passed, ground still moist. it is mild and calm. a long bike detour on my way home.



13



08 april 12, i visit the village church. on site i sit and enjoy the long grass moving in the wind. trying not to get ahead of myself.

14

09 april 12, i take the rope with me for the very first time. longing for an intermediary. it proves very helpful.



15



15 april 12, opening everything up again. don't want to be plant, human or animal. want to be no-thing, don't want a story to tell.



19

18 april 12, catalonia city trees. dry, dry country, trees so thin, young and dry, different colour earth, different colour light.



20

24 april 12, back on site the leaves are out. let's live here, in all beauty, i fall asleep in the middle of the field. mid-performance.



21



27 april 12, out on a cool evening. i just want to sit sleep. lie here, listen to the rain. there is more space than in a house.



25

28 april 12, a rainy day with michaël, he finds his tree. all elements with all their banalities and extraordinarities slowly emerge.

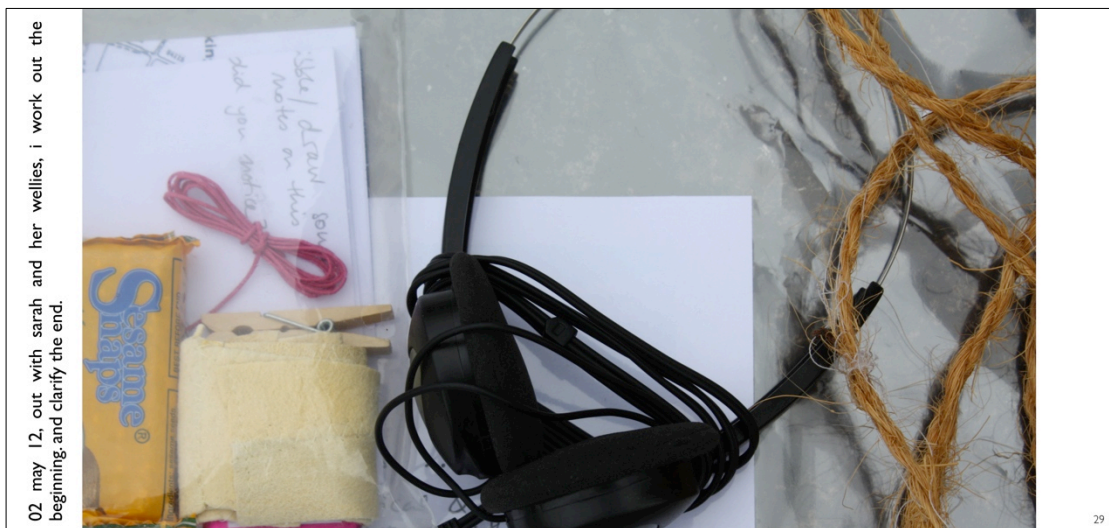


26

30 april 12, today i'm just here as a visitor, resting. time flies anyway, why bother? why now? a sunny day since forever.



27



on the fifth and sixth of may i come out, but don't take many pictures. many thoughts in my head, many things still to complete.

overall the task seems to be, always and again - how to come from here, how to move from here, how to remain in a state of possibility rather than exhaustion. i am weary now, more often, tired. words move through my head at night and my time is filled with tasks.

on the seventh of may i finish compiling the books, today, the eighth is the last day for the printer.

off they go. off i go.

liz comes out on may sixth. she says a beautiful thing after witnessing me move: "it seems like you've struck out on your own this time. like you don't need the trees anymore."

maybe that's true.

