

# Aesthetic Boredom: Investigating the Experience of Slow Dance in a Society of Haste

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The floor piece by ALICE FINE/ Marika Troili, on the dance floor of *Slow Dance* by Hana Lee Erdman and Louise Dahl.

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“Why has no one ever invented a God of slowness?”

Peter Handke

## ABSTRACT

This thesis contributes at theorizing a recent tendency in contemporary dance, coined ‘slow dance’ by Hana Lee Erdman and Louise Dahl, while investigating it in the context of today’s society of haste. Building on social, philosophical and cultural diagnoses by Hartmut Rosa, Byung-Chul Han and Jonathan Crary, I portray today’s time-regime as accelerated, atomized and hyperactive; I identify competition and disenchantment as two driving-wheels of haste; and I put forward alienation, excessive self-centeredness and hyperactive standstill as three main problems it leads to. Drawing on publications by André Lepecki, Bojana Cvejic, Bojana Kunst and Ana Vujanović, I explore how contemporary choreography answers to this context. In a first case study, *Slow Dance* by Erdman and Dahl, I show how a slow pace invites a shift away from personhood, towards the more detailed realm of ‘molecular thingness’. In a second one, I rely on the concept of ‘atmosphere’, as described by Gernot Böhme, to approach slowness beyond easily identifiable compositional choices, and I describe how a slow atmosphere in *The Senders* by Stav Yeini facilitates ‘deep perception’, in allusion to Pauline Oliveros’ ‘deep listening’. With Alva Noë, I develop the concept of ‘aesthetic boredom’ as a specific kind of aesthetic experience that one accesses when binding sensorially with a piece of slow dance beyond the boredom, distraction or impatience that its slow atmosphere might trigger. Where boredom makes a general state of alienation sensible, aesthetic boredom potentially enables what Rosa calls “experiences of resonance”. Building on Rosa’s ‘resonance’ and Vujanović’s ‘landscape dramaturgies’, I propose the term ‘atmospheres of resonance’ to indicate the distinctive way in which slow dances organize collective spaces of spectatorship, namely spaces that, by calling attention to a realm that ontologically precedes all kind of individuation, bypass individualistic as well as anthropocentric modes of engaging.

304 words

## FOREWORD

Paradoxically (or symptomatically?), although the question of slowness has driven it from its very beginning, I have written this thesis with an almost constant feeling of running against the clock; continually deferring deadlines. Even though they have delayed the completion of this thesis, I am immensely grateful for the opportunities as young dramaturg, choreographer and performer that this research has brought me. Written in the grooves of time that I found or protected between multiple projects, alimentary jobs, and my own artistic work, this thesis is imbued both by a feeling of haste, and a dramaturgical urgency for developing spaces that favour practices of listening and non-knowing.

I am grateful to Konstantina Georgelou for her feedback, valuable reading suggestions and great flexibility, as well as to Liesbeth Groot Nibbelink for her interest in my research from its very beginning, for the few decisive conversations we had, and for suggesting me the reading of Hartmut Rosa. In what follows, I focus on a piece by Hanna Erdman and Louise Dahl, and one by Stav Yeini. My experience of their work as well as the time we have spent together in conversation have left a very clear mark on this thesis, and I am thankful for how they generously have welcomed me inside their processes. Although their contribution to my research remains mostly invisible in this thesis, the same thankfulness goes to Jeanne Colin, Evelien Cammaert and Marie Topp. The topics we discussed together, and the rich dramaturgical and creative exchanges we had, lie at the core of the main concepts I develop. Finally, I direct a vast wave of gratitude to my twin sister Julie for her eagle-eyed Deleuzian and conceptual feedback; to Elien Delaere who generously took the time for giving me tasteful redactional revisions; to all friends who have found time to read drafts and made me feel less isolated in the process of writing; to my parents for their unconditional support; and to Benjamin for his patience, care and clear mind.

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## Introduction

In the past two or three years, it has struck me how many performances have given me an impression of ‘slowness’, and the variety of ways in which they did, enticed a desire for dramaturgical investigation.<sup>1</sup>

When searching for projects that I could join and study for the practical research project of my internship, the guiding question therefore has been: who works with slowness? This brought me in contact with five projects: *RECEPTION* (2019) by Jeanne Colin, *Slide* (working title, 2020) by Evelien Cammaert, *The Senders* (2019) by Stav Yeini, *Slow Dance* (2019) by Hana Lee Erdman and Louise Dahl, and *Oceanic* (2020) by Marie Topp and Julia Giertz. Despite their differences in format – ranging from performative installation to frontal, black box performance –, dramaturgy, style and even discipline,<sup>2</sup> I discovered to my surprise that these artistic projects share an interest in certain questions. Because of these remarkable axes of connection, and encouraged by the recent work of Erdman and Dahl, I propose to group these and many other works in the European contemporary dance and performance scene that resonate with the same questions under the term “slow dance”.<sup>3</sup>

Erdman and Dahl, who have extensively tasted durational dance while performing in pieces by Mårten Spånberg, coin ‘slow dance’ as both the title of their first choreographic work and a gathering term for dance practices that resonate with a wider slow art movement: a movement that calls attention to the experience of time unfolding, where watching becomes both conscious and embodied.

Like slow food, slow cinema, slow sex, slow art and many other slow movements and genres, slow dance emerges in reaction to a contemporary context where most areas of life go fast. Some of these movements, like for example certain types of yoga, mindfulness and slow food, paradoxically are re-appropriated by a capitalist logic.<sup>4</sup> To differentiate slow dance from movements where the word “slow” tends to be taken very literally, becomes almost a brand, or where “slowing down” is no more than a way to better serve the fast-running machine of today’s life and work, I propose to think of it in a way that resonates with the thought and discourse that Carolyn F. Strauss develops in her Amsterdam-based Slow Research Lab and

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<sup>1</sup> Some of them are dance performances where movements are executed very slowly, like *Staged?* (2017) by Maria Hassabi, *Pandora's Dropbox* (2017) by Katja Heitman, *Liaisons* (2018) by Marie Topp, *Crowd* (2018) by Gisèle Vienne and *Slow Dance* (2019) by Hana Erdman and Louise Dahl. Yet others create a slow impression with other dramaturgical procedures like stillness, repetition and variation, slow build-ups and long durations. For example, *Dança Doente* (2017) and *A Invenção da Maldade* (2019) by Marcelo Evelin/Demolition Incorporada, *Gerard Richter, une pièce pour le théâtre* (2017) by Mårten Spånberg, *Symphonia Harmoniae Caelestium Revelationum* (2019) by François Chaignaud and Marie-Pierre Brébant, and *Slugs' Garden/Cultivo de Babosas* (2017) by Fabián Barba.

<sup>2</sup> All of these artists are dancers-choreographers, except Cammaert, who's first medium is photography.

<sup>3</sup> With Fabian Barba (2019), I am aware that contemporary dance discourse sometimes discriminates non-Western dance. Therefore, it seems important to specify that my defining slow dance as primarily European or Western is motivated by my experience as Europe-located dancer and dramaturge, and my ignorance of what is happening in other scenes. I agree with him that “[we] need to pay attention to the (Western and non-Western) philosophical assumptions in relation to time and the contemporary and, ultimately, to question the very primacy of such a temporal category to define and judge the value of the artworks: the importance and centrality given to the contemporary might already be distinctively Western” (Barba, page unknown)

<sup>4</sup> Read for example Mary Antony's article “That's a Stretch: Reconstructing, Rearticulating, and Commodifying Yoga” (2018), or Ronald Purser, “The Mindfulness Conspiracy”, an article adapted from his book *McMindfulness: How Mindfulness became the New Capitalist Spirituality* (2019).

her *Slow Reader* (2017).<sup>5</sup> With the echo of Strauss' writing in mind as well as that of several other authors who have coloured this thesis, I understand slowness as something that can be thought *ex negativa* as a way to counter toxic logics of effectiveness, work, competition and individualistic as well as anthropocentric (self-)fulfilment, or *ex positiva* as something that facilitates alternative qualities and states of being, collectively as well as individually, while opening spaces that lie "beyond human cognition and lifespans" (Strauss 14) and favour reflection, contemplation not-knowing, listening, deep sensorial perception, resonance and care.

Although it would be beautiful to focus exclusively on slowness' positive potential, for the sake of clarity, I study slowness in the context of a society that primarily favours its opposite. In order to deviate attention from literally slow paces and instead call attention to the cognitive, emotional and physical states slowness generates, I propose to consider slowness as opposed to *haste* instead of speed. Accordingly, slow dance, as I understand it, doesn't designate only dances that literally adopt slow paces, but also works that more broadly induce a state that escapes the abovementioned logics of work, competition, and self-fulfilment.

In *Artists at Work* (2014) Bojana Kunst defends that nowadays dance is absorbed by the all-encompassing neoliberal realm of work and speed, and asks: "What would the proposition that dance is work mean for the society that is to come? Is it possible to find an alternative to the continuous movement and speed, to the flexibility of bodies and spaces, to the dispersion of energies and power of bodies congregating only due to advertising campaigns and massive spectacles?" (118-119). It seems like slow dance contributes at formulating an answer to this question, and that the potential and power of contemporary dance nowadays doesn't lie, like in the past century, in the expression of values like freedom, creativity and individuality because these have been absorbed by a neoliberal culture, but rather in considering movement as something related to time, change and the materiality of bodies (Kunst 99-119). Building on Kunst's reasoning, I believe the relation between choreography, slowness and sensorial perception might be empowering because it leaves time to more consciously experience time and attention as questionable rather than compulsory givens, to experience sensorial perception in more conscious and embodied ways, and differentiate modes of being(-with) that are possible and desirable from those that are automated in a fast society.<sup>6</sup>

Encouraged by the extensive and varied presence of slowness in recent choreographic work, this thesis proposes 'slow dance' as a term to indicate performances that are 'slow' in the rather broad sense described above, and investigates it both in the context of contemporary dance theory and in today's socio-cultural context of haste. With the hypothesis that true sensorial perception requires time, and starting from the impression that by allowing more time for sensorial perception slow dance creates spaces in time where modes of relating can be cultivated that in a context of haste are difficult to establish, this thesis investigates the

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<sup>5</sup> On the website of Slow Research Lab, Strauss formulates it as follows: "Through a mix of theoretical reflection and creative experimentation, we investigate an expanded terrain of individual and collective potential that brings balance to the pace at which we encounter the world, and integrity to how we position ourselves within it. In *that sense, the word 'Slow' is intended not only to inspire a different velocity of engagement, but also to evoke a quality of being*, characterized by critical thinking, deep spaces of reflection, and the unique forms of creative expression that are born of them. We use the term both as an adjective and as an active verb that describes the pursuit of more holistic ways of knowing oneself, encountering others, sharing knowledge, and evolving together toward harmonious and resilient forms of living." (ww.slowlab.net/ABOUT).

<sup>6</sup> "Human beings need to have a sense of slowness because this is the only way to differentiate those changes that are desired and possible." (Kunst 133)

following question: *in a society of haste, (how) can 'aesthetic boredom' as the aesthetic experience of slow dance create alternative experiences of being-with?* This question will be studied step by step along six chapters, dedicated to five sub-questions.

Chapter 1 asks: “What do I understand by a society of *haste* and what problems does haste pose?” It outlines the societal context in which my study is embedded. I draw from Jonathan Crary (2013), Hartmut Rosa (2010, 2019), and several publications by Byung-Chul Han (2015, 2017, 2018) to portray the time-regime that governs contemporary society, as well as to identify its main problems, causes and consequences.

Chapter 2 is dedicated to the question: “What directions can (and does) choreography take in today’s context of haste?” It examines how contemporary choreography is affected by haste and situates slow dance in the field of contemporary dance theory. From the study of publications by Kunst (2015), Bojana Cvejic (2015) André Lepecki (2016) and Ana Vujanović (2018, 2019), I highlight a set of directions that contemporary choreography is taking.

In Chapter 3 and 4, the question “How does slowness translate in slow dances, and what does it do?” is investigated with two case studies. On the one hand, Cvejic’s and Kunst’s analyses of *Nvsbl* (2006) by Eszter Salamon will help me show how a slow pace in *Slow Dance* invites a shift away from personhood, towards the more detailed realm of what I call ‘molecular thingness’. On the other, the concept of atmosphere, as described by Gernot Böhme (2013), will appear useful not only to approach slowness beyond easily identifiable compositional choices in *The Senders*, but also to account for how slowness facilitates deeper experiences of perception, which I call ‘deep perception’ in allusion to Pauline Oliveros’ (2005) ‘deep listening’.

Chapter 5 answers the following double question: “What is an aesthetic experience, and, in a context of haste, can we understand ‘aesthetic boredom’ as a type of aesthetic experience that specifically applies to slow dance?” Building on Alva Noë’s (2015) writing on art and human nature that describes contact with art as inseparable from everyday engagement with the world and gives boredom a central place in how aesthetic experiences occur, I propose the concept of *aesthetic boredom* as a particular type of aesthetic experience, and a state beyond boredom to which slow dances invite.

Finally, Chapter 6 explores the question: “(How) does ‘aesthetic boredom’ create alternative experiences of being-with?” When individual experiences of aesthetic boredom take place in collective settings, I suggest that slow dances organize collective spaces of spectatorship that, by calling attention to a realm that ontologically precedes all kind of individuation, bypass individualistic as well as anthropocentric modes of engaging. I call these spaces ‘resonating atmospheres’, and develop the concept building on Vujanović’s ‘landscape dramaturgies’ and Rosas’ ‘resonance’.

Besides Strauss’ above-mentioned discourse on slowness that emerged in the field of design and architecture (although it definitely exceeds it)<sup>7</sup>, the still embryonic use of the term “slow dance”, the already more

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<sup>7</sup> As the first sentence of its about-page claims, Strauss’ Slow Research Lab is resolutely multidisciplinary: “Slow Research Lab is a multidisciplinary research and curatorial platform based in the Netherlands.” Its activities range from publications to workshops, study groups, expositions and practices of encounter and listening immersed in certain ecological environments. ([www.slowlab.net](http://www.slowlab.net))

established movement of slow art,<sup>8</sup> and the well-trodden genre of slow cinema, his thesis joins two debates. One deals with the (growing) speed in late-modern society and spreads over a wide range of fields. The other takes place in contemporary dance theory.

In the past decades, society has been studied at large as a society of speed and acceleration in several fields of study. A wide variety of publications denounce the problematic consequences of speed on politics, economy, health, social relations, the environment, and simply the quality of one's experience of everyday life, while countless initiatives advocating slowing down on the level of lifestyle have been promoting practices like mindfulness, slow sex and slow food through books, workshops or even smartphone applications.<sup>9</sup>

In the field of cultural theory and philosophy – the field on which I mostly will build –, authors like Jean Baudrillard (1992), Paul Virilio ([1977] 1986, [1990] 1999), Bernard Stiegler (2009) Hartmut Rosa (2010, 2019), Jonathan Crary (2001, 2013) and Byung-Chul-Han (2015, 2017, 2018) have extensively discussed the problem of speed, acceleration, short-termism and non-stop activity.

More recently, the acceleration of society also has emerged as a topic in art theory. For example, *The Future of the New: Artistic Innovation in Times of Social Acceleration* (2018), a publication edited by Thijs Lijster, discusses the role of art in the contemporary context of acceleration.

In the field contemporary dance theory, recent publications reflect on how choreography can critique, subvert, resist, or even just independently exist in a neoliberal capitalist society that rules modes of working, perceiving and thinking. In this niche, the present thesis joins a debate that involves publications by Claire Bishop (2018), André Lepecki (2016), Bojana Kunst (2015), Bojana Cvejic (2015) and Ana Vujanović (2018, 2019).

### *Methodology*

I combine two methods in this thesis: contextual analysis and dramaturgical research. My contextual analysis studies two choreographic works, *Slow Dance* by Erdman and Dahl, and *The Senders* by Yeini in relation to a societal context of haste. I approach these two case studies by building on the dramaturgical research I effectuated in the framework of my internship.<sup>10</sup> This dramaturgical research has taken the form of conversations with Erdman and Dahl, Yeini, Jeanne Colin, Evelien Cammaert, and Marie Topp; participation to rehearsals and artistic research as dramaturgical advisor of Colin and Cammaert; observation of a video shooting of *Slow Dance*; participation to a discursive event organised at MDT Stockholm in relation to

<sup>8</sup> Read, for example: "Slow art? It will 'blow your mind'" (2019) by Anna Bailey.

<sup>9</sup> For example: *About Time: Speed, Society, People and the Environment* (2005) by Tim Aldrich, *Faster: The Acceleration of Just About Everything* (1999) by James Gleick, and *Empires of Speed: Time and the Acceleration of Politics and Society* (2009) by Robert Hassan.

*Calm* has been chosen Apple BEST OF 2018, Apple's App of the Year 2017, Google Play Editor's Choice 2018, and was named "the world's happiest app" by the Centre for Humane Technology. It proposes guided meditations, relaxation exercises, soundscapes, stretching exercises, masterclasses to cultivate gratitude, enhance performance, and release fear, and stories to calm down before going to sleep. ([www.calm.com](http://www.calm.com))

<sup>10</sup> For more details about my internship, see "Investigating Slowness as a generator of Singularities: Research Report", and my Internship Report.

this same work; and attending the works that have reached their premiere date, namely *Slow Dance*, *The Senders* and RECEPTION by Colin as a member of the audience, multiple times.

Out of the above-mentioned internship collaborations, I have selected *Slow Dance* and *The Senders* as case studies, not only because they are the two only works that had reached their premiere date when I started writing, but also because they strongly differ in format, and apply slowness in remarkably different ways. Besides that, the choice to take as case studies two works I discovered in the course of my internship is also motivated by a desire to write about very recent work by less well-known female artists rather than by established choreographers like Mårten Spånberg or Maria Hassabi – two choreographers who are widely recognized respectively for durational performances, and slowly moving choreographies. And finally, it goes without saying that the time spent with Colin, Cammaert and Topp is subliminally present throughout these pages, for it has nourished many of my reflections and conclusions.

The development of concepts plays a central role in the methodology of this thesis. To clarify my use of concepts, I will build on Liesbeth Groot Nibbelink's introduction to *Nomadic Theatre: Mobilizing Theory and Practice on the European Stage* (2019). To start with, she refers to Mieke Bal (2002) and Maaïke Bleeker (2009) to defend that the field of theatre and performance studies – I consider dance studies, and this thesis, as being part of this same field –, “must seek [their] heuristic and methodological basis in concepts rather than methods” (Groot Nibbelink 15; Bal 5). In the absence of any established methodology that would help me to develop of my argument, I will take a flexible, creative and pragmatic use of concepts as a methodological basis.

To outline a context that is best adapted to the questions of my dramaturgical research, I discuss thoughts by several authors, place their concepts side by side, and gather them into a new framework that highlights a few key aspects of the societal context I propose to call “haste”. In doing so, my methodology resonates with how Groot Nibbelink compares concepts to toolboxes, and, referring to Brian Massumi's introduction to Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* (2014), puts forward that concepts (by these authors) should not “add up to a system of belief or an architecture of propositions that you either enter or you don't, but instead pack a potential in the way a crowbar in a willing hand envelops an energy of prying” (Deleuze and Guattari xv), and “should be evaluated in use: do they work, do they help to solve a problem?” (Groot Nibbelink 20).

Furthermore, in order to be able to account for the phenomena my dramaturgical research brought me to study, I develop a few new concepts, ‘molecular thingness’, ‘deep perception’, ‘aesthetic boredom’ and ‘atmospheres of resonance’, while building on and transforming existing ones. The process of writing has made me aware that the concepts I create “do” something to the phenomena I study, just like the phenomena inform the concept. Groot Nibbelink writes:

“Concepts ‘do’ things because they create focus: they organize phenomena and define the sphere of questions addressed to an object. [...] A concept works as a searchlight; it focuses interest and installs a certain, articulated perspective, without denying that a different perspective would produce a different object. [...] In turn, objects “speak back”: they determine the specific set of questions that will be addressed to them and, occasionally, they answer by resisting interpretation. [...] if a concept inflects the object, and the object in turn co-defines the concept, then what is

“of” the concept, and what is “of” the object, and how do you prevent these movements from getting into a blurry mess?” (Groot Nibbelink 16-17)

Although pragmatically intended to facilitate the study of evasive phenomena, my creative use of concepts has sometimes brought me into this “blurry mess”, where concept and object of study enter confusion, or where the object of study resists the conceptual framework I try to approach it with. At the end of the day, ‘aesthetic boredom’ and ‘atmospheres of resonance’ only prove worthwhile inventions to the extent that they enable me to highlight aspects of *The Senders* and *Slow Dance* that are impossible or difficult to assess without them. Surely, there are many other aspects still left “in the dark”.

Finally, like Groot Nibbelink does with ‘nomadic theatre’, I want to propose ‘slow dance’ as a concept rather than a genre or tendency (15). Instead of making it a fixed category or even a term to name a particular group of choreographic work, my desire is to contribute at making slow dance a workable concept, a tool that makes it easier to study slow choreographic practices.

I will end this introduction with a few notes on the tone of my writing and on my literary sources.

First, although referring to Böhme’s publication helps me to approach the evasive phenomenon of atmosphere as a workable concept, it remains that atmospheres are quasi-phenomena, situated between objective and subjective reality. Therefore, in order to fully account for *The Senders* as a work with a ‘slow atmosphere’, and to elaborate the concepts of ‘aesthetic boredom’ and ‘atmospheres of resonance’ where atmospheres play a big part, I will alternate between a descriptive tone of writing, and a more subjective testimony of my personal experiences as an attender.<sup>11</sup>

It has soon become clear that this research topic exceeds by far the scope of this thesis because of its complexity and tentacular expansion into a wide web of implications that I lack space to highlight. I will therefore make abundant use of footnotes.

In accordance with the non-hierarchical and non-anthropocentric world-view that goes together with the slow discourse that inspires this thesis, it would be coherent to adopt a less affirmative or argumentative tone that would leave more space for not-knowing. Yet, due to a lack of practise, time and affinity with the English language; and because I simply don’t have the habit, I will leave the exploration of this tone to future writing.

To finish, I develop above mentioned concepts, and draw a societal context for my analysis through the study of literature from the fields of philosophy, cultural theory and dance theory. I acquired the publications in print via Book Depository or accessed them as digital online sources via WorldCat.

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<sup>11</sup> I use the term “attender” because some pieces, like *The Senders*, are not predominantly to be visually spectated or heard by an “audience”. Moreover, “attending” has the advantage of giving priority to none of the senses, while also highlighting this aspect of slow performances that they need to be *attended* for some time to being fully experienced.

## Chapter 1: A Society of Haste

This first chapter presents a condensed analysis of the societal context to which the slow dances that will be studied in chapters 3 and 4 react. It approaches today's neoliberal, globalized society from a temporal point of view. I mainly build on publications by Crary, Rosa and Han, and I already put them in connection with analyses by Lepecki and Kunst. I first propose acceleration, 24/7 and the atomization of time as three ways to describe the contemporary time-regime. Then, I advance two possible causes that are also driving-wheels for this time-regime, and two major consequences. These will prove useful to imagine how slow dance can offer an alternative to the problems haste poses.

### 1.1 Time in a Society of Haste

In today's society, one sometimes feels that just about everything is accelerating, as the title of James Gleick's book (1999) suggests. Crary defends that late capitalism has installed a 24/7 temporality, where non-stop activity "for its own sake" has become a new norm. He writes: "To always be doing something, to move to change – this is what enjoys prestige, as against stability, which is often synonymous with inaction" (24/7 15). When Crary defends that this new temporality attempts to eradicate sleep, he is also diagnosing the numbing effect of a lack of sleep in a consumer society that leaves little or no space for that which escapes instrumental control (24/7 24).

In *Alienation and Acceleration: Towards a Critical Theory of Late-Modern Temporality* (2010) Rosa dissects modernity's acceleration in three subsystems that feed into each other and drive themselves (31-33).<sup>12</sup> Firstly, technological acceleration speeds up modes of communication, production and transportation. Secondly, social positions like jobs and family structures change at ever faster rates and produce what Rosa names "acceleration of social change". Thirdly, the pace of life is accelerating as we face an increase in units of actions or experience per unit of time. Contemporary subjects tend to squeeze many activities in one day and even to combine several actions and experiences at the same time: they drive a car while calling a friend, eating a sandwich and listening to the radio. Doubtlessly, this tendency toward hyperactivity and overstimulation has a substantial effect on one's daily life experience and attention spans.

In *The Scent of Time* (2017), Han reacts to Rosa's acceleration theory defending that acceleration is not (or not anymore) the core of today's temporal crisis, but rather one of its effects (19). According to him, because of a lack of direction or anything holding it in something like a "bedding", temporality has broken

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<sup>12</sup> Rosa acknowledges that there are also realms of contemporary life that are not accelerating. For example, natural speed-limits astronomically determine the length/rhythm of days and years, and biologically the duration of pregnancies. Dysfunctional consequences of speeding up also give rise to decelerating events like traffic jams or burn-outs. Moreover, Rosa calls "oases of deceleration", socially or geographically isolated places that are not (yet) affected by modernisation and therefore by social acceleration — for Rosa acceleration and modernity go hand in hand —, like remote islands or Buddhist monasteries where, as we say, time seems to stand still. Sometimes also (pseudo-)oases are commercially created to better serve the general accelerating movement, for example when "stressed-out managers or teachers take some *time out* in monasteries or take part in yoga-courses which promise 'a rest from the race' just for the purpose of allowing a more successful participation in accelerated social systems afterwards" (*Alienation and Acceleration* 36). Still, the general movement of late-modern society is one of acceleration: deceleration is either due to natural restrictions, undesired consequences, functional recharging of batteries, or small and marginalized groups of ideological resistance, like the Amish community or a Monastery.

free into a “fleeting whizz” (Ibidem). Where time used to be seen as the manifestation of God’s will, its centre of gravity moved, since the beginning of modernity, from a *now* inhabited by the eternal truth of God to a *future*, a human project, that gives the project “sense”, this is, at the same time “meaning” and “direction”. This is where acceleration was called to emerge, because any lingering would slow down the progressive process. (*The Scent of Time* 16-17). Today, according to Han, the temporal line has lost the point towards which it was directed. After four decades of postmodernist scepticism towards the idea of progress, and in the light of the current economic, humanitarian and ecological crises, the narrative of a history evolving linearly towards a God-given or human-made better future doesn’t hold anymore.<sup>13</sup> By losing its point of orientation, time has exploded into a multitude of points, fleeting moments of information without meaning or narrative. That’s why for Han time is not just accelerating but has broken free into a whizz of atomized non-time (*The Scent of Time* 1-11).

In what follows, I will continue considering Han’s and Rosa’s frameworks simultaneously because, even if acceleration can be seen as merely one of the effects caused by a recent atomization of time, I would like to see them as complementary. Indeed, I believe they are far from being opposed to each other or mutually exclusive, as Han seems to suggest. Rosa offers a broad framework that accounts for a wide range of interconnected phenomena. Han’s vision of atomised time explains on a slightly deeper level what is going on today regarding time, human existence, and states like boredom and contemplation, but none of these deepening reflections invalidate Rosa’s analysis of what happens at the surface. I integrate Crary’s idea of 24/7-temporality here and there as a complement to Han and Rosa’s frameworks, because it highlights the central role of hyperstimulation and hyperactivity.

In order to continue using different frameworks simultaneously, and following Mieke Bal (2018) who uses the formulation “culture of haste” (85), I use a terminology that neither excludes Rosa’s, nor Crary’s or Han’s thinking: “a society of haste”. Where “acceleration” primarily indicates mechanical action, “haste” has the advantage of highlighting an emotional and physical state, which makes the consequences of slowness on attention and states like boredom more straightforward.

## 1.2 Causes of Haste: Competition and Disenchantment<sup>14</sup>

According to Rosa, acceleration results from the fierce competition that goes together with a capitalist model of society. This competition doesn’t only affect work and finance, but also personal fulfilment (*Alienation and Acceleration* 28). Lepecki cites political theorist Wendy Brown (2015) alongside sociologist and dance scholar Randy Martin (2002), who respectively observe an economization and financialization of life realms and practices that previously weren’t governed by the model of financial investment, and now are (Brown 31, Martin 3). This means that whether they belong to professional, affective or corporeal (and maybe even

<sup>13</sup> In “De Georges Bernanos à Extinction Rebellion: La gauche en quête d’un supplément d’âme.” (2019) Evelyne Pieiller places the postmodern scepticism beautifully in the perspective of today’s social, economic, ecological and even spiritual riddles.

<sup>14</sup> Not all of these authors mention the term “disenchantment”. I decide to use this term to group the varied yet similar observations the four authors formulate regarding how a loss of religious belief makes it difficult to accept death (*Alienation and Acceleration* 29-30; Kunst 133), and how a loss of God-given, eternal truths creates a lack of lasting sense and a difficulty to accept conclusion and transition in all areas of life (*The Scent of Time* 11).

religious or spiritual?) realms of life, actions, gestures, movements, words, and corporeal dispositions of today's subjects are oriented toward the “*acquisition of self*”. Following the model of financial investment, actions are expected to bring profitable returns that will enhance the self's future value (*Singularities* 10). Although Han focusses less on the idea of competition than on self-induced slavery and a harmfully exaggerated glorification of work, these thoughts resonate with how he calls today's society an “achievement-society” where narcissistic “achievement-subjects” are acquiring ever more Self, incapable of relating to the Other (*The Burnout Society* 4, 9).

Because this context doesn't allow the alien, the negative, that which is not ‘me’ and which ‘I’ cannot readily consume – in short: ‘otherness’ – to emerge, Han calls this excessively positive society an “inferno of the same” (*The Agony of Eros* 41). Likewise, Crary sees the excessively self-identical 24/7 world as a disenchanting one, because it presumes to eradicate shadows, obscurity, alternate temporalities, mystery and unknowability (24/7 19).

This disenchantment doesn't only eradicate otherness, it also makes it very difficult to relate to death. According to Han, Rosa and Kunst, the loss of a deity providing the world with lasting values and some sense of eternity – be it as a promise for an afterlife or the presence of eternal, sacred truths – entices a desire to live more, or faster, in a vain attempt to find fulfilment where religion has ceased to give it. Where Rosa and Kunst see acceleration as a desperate attempt to cover up the shortness and finitude of life, Han notices a panicking reaction to a loss of direction, sense, and meaning.<sup>15</sup>

### 1.3 Consequences of Haste: Hyperactive Standstill and Alienation

Although each uses different approaches and concepts, Han, Rosa, Lepecki and Kunst clearly agree on two main problems that I will discuss here. First, despite an atmosphere of constant fluctuation, the current time regime provokes a hyperactive standstill that impedes real change to take place. Second, contemporary subjects are alienated: a tendency to excessive self-centredness and the resulting inability to relate to otherness make it hardly possible to experience connection with self and world.

Does acceleration actually lead anywhere? Rosa often uses the image of the hamster wheel or the term “hyper-accelerated standstill” (*Alienation and Acceleration* 38) to indicate that it doesn't. Virilio has indicated that when the barrier of the speed of light is crossed – like in today's very common cases where optical fibres transmit information in “real time” or “live” – one leaves the realm of relative acceleration that goes together

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<sup>15</sup> Rosa describes modern society as a secular society where a “good life” doesn't correspond anymore to the religious promise of an eternal afterlife. Instead, a modern “good life” is a “fulfilled” life *before* death, a life full of rich experiences and developed capacities. Rosa goes as far as suggesting that acceleration is modernity's way to deal with finitude and death, because increasing the pace of our lives can create the illusion of living more lives in one, in other words, finding eternity *in* life rather than *beyond* it (*Alienation and Acceleration* 29-30). In *Artist at Work*, Kunst cites Odo Marquard (1990) who defends a similar idea. According to him, life is unbearably slow next to death, and acceleration is our response to the ontological shortness of human life in comparison with the world around it (Kunst 133). Han refuses to see today's whizz merely as a desperate answer to the finitude of life and the fear of death. Rather than a however vain strategy to live an eternal life in a world without God, today's speed according to him is simply due to the restlessness and urgency triggered by an incapacity to deal with conclusion in general, and therefore even less with concluding life. The atomisation of time, according to him, goes with an atomisation or individualisation of life (*The Scent of Time* 11). Rather than structured as a meaningful story made out of transforming events, life has become a succession of fleeting points that do not evolve towards a conclusion or completion. There is no ‘right time’ for things anymore in this context. Certainly not for dying.

with mobility and emancipation, and enters *absolute speed*. Absolute speed implies as its “Other” the potential for absolute stasis, that could be compared to a certain incarceration: one becomes isolated because “it is no longer necessary to go towards the world, to journey, to stand up, to depart, to go to things”, since “everything is already there” (Armitage 31). Virilio (1999 [1990]) has called this phenomenon ‘polar inertia’. Following this line of reasoning, as well as the postmodern idea of the end of history, Rosa believes that there are no new energies available and there is no real change possible in late-modern society of acceleration: one needs to keep running not in order to achieve the Golden Age promised by modernity, to obtain a higher social position or manifest something new, but simply to keep what we have and not to get behind (*Alienation and Acceleration* 28, 30, 77-82). Although the dazzling speed of events gives the impression of a radically open future and a high potential for transformation, it only badly covers up a deep-rooted structural and cultural inertia in which any hopes for real change seem “utterly futile” (*Alienation and Acceleration* 38-39). Because the term of “haste” plays a bigger role in this thesis than “acceleration”, I will go on using the term “hyperactive standstill” instead of Rosa’s “hyper-accelerated standstill” to refer to this first consequence.

This hyperactive standstill might be due to the absorption of any real difference or change by an overly flexible and “open” neoliberal system.<sup>16</sup> To Kunst, all differences, all side-movements, seem to be absorbed by the all-encompassing protocols of capitalism and acceleration (116). According to her, this inertia also translates in a literal fatigue on the level of the subject: profusion of investments and consumption don’t only have “harmful consequences on our habitat (natural or social), but also underlies the experience of subjectivity as redundancy, dissatisfaction, insufficient gains, a phantasmagorical waste of energy and resources that brings exhaustion instead of affirmation of subjectivity” (Kunst 124). For similar reasons, Han calls today’s society a “burnout society” (2015), and describes it as an achievement society where the glorification of work, frantic productivity and overstimulation lead to an ‘inferno of the same’ where narcissism, depression and burnout flourish because it doesn’t allow for sufficient otherness (*The Agony of Eros* 1-3, 41).

Resonating with the above-mentioned idea that absolute speed leads to an isolation or imprisonment where the world is reduced to nothing, Crary observes that in a 24/7 culture that creates the illusion that anything can be done at any time, patience, and especially the patience to listen to the other atrophies. This has drastic consequences not only on politics (for democracy requires to listen, and wait for one’s turn to speak), but also on anything related to reciprocity, sharing, cooperation and even care for others (24/7 124-125). In line with the Critical Theory tradition of the Frankfurter Schule, Rosa calls this isolation, self-centredness and lack of reciprocal relation with the other “alienation”.<sup>17</sup> It is the main critique he addresses to social acceleration. Contemporary subjects are alienated in the sense that they lack a meaningful relation or connection to time, space, others, the world of things and even themselves, which, in Rosa’s terms, prevents them from living a “good life” (*Alienation and Acceleration* 83-97, 101).

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<sup>16</sup> Kunst takes as an example *Mass Ornament* (2006), a video installation by Nathalie Bookchin made out of a collection of hundreds of people dancing in idiosyncratic yet similar ways, alone, each in their living room. This video installation exemplifies the “difference of radical sameness” that characterises contemporary subjects (112).

<sup>17</sup> ‘Alienation’ is a difficult concept to use because it has no fixed definition and always implies a third element: one is alienated *from something* (Lijster 24). Essentialist uses of alienation describe an alienation from some ‘true’ human essence, ‘authentic’ nature or unalienable inner being. These conceptions don’t only tend to arbitrariness, — for whom is to determine what is authentic and what is not? — they also easily become oppressive, and can lead to totalitarian forms of philosophy, behaviour or politics (Lijster 25). What Rosa proposes is a relational alienation. (*Alienation and Acceleration* 84).

## Conclusion

We can take with us in our further investigations that the causes of today's haste – competition and disenchantment – are very much related to the central role given to the individual person. Indeed, where competition serves the acquisition of ever more self-fulfilment, disenchantment goes with a refusal or incapacity to relate to otherness, and the difficulty with relating to death arguably owes its significance to the importance given to individual life and personhood. I will substantivize Lepecki's neologism "Self(ie)-centred" into "Self(ie)-centeredness" to refer to this problematic focus on the individual person or subject.<sup>18</sup>

The speed that results at least partly from capitalist competition doesn't only have destructive environmental consequences, it also causes narcissism, fatigue, depression, burn-out and alienation on the level of individual subjects. In a climate of haste, differences and side-movements easily disappear in a seemingly flexible and therefore all-absorbing conditioning, where little place is left for otherness. Therefore, alienation and inertia go hand in hand, because the machine that creates and maintains a climate of haste is too invisible to be made accountable. In a general situation of hyperactive standstill, there is so little space for structural, real change to happen, that the time-regime appears like a necessary, unavoidable and unquestionable given.

Against this backdrop, we can conclude that the main problems a society of haste poses, are three interconnected phenomena: Self(ie)-centeredness, hyperactive standstill and alienation.

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<sup>18</sup> I will continue using both "person" and "subject", for the authors I read sometimes focus on either one or the other, or, like Lepecki, use both. For me, the 'subject' refers more to a psychological entity, and 'person' to a physical one.

## Chapter 2: Choreography in Times of Haste

According to Cvejic, the mere term “contemporary dance” already indicates the influence capitalism. For her, it is a falsely neutral term to distinguish present-day dance production from Western-European historical forms like classical ballet or modern dance, but also from non-Western dances, and from non-artistic forms of dance like therapeutic movement, social dance or entertainment. She defends that this term should be distrusted and criticised for its obsession with novelty and contemporaneity or presentism that is symptomatic of the capitalist logic of permanent exhaustion and renewal, and implicitly judges the non-“contemporary” as being out-dated, old-fashioned or passé (Cvejic 5).

This note being made, I will go on by placing next to each other Cvejic’s, Lepecki’s, Vujanović’s and Kunst’s views on the question: “What directions can, and does, choreography take in today’s context of haste?”

### 2.1 No In- and Outside (or How to Avoid Being Absorbed)

Lepecki starts *Singularities* by illustrating a tendency in contemporary performances to let go of the idea that there would be something like an “inside” of the theatre that is autonomous from what happens “outside”. Of course modern and postmodern dance pieces have addressed political contexts with their content, but now, “what is emphasized is not content but how dancers and audiences all produce, and are produced by, a shared bio- and necropolitical ‘nervous system’ that assaults the putative autonomy of choreographic representation at the moment of its performance and informs the very physical and affective conditions of contemporary spectatorship and performing” (*Singularities* 2).<sup>19</sup>

The annihilation of this divide doesn’t have only to do with an aesthetic shift from a focus on content to a focus on the event as a collective experience that is inseparable from the lives of everyone who is present. According to Kunst, where in the previous century dance has been the form of expression for the freedom, creativity and singular subjectivity that only could exist outside the realm of work (108), today dance *is* work (118), and movement as well as creativity and flexibility have been *absorbed* by logics of capitalist production (113). Therefore, she asks what dance could be, now and in the future, unless a powerless expression absorbed by the swirl of accelerated production and consumption, if dance is work, and is part of the economy rather than autonomous in relation to it (Kunst 110, 118).

Perhaps driven by the same political concern, Cvejic indicates that one of the characteristics that differentiates recent choreographic work from the avant-garde of the sixties, is its political ambition to “critically and experimentally [examine] the ideological effects exerted by the socioeconomic consensus of contemporary capitalism on the theatrical apparatus of representation” (Cvejic 10).

Lepecki, Cvejic and Kunst stress the political urgency for contemporary choreography to address its societal context and observe the challenge of not letting oneself being absorbed by today’s neoliberal, capitalist

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<sup>19</sup> Lepecki begins *Singularities* by sharing a text Mette Ingvarsen gave to the audience on her premiere of *7 pleasures* (2015) at Centre Georges Pompidou, five days after the coordinated terrorist attacks in Paris, in November 2015: “Tonight we will move and dance with all the thoughts and feelings that we have passed through in the previous days and we would like to invite you to do the same” (*Singularities* 1).

conditioning.<sup>20</sup> By studying slow dance not independently but precisely in the context of today's society of haste, this thesis subscribes to this call.

## 2.2 Moving Away from Dance as Free Self(ie)-Expression

For Kunst, the fact that, until the seventies, work and leisure were radically separated explains why modern dance developed as a dance of non-work, externalising all that which wasn't allowed to be present in working contexts. For example, dance pioneers of the beginning of the 20th century like Isadora Duncan, explored the 'natural', singular body and the dynamics from inside to outside, as opposed to the instrumentalised working body. Kunst links this "naturalisation of movement" to Fordism and the discovery of the individual subject (Kunst 108). Similarly, Cvejic identifies in the first dance trend of the 20<sup>th</sup> century a *subjectivation of the dancer* through (emotive) self-expression: the body is seen as a place of "noncompromisable subjectivity" that "cannot lie" (as Martha Graham's famous dictum goes) and expresses a dancer's experience, truth and nature through dance (Cvejic 19).

Now, the doors separating work and leisure have disappeared, and that which was excluded from the working sphere has come to take place at the core of contemporary work: free-will (motivation and own initiative), flexibility, creativity, imagination, autonomy, spontaneity. In this context, movement has become primarily a way to keep up with an accelerated flux of production and consumption, and freedom takes the form of voluntary temporal enslavement. For Kunst, dance therefore cannot anymore be seen as the expression of free and idiosyncratic subjectivity (Kunst 113-114).

Besides, for Lepecki, in today's extremely Self(ie)-centred environment (*cfr.* 1.2 Causes of Haste), dance needs to be careful with the historical association between the presence of a dancer and the presentation of his or her charismatic personality.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, he advocates for experimenting with planes of existence beyond the boundaries of contemporary personhood, arguing that "the person is not to be conceived of as the only form within which life is destined to flow" (*Singularities* 11).

## 2.3 Abandoning the Body-Movement Bind

According to Cvejic, throughout the shifting trends of the past century, dance has always maintained a bind between body and movement. This bind breaks in recent choreographic work since approximately the turn of the century. Cvejic cites Lepecki (2006) who observed that European choreographers like Juan Dominguez, Vera Mantero, Jeôme Bel, Xavier le Roy and Boris Charmatz "betray[ed] the modernist conception of dance as 'an uninterrupted flow of movement' by inserting long lapses of stillness or slowing movement down, thus undermining the 'kinetic spectacle of the body'" (Cvejic 20, *Exhausting Dance* 1-18). In the last few decades

<sup>20</sup> Lepecki explicitly address artists and art critics alike: "In conditioning both art and the theories that address art, the conditions that make neoliberal capitalism's irrationality rule, that make it present itself and perform as reasonably rational, as reasonably acceptable, as reasonably desirable project for subjectivity, indeed as the only *possible* and reason- able option for life—those conditions of neoliberal performance must be addressed" (*Singularities* 3).

<sup>21</sup> Lepecki writes: "Choreography has historically and foundationally made dance alloy personhood and the body into an unbreakable epideictic unit, whose only purpose is the self-praise of the dancer's personhood" (*Singularities* 84), and, citing Mark Franko, "The dancer's own person is the ultimate and single object of praise and dispraise in the dance" (*Singularities* 36-37; Franko 22).

something seems to have drawn choreographers to create dances that don't move, move very little or very slowly, thus bringing dance away from what one might think most essentially defines it: a flow of movement.

## 2.4 Duration

Kunst defends that, rather than seeing dance as related to freedom, as it was in the avant-garde of the past century (*cf.* 2.2), choreography now needs to approach movement in relation to how bodies (try to) move with the world, pressured by acceleration (113). Duration,<sup>22</sup> according to her, can be a powerful key to do so, for it has the potential to uncover and put pressure on “the seemingly smooth protocols of the contemporary capitalistic world” (Kunst 117). Kunst associates speed in contemporary society to one's subjectivation process, defending that “all the dispositives we use to establish ourselves as subjects today promise speed and effectiveness” (122). Through working with duration, choreography can cause one to feel dispossessed of one's own ‘self’, because, by confronting one with “non-functioning and non-operativity” (130), it reveals that one is not moved by an inner sense of time – this is “the basic illusion of the contemporary subject” (116) –, but by a time that is socially constructed and economically conditioned. That's how for Kunst duration has a strong subversive power.

Han also attributes an important role to duration to counter the conditioning of a capitalist logic of work and effectiveness. His approach complements Kunst's with a slightly more philosophical and less political intake. According to him, today's atomized, discontinuous time doesn't need to be empty: it can have a scent of its own. Yet to have its own scent, it lacks *duration* – or, more poetically: a breath. For Han, duration is what lasts long and is slow (*The Scent of Time* 82). It can give a sense of connection that would bind the multitude of dispersed and fleeting events together, and can be reintegrated through an attitude of lingering that characterizes *vita contemplativa*: “a state that eludes all human intervention”, is characterized by a basic mood of “marvelling at the way things are” (*The Burnout Society* 14), exists outside the productivity-logic that characterizes work, and instead goes with hesitating, pausing and a sense of leisure that allows things to simply be without serving any goal (*The Scent of Time* 107-114). This lingering attitude is something I will come back to more extensively in Chapter 5 and 6.

## 2.6 Singularity

Where Kunst puts forward the power of duration, Lepecki sees in affirming ‘singularity’ a way to subvert and resist today's neoliberal, capitalist “Self(ie) culture” (*Singularities* 10). According to him, we are no mere defenceless victims of irrational capitalist conditioning: we “find vacuoles and gaps, we cut grooves where we run, dance, write, study, make love, live, and permeate back to infiltrate and undo the conditioning” (*Ibidem* 3). Contrary to Kunst who argues that freedom from strict structures is not anymore at stake in contemporary choreography and advocates, with duration, for finding real rather than spectral *change*, Lepecki keeps with the notion of *freedom*. He advocates for “more potent motions and notions of freedom” rather than “little

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<sup>22</sup> Kunst doesn't specify what she precisely understands by duration and slowness. My guess is that for her, duration is what lasts long and produces experiences of slowness (130, 133).

freedoms” and “pre-given choices”, asking: how can choreography propose something else? Something unanticipated?” (Ibidem 13-14). The concept of ‘singularity’ is key in the formulation of his answer.

Lepecki develops an understanding of singularities in the footsteps of Gilles Deleuze and Georges Simondon as *events* that (1) are transindividual in the sense that they have an intrinsic collective nature and a “proximity to the mode of existence of things” rather than to that of objects and subjects, the individual or the person (Ibidem 6); (2) are “whatever escapes instrumental reason, whatever exists outside logics of manipulation, whatever is unconditioned, whatever actively wants to run away, escape, from being reduced to graspability and comprehension” (Ibidem 29); and (3) where tracks of virtual potentiality have become actual and thus where change has happened, like in what Deleuze calls *sensitive points* – points in mathematics where real change can happen, for example, the point of 90° C where water starts to boil and 0° C where it freezes. The notion of ‘singularity’ will be implicitly present throughout the two next chapters.<sup>23</sup> Especially the proximity of singularities to “the mode of existence of things” that has a transindividual character and escapes full grasp, instrumentalization and comprehension, will be of importance in the development of my argument.

Lepecki uses the term “thingness” in reference to Heidegger, who by this term indicates objects before or beyond their instrumental value or “toolness” (*Singularities* 36, 39-45, 140; Perniola 109), but with it, he also seems to indicate what Deleuze describes as a “molecular” plane that precedes any kind of individuation, and is situated below, because it is primordial to, a “molar” plane where things are organized, modelled, individuated. Cvejic uses this distinction to discuss Eszter Salamon’s *Nvsbl* (2006), and describes molecularization as “Deleuze and Guattari’s revolution that extends becomings to animals, plants, and minerals, different from ‘molar subjects, objects, or forms that we know from the outside and recognize from experience, through science, or by habit’”(Cvejic 211; *A Thousand Plateaus* 275). Deleuze specifies the distinction in *Dialogues* (1988):

“[the molar plane] is not given for itself, but must always be concluded, inferred, induced on the basis of what it organizes. [...] It is therefore a plane of transcendence, a kind of design, in the mind of a man or in the mind of a god, even when it is accorded a maximum of immanence by plunging it into the depths of Nature, or of the Unconscious. One such plane is that of Law, in so far as it organizes and develops forms, genres, themes, motifs, and assigns and causes the evolution of subjects, persons, characteristic features and feelings. [...] [The molecular plane] knows only relations of movement and rest, of speed and slowness, between unformed, or relatively unformed, elements, molecules, or particles borne away by fluxes. It knows nothing of subjects but rather what are called ‘hecceities’. In fact no individuation takes place in the manner of a subject or even a thing.” (*Dialogues* 91-92, my emphasis)

Although Deleuze’s two planes cannot be reduced to a simple opposition between objects and subjects on the one hand, and things on the other, this molecular realm has much in common with Lepecki’s ‘singularities’ and the characteristics he attributes to ‘thingness’. This is barely surprising since Lepecki builds his concept of ‘singularities’ on Deleuzian thought and since, for Deleuze, the molecular is a realm where fluxes potentially intersect in sensitive points to generate events, like Lepecki’s singularities. It is a primordial level, a ground that precedes and is constitutive of subjects and objects.

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<sup>23</sup> “Singularities are turning points and points of inflection; bottlenecks, knots, foyers, and centers; points of fusion, condensation, and boiling; points of tears and joy, sickness and health, hope and anxiety, ‘sensitive’ points” (*Singularities* 7; *The Logic of Sense* 52).

Although it could be considered tautological, since Lepecki's 'thingness' could be assimilated to the 'molecular' I will use 'molecular thingness' to indicate a realm that escapes full appropriation by the instrumental rationality that characterises a culture of haste. This will allow me to stress its pre-individual character, acquire independence from Deleuzian thought, while at the same time subscribing to Lepecki's Heideggerian understanding of 'thingness'.

If we think back at Byung-Chul Han's insistence that today's society lives with an anguishing lack of otherness, it might help to understand this 'molecular thingness' as something not readily consumable, or not yet appropriated and therefore not readily assimilable in a narcissistic culture; something that is an instance of what Han calls *the other*.

## 2.6 Landscape Dramaturgies

Vujanović coins "landscape dramaturgies" as a tendency in the contemporary European dance and performance scene that emerges in today's "fast-changing, turbulent and supersaturated social environment" ("Meandering Together" 1).

As usually "long, slow and spatially stretched performances" ("Space after perspective" 2), landscape dramaturgies share with Kunst's duration that they easily create experiences of slowness. By describing this kind of performance as "a semantically under-determined landscape of various *things* in which the only way to situate ourselves is to enter as one" ("Space after perspective" 8, my emphasis), Vujanović identifies with this concept both a movement towards 'thingness', similar to what Lepecki does with singularities, and a questioning of how to collectively inhabit spaces where the single-point perspective, traditionally associated to the presupposed author-creator who (implicitly) indicates where to look and what to see, is missing.<sup>24</sup> As such, they show a certain distrust towards the hierarchical and anthropocentric worldview that since modernity was coupled to this perspective.

Vujanović's landscape dramaturgies seem to combine many of the above-mentioned directions choreography is taking in the face of haste: they are inseparable from their societal and political context, and move away from personal self-expression as well as Cvejić's body-movement bind by cultivating a sense of duration, slowness, spaciousness and thingness.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have first highlighted three movements "away", and then three movements "towards" as a set of directions contemporary choreography is taking in the current climate of haste. The triple movement "away", leads to an understanding of contemporary choreography as radically unseparated from its societal context, where that which is choreographed can be something else than dance in the sense of a flow of movement, and were it should be explored as something else than the free expression of the dancer's

<sup>24</sup> Like Lepecki, Vujanović sees objects as being "already-yet modelled by human mind (language, history, standards etc.) and thus necessarily objects of knowledge", as opposed to 'things': "material, physical entities" that "exist on their own, (still) unknown to and unnamed by anyone" ("Meandering Together" 1). Her idea that one needs to enter a landscape of things *as* a thing, echoes Lepecki's observation that in some experimental contemporary performances, performers present themselves on stage between objects as "a thing among (other) things" (*Singularities* 41,46).

experience or personality. As we will see in Chapter 3 and 4, moving away from the dance as a flow of movement executed by a body can result in slowness, but also in forms where movement manifests otherwise than through a moving body.

As for the two first movements “towards”, Lepecki’s advocacy for more potent movements of freedom through events of singularity at first sight seems in contradiction with Kunst’s idea that dance cannot anymore be the expression of freedom. But both visions are actually close to each other, since the concepts of singularity and duration equally move away from the association between freedom and individuality or personhood. What is more, with their ungraspability (singularity) and radical inefficiency (duration), both are devised to escape and resist the logic of efficiency, profit and investment that characterises today’s neoliberal society of haste.

Following Lepecki, who in *Singularities* proposes the events of thingness, darkness, animality, persistence, and solidity as five particular singularities of contemporary choreographic works, I will build on the potential Kunst sees in the use of duration (which creates experiences of slowness) to propose slowness as another event of singularity on the list. In Chapter 3, I will look at *Slow Dance* as a singular event of molecular thingness and slowness, where slowness can be seen as a potentially transformative tool: a sensitive point from where ‘molecular thingness’ becomes experienceable. In Chapter 4, I will describe how, similarly, a slow atmosphere in *The Senders* allows the ‘deep perception’ of molecular thingness. Chapter 5 will propose ‘aesthetic boredom’ as a specific type of aesthetic experience that can take place when attending slow dances and favours the deep perception of molecular thingness.

Finally, Chapter 6 will build on Vujanović’s landscape dramaturgies to propose ‘atmospheres of resonance’ and investigate how slow dance can open to other ways of being-with in a seemingly unquestionable and structurally inert climate of haste.

## Chapter 3: *S l o w D a n c e*'s Slow Pace as a Vehicle of Molecular Thingness

“What disappears isn't the body, but its function of being the conduit of a subject.” (Cvejic 218)

### 3.1 Choreographic Slowness

In dance pieces or other live performances, slowness is most obviously recognizable when performers move at a slow pace, like they do in *S l o w D a n c e*.<sup>25</sup> Yet other compositional choices like the use of long durations, stillness (in combination with micro-movement, or not), repetition of the same material with (little) variation, or slow dramaturgical progressions also can bring about a sense of slowness.<sup>26</sup>

However, because there are pieces like *The Senders* that I would call slow but that don't work with any of the above slowness-inducing compositional choices, it remains a question if these really hit the core of what I propose with slowness. Moreover, whereas elements of pace, duration, and composition partially explain why attention is troubled when attending slow performances, they neither sufficiently nor necessarily account for the cognitive and affective state I found myself in during some of them. In the next chapter, I will therefore call upon the idea of *atmospheres* to approach slowness in *The Senders* beyond easily identifiable compositional choices.

Yet before delving into atmospheres, I will start by investigating what slowness does in a performance where the slow quality is obvious and explicit: I will take a close look at how a slow pace of movement in *S l o w D a n c e* invites one into a realm where dancers as persons and dance as a flow or sequence of movements retreat, and where instead a molecular plane that I call 'molecular thingness' becomes experienceable.

### 3.2 *S l o w D a n c e*'s Slow Pace as a Vehicle to Thingness

*S l o w D a n c e* has been presented as a site-specific duet in the church of the Swedish town Knislinge in May 2019, as a black box group-piece for four dancers at MDT Stockholm in September 2019, and as a duet at Counterpulse, San Francisco, in December 2019. The black box group-piece is frontal, lasts approximately an hour, and soberly alternates duets, trios and solos of slowly executed dance. Light and costume design are

<sup>25</sup> For example, *Staged!* (2017) as well as most other works by Maria Hassabi, *Slugs Garden/Cultivo de Babosas* (2017) by Fabian Barba and Esteban Donoso, *Crowd* (2019) by Gisèle Vienne, *Pandora's Dropbox* (2017) by Katja Heitman, and *Monument 0.8: Manifestations* (2019) by Eszter Salamon enfold, from beginning to end, with dancers moving at very slow paces.

<sup>26</sup> A few often-cited examples of performances with long durations are Mårten Spånberg's *La Substance, but in English* (2014), *The Internet* (2015) and *Natten* (2016), but I also think of his *Gerard Richter, une pièce pour le théâtre* (2017), *Symphonia Harmoniæ Cælestium Revelationum* (2019) by François Chaignaud and Marie-Pierre Brébant, or *Mount Olympus* (2015) by Jan Fabre. I could also include *Work/Travail/Arbeit* by Anne-Theresa de Keersmaecker (2015) or *This Variation* (2012) by Tino Seghal, but as these take place in a museum, the contract of attention-spending is different. Although, as Ana Vujanović indicates, the appearance of many slow dramaturgies (she calls them “landscape dramaturgies”) in theatre spaces could be seen as an echo of the recent trend to programme dance in museums (“A Space After Perspective” 2), I choose to focus here on choreography and performance in spaces that, even when they don't take place in the traditional black box, invite audiences to attend from beginning to end. Examples of performances that work with stillness (and micro-movement) are: *Headroom* (2018) by Boogaardt/VanderSchoot & Erik Whien and *Slugs Garden Cultivo de Babosas. Headroom, Gerard Richter, une pièce pour le* and *Pandora's Dropbox* are structured by repetition and variation of the same material; and *Dança Doente* (2017) and *A Invenção da Maldade* (2019) by Marcelo Evelin as well as *Headroom* use slow dramaturgical progressions.

happy coloured with pink, purple, yellow, blue and – for the costumes – some olive green, black and white. The scenography is simple without being minimalistic: a painting in the same colours by ALICE FINE and Marika Troili, inspired by artist and spiritual teacher Teal Swan's frequency paintings, and printed on a white dance floor.<sup>27</sup>

Two dancers come up and start dancing slowly with their back towards the audience. The only noise one hears is the cracking of the floor of MDT under their footsteps, some coughing and some shuffling around of audience members. The dance starts in *unisono*, crosses the middle part of the stage in a zigzag from front to back, and then the dancers separate. A third dancer comes in progressively from one side while, almost unnoticeably, another one is starting to exit. Like this, the four dancers alternate between solos, duos and trio's that draw unpredictable itineraries across the space and effectuate a walking choreography where arms and heads keep going in directions one cannot foresee. Only for two short moments, one more or less in the middle of the performance and one by the end, a slow, simple, three-chord song with a warm and almost sad male voice is played.<sup>28</sup>

Slowness in this piece translates most noticeably in a very slow pace of moving. From beginning to end, the dancers move so slowly that the choreography becomes almost unrecognisable as a sequence of movements in space.<sup>29</sup> I am only able to recount movement itineraries in the description above, because during a video shooting, I got the chance to see parts of the piece being "sketched" or "marked" and thus speeded up. The same movements I had already seen performed twice, very slowly, then suddenly appeared to me as one: one flow of movement, one dance and one choreography, I realized that the choreography of *Slow Dance* is slowed down to a 'sensitive point'<sup>30</sup>(*cf.* 2.5) where the sequentiality of movement unfolding becomes blurred.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, one loses the sense of where in space and time a movement came from, and where it is going towards because its slow pace exceeds the scale of measurements one commonly uses to situate perceptions.

The effect of *Slow Dance*'s slow pace on how the movements are perceived resembles what Cvejic writes about Eszter Salamon's *Nvsbl* (2006) and echoes the relatively recent tendency she identifies in European choreography to abandon the idea of dance as a flow of movement (*cf.* 2.3):

"*Nvsbl* breaks with the sensorimotor habit by installing a radically slow pace of movement. Movement is no longer part of an action directed and extended in space: it doesn't primarily serve to displace the bodies or to shape a pattern

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<sup>27</sup> The idea behind Teal Swan's paintings is that an image omits a certain frequency and by looking at it you can receive a transmission of its frequency. ([www.tealswan.com](http://www.tealswan.com))

<sup>28</sup> "Comparison" by Uther Moads.

<sup>29</sup> At least, it is choreography understood in this sense that Mette Edvardsen, in *No Title* (2014), makes disappear by saying "B—gone, A—gone, going from B to A is gone C ... gone ..." (*Singularities* 61).

<sup>30</sup> In accordance with Deleuze and Lepecki, I use the term "sensitive point" as a point where an event causes change (on a molar plane). Here, I propose that the pace of moving reaches a point in relation to the time one needs in order to situate perceptions of movement, where a shift happens from movement being discernible as a flow or sequence to movement becoming indiscernible as this flow (*Singularities* 7; *The Logic of Sense* 52).

<sup>31</sup> With Noë, I see choreography as the practice that re-organizes the organized practice of dancing, and "puts the fact that we are organized on display" (*Strange Tools* 13, 11-18). In this case, it means I was able to identify that which the dancers were doing as dancing, and also could "see" the choreographic practice that had composed it.

(form), nor does it allow the bodies to manipulate objects. It is far removed from the experience of everyday action, not only dispensing with utility or efficiency, but being hardly discernible.” (Cvejic 208)

Although the pace of movement in *Slow Dance* doesn't go to the point of becoming “hardly discernible”, like in *Nvsbl*, the slow pace of both pieces causes dance to no longer take place as a sequence or flow of movements. As every point in the choreography is stretched out right enough to make one lose track of its relation to what came before and what will follow, movement is disidentified<sup>32</sup> from its common understanding as displacement from A to B in space and time. Isolated from its causes and purposes in choreographic pasts and futures, it rather takes place at a level below action, utility, efficiency or (however abstract) causal unfolding.<sup>33</sup>

Moreover, although Lepecki indicates recent tendencies to abandon this, it remains a common spectatorial attitude to admire dancers on stage as very skilled or beautiful *persons* (*cf.* 2.2). In accordance with his advocacy to “[experiment] with planes of existence beyond the boundaries of contemporary personhood” (81), *Slow Dance* has been created by Erdman and Dahl especially searching for ways to “strip away the personalities of the dancers”.<sup>34</sup> Choreographic choices like spreading out far in space, rarely coming close to the audience and almost never showing the faces of the dancers frontally bear witness of this intention. Yet it is primarily because of the slow pace of moving that a sensitive point is reached where not only movement as a sequence of actions or displacements disappears, but where also the dancer as the (admirable) *person* who *does* the actions retreats to the background. Rather, I see stretched out moments of bodies in movement simply *being* there.<sup>35</sup>

Both shifts work like a zoom that brings attention away from the modelled realm that, with Deleuze, Cvejic calls “molar” (*cf.* 2.5) – here: the dancers as persons or subjects, and movements as objects that serve the utility of creating this or that form, this or that pattern –, and instead draws it closer to what I call “molecular thingness” (*cf.* Ibidem) – here: the infinitely complex and particular materiality of bodies, light and clothes in space. In other words, bodies and other elements of *Slow Dance* appear to me not as this or that person, and not as generally recognizable objects – not as Hana and Louise, a t-shirt and a pair of shoes – but as irreducible, unidentifiable because infinitely detailed, molecular things that cannot even be named because they precede individuation. For example, one can see the dancer's weight shifting slowly from one hip to another, and how this makes her sitting bones move in this very specific way; is granted the time to note how

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<sup>32</sup> Like the singularities Lepecki discusses in his book, this singular event of slowness and ‘molecular thingness’ disidentifies dance. Lepecki writes in his introduction: “By moving away from aesthetic-semiotic policed consensuality, by affirming the singularities they make, the works discussed in the following six chapters *disidentify* dance, make dance unrecognizable in relation to its expected formations, and therefore make dance truly foreign to itself.” (*Singularities* 6, my emphasis)

<sup>33</sup> Where, for Cvejic, choreographic, real life and imagined pasts load the movement qualities in *Nvsbl*, I have the feeling that the slow pace of *Slow Dance* rather blurs choreographic pasts and futures by zooming in on an extended present. A present that lasts a bit longer than usual. Recent choreographic pasts linger a little, as long as they stay present in the experience of attender and dancer, but the organicity and unpredictability of the choreography – contrasting with *Nvsbl*'s steady progression from the sides to the centre and back of the stage – blur the temporal and choreographic line.

<sup>34</sup> This is the expression Erdman and Dahl used during our first Skype meeting about *Slow Dance*, in February 2019.

<sup>35</sup> When at the gathering Opening Time organized at MDT on the 7<sup>th</sup> of September 2019 by Erdman and Dahl, I shared this impression I had as a spectator, I was excited to hear Erdman – almost ashamed – answer that, while performing the duet version of *Slow Dance* in a church, she was struck by the strange impression of feeling more like an *artwork* than a dancer during the performance.

carefully chosen lights reflect on the fabric of a blouse that, right now, shows interesting shades and folds because of the tiny movements of the dancer; sense the tension in space that is created by two bodies coming closer to one another; observe a body with its very proportions, micromovements and texture of skin; or let one's eyes rest on the artwork that has been printed on the dancefloor.

By stripping away movement as action and the persons as authors of these actions in the favour of an infinitely rich molecular reality, the slow pace of this performance brings attention to an ontological level below instrumental relations of (dancers as) subjects and (movements as) objects serving a choreography. Due to the slow pace of moving, one's attention is less attracted to persons effectuating movements that one could de-code, understand or even simply assimilate to their organized reality, than to a molecular materiality that escape one's full grasp and *is simply there*. Referring, like Cvejic above, to *Nvsbl*, Kunst cites Cristina Demaria to indicate how this causes spectators to feel dispossessed from their perception and even their subjectivity:

“with their bodies, and with a miraculous play of lights, [the four dancers] are not so much composing figures as being figures [...] figures that become channels of a ‘logic of sensation’ (Deleuze), at times also laboriously alienating for a public accustomed to seeing and therefore judging what it manages to interpret (‘But nothing’s happening here, said a woman in front of me, fidgeting nervously in her seat’) [...] [The reduction of movement] *deprives us of control over our own perception and consequently of presumed control over bodies which our vision believed it could frame and interpret with its own memory models*” (Kunst 125, my emphasis)

Kunst's observation is actually barely surprising in the light of what I propose above. Indeed, if the plane of molecular thingness that becomes perceivable in *Slow Dance* is a plane that precedes *all* individuation, then in this plane, arguably, not only performers and movement appear as disidentified from the molar entities one usually knows them as, but also the spectator herself. This echoes the idea by Vujanović that, in a “a semantically underdetermined landscape of various things [...] the only way to situate ourselves is *to enter as one*” (“Space after Perspective” 8, my emphasis).

## Conclusion

In *Slow Dance*, slowness translates in a slow pace of movement that actualizes two trends that Lepecki and Kunst propose for contemporary dance in a society of haste: duration and singularity. The slow pace of movement creates a sense of duration that, by bringing attention to a molecular realm of existence below the personhood of dancers and spectators alike, below movement as action and below graspability, allows to question not only the time-regime that reigns in contemporary society, but also the work-logic, instrumental rationality and craving for personal self-fulfilment that go with it.

Inspired by Lepecki, I propose to see *Slow Dance* as a singular event of slowness and ‘molecular thingness’. It is as if slowness had one zoom in to a sensitive point where rougher, human-modelled realities necessarily blur – maybe because they exist at another pace? –, and where one's attention is drawn to an infinitesimal realm that precedes the frames and memory models that make the world graspable.



*Slow Dance* at MDT Stockholm, September 2019, stills from Marta Popivoda's film.

## Chapter 4: *The Senders'* Slow Atmosphere as a Vehicle of Deep Perception

“To see we must forget the name of the thing we are looking at” (Claude Monet)

Now that we have seen what a slow pace does in *Slow Dance*, I would like to discuss a performative installation where slowness doesn't translate into any easily pinpointable compositional characteristic.<sup>36</sup> Yeini's sensorial choreography of sound, smell, taste, visuals and touch, *The Senders*, doesn't work with slow paces, doesn't follow a slow build-up, and doesn't last very long. Still, the piece generates a sense of slowing down: it invites to sit back (or better: lay back), relax and sense. To get a grasp on this piece's invisible slowness, I propose to think of it as an atmosphere.

After a short presentation of the concept of atmosphere, I will have a look at how this translates in *The Senders* and propose it as a vehicle for what I will call 'deep perception' in allusion to Pauline Oliveros' (2005) 'deep listening'.

### 4.1 Atmosphere

Gernot Böhme (2013) makes of the elusive term “atmosphere” an actually workable concept by taking the discipline of stage set as paradigm to study the possibility of *making* atmospheres with objective reality. Originally a meteorological term referring to the envelope of air around the planet that carries the weather, the word “atmosphere” indicates a “mood” that is “in the air” (Böhme 1). According to Böhme, atmospheres have a vague ontological status, somewhere between objective and subjective reality (3).

On the one hand, we can approach atmospheres as vague and numinous yet characteristic subjective realities that affect the emotional – and I would add: cognitive and physical – states of subjects through sensorial perception.<sup>37</sup> They are that “something more”, or “*je ne sais quoi*” that is “experienced as something numinous – and therefore irrational” (Ibidem). They are vague, intangible, and not fully graspable or expressible because they are no objective matter, but rather “totalities” that “imbue everything”, “bathe everything in a certain light” and “unify a diversity of impressions in a single emotive state” (Böhme 2). Yet despite their vague nature, they also always carry a specific character (cold, warm, serious, holiday-ish, cosy) that communicates a particular feeling to subjects in a “bodily-sensuous way” (Böhme 2).

On the other hand, the centuries-old practice of stage design proves that atmospheres can also be approached from the objective world. Since they are situated somewhere in-between objects and subjects, they can only be “made” or generated indirectly: by setting the conditions, manipulating and organizing objective material, sound and light in order for an atmosphere to appear.

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<sup>36</sup> Whereas *Slow Dance* is unquestionably identifiable as a piece of dance and choreography, *The Senders* by Stav Yeini exists in a grey zone between performance, installation and choreography: it is at the same time an immersive, performative installation and a choreography of the senses. Still, both pieces are clearly situated in the contemporary dance and performance paradigm I have discussed in Chapter 2.

<sup>37</sup> As I will propose in Chapter 5, atmospheres induce states that are not only affective, but also cognitive and physical. In any case, I doubt states can involve any of these aspects separately. Clarity on this question would require more research, but, if atmospheres belong to a molecular plane, then, as molecular fluxes of sensation that indistinctly traverse everything, they arguably affect all “kinds” of states, beyond any categorization.

Where Böhme mostly mentions objective reality and light, I would like to explicitly add movement quality (which includes pace, presence and the state of performers) as well as compositional pace, rhythm and duration to the list of atmosphere-generators. Because, as live performances, slow dances unfold through time, the way in which movement is organised and executed reasonably can be considered an essential part of defining and generating their atmosphere. Besides, because movement can relate to slowness and duration, as well as to efficiency and haste, I consider it an especially valuable parameter of *slow* atmospheres.

Finally, if atmospheres are situated outside of that which is identifiable as either objective or subjective reality, one could wonder if they don't operate on a molecular plane that precedes these distinctions. Clarity on this question would require more research, but this would explain why atmospheres indistinctively "imbue everything" with a certain mood, for molecular fluxes of sensation indistinctively traverse everything.

#### **4.2 The Senders' Slow Atmosphere: A Vehicle for Deep Perception**

The concept of atmosphere is especially useful to describe how slowness translates in *The Senders*, an immersive installation that combines various arts and crafts, and offers a space for amplified sensorial perception to an audience of approximately twelve experiencers at the time – depending on the size of the space where it is set.

In a space where the floor is covered with mattresses wrapped with off-white, cotton fabrics, attendees are gently invited to come in. They wander around a little before they naturally find a place on the mattresses. On the ceiling, visuals are projected. Spontaneously, most attendees adopt a comfortable lying or half-lying position. Enlarged to the point of being unrecognizable, one sees mould on a branch, pink marble, soap bubbles, a plastic bag. One sees these enlarged things on the ceiling, but similarly to how I couldn't have recounted the choreographic itinerary of *Slow Dance* without having it seen speeded-up, one doesn't recognize them until discovering the station where the real-size specimens are placed under the lens of a microscope-camera. Scattered in space, there are stones, flowers, shells, fruits, bark, cotton and silk fabrics with which the performers – Yeini calls them, "senders" or "facilitators", because she doesn't see them as the main performative entity of this piece – touch attendees. Parts of bodies are covered with fabric, caressed with stones and flowers; objects are placed on torsos and in palms of hands. Electric cables lie around, and bass-transducers make all the sounds (not only the basses) of the soundscape sensible through vibration. Other wires connect electrodes to two green plants and transmit their electrical variations to the sound system;<sup>38</sup> a light-sensitive snake of coloured led-lights does the same with the light in the room. Integrating vibrations of light and plants, the soundscape of *The Senders* is a spacious, soothing mix of composed music that also features rain, whales, water, voice and probably many more things of which I am not aware. Smells composed with essential oils are brought into the space one after the other. Accordingly, lights and visuals evolve from one colour to the other. Fermented foods and drinks are offered at the beginning and the end of the experience.<sup>39</sup>

Yeini has created this piece after years of working as dancer and choreographer with an intention to take place somewhere in the periphery of the artwork rather than at the centre of the stage. She considers

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<sup>38</sup> For this, Yeini uses a device called Midi Sprout, which recently changed its name to Plant Wave ([www.plantwave.com](http://www.plantwave.com))

<sup>39</sup> I describe my experience as an attendee at Performatik, workspacebrussels, in March 2019.

herself as a “curator” or “artist-modulator” who levels out the input of all the “micro-authors” with whom she collaborates. Accordingly, she doesn't see the bodies of performers as the performative entity in this piece. Rather, that which she choreographs is the space as an entity that transforms; an invisible shape that the ‘senders’ regulate and hold together.<sup>40</sup>

Understood in this way, the core of *The Senders* is rather invisible and ungraspable. I propose to call it an atmosphere in an attempt to half-grasp something that escapes full understanding and is difficult to approach with language. Like atmospheres, it is intangible, numinous; it is generated by a specific organisation of material reality, movement and composition while it at the same time exceeds this organisation; and it sensorially affects everyone in the space who allows it, while inducing a certain affective, physical and cognitive state.

*The Senders*' atmosphere emerges from music, light, smells, all objects in the room (flowers, stones, soft, off-white fabrics, etc.) and the audience-setting (the mattresses where attenders lie down), but certainly also by the movement quality of the senders.<sup>41</sup> Everything creates a safe, cosy, calm and still somehow vibrant atmosphere that invites sensorial perception and relaxation. If we consider the states of the facilitators an atmosphere-generators, then their relaxed but also very aware presence, their multisensorial listening, and their determination to take the time needed to attune to their whole environment, colour the atmosphere of the piece, and affect attenders.<sup>42</sup> Cognitively, physically and affectively, the latter are invited to enter, like the senders, a relaxed, attuned and listening state that, by letting go of the tension that usually accompanies the working mode in a society of haste, opens space for less action and more sensorial receptivity. In this state, one doesn't actively dominate, comprehend assimilate, produce, or consume, but instead allows instrumental rationality to take a step aside, and becomes opens for a kind of perception that is unusual in a societal context of overstimulation and hyperactivity (*cf.* 1.1 and 1.3).

Referring to Pauline Oliveros (2015), I will call this kind of perception “deep perception”. In her practise of ‘deep listening’, the word “deep” alludes to that which “surpasses one's present understanding, or has too many unknown parts to grasp easily”, and which “defies stereotypical knowing and may take either a long time, or never to understand or get to know” (Oliveros xxiii). Just like she associates deep listening to the way animals listen indistinctively to all sounds that surround them, including all sonic stimuli and not only those identified as music, or those one is currently interested in, I would like to think of ‘deep perception’ as a

<sup>40</sup> We have discussed this topic during a conversation in Brussels, in January 2010. Yeini's interest in spaces as performative entities was also present in *Elsewhere* (2017) and *Performative Spaces* (2015).

<sup>41</sup> This quality of movement is not literally slow or fast but derives from a conscious and relaxed state. It is slow in the sense of not hurried, attuned (listening to bodies and other elements in space before imposing any change on them), and gradual (avoiding brisk shifts and sudden interruptions). Although reducing speed might help to sense – this is the hypothesis my research question –, there is no desire in *The Senders* to generalize a slow pace of action, and there is no forced carefulness or holy respect to tranquillity: with playfulness, speeding up happens naturally. Without creating impulse or force, dancers allow movements with more dynamics or momentum to take place, while feeling comfortable (to not “push” any movement), attuning and listening with all senses to all that is around are given full priority.

<sup>42</sup> Massumi presents an understanding of attunement that is especially interesting when one tries to understand slow dance as events that collectively affects an audience. For him attuned reactions, are reactions that subjects have collectively but differentially to the same impulse: “Say there are a number of bodies indexed to the same cut, primed to the same cue, shocked in concert. What happens is a collective event. It's distributed across those bodies. Since each body will carry a different set of tendencies and capacities, there is no guarantee that they will act in unison even if they are cued in concert. However different their eventual actions, all will have unfolded from the same suspense. They will have been attuned – differentially – to the same interruptive com- motion.” (Massumi 55-56).

mode of perception that doesn't identify, but indistinctively listens – with all senses – to all sensorial stimuli that are present in a space and constitute its atmosphere. Because it doesn't identify – something one potentially does in a split second –, but instead attunes to things that are not yet assimilated by models of thought and language, this kind of perception requires time, or better, it unfolds through time: it is durational.

For example, in *The Senders*, I quickly understood that reading or identifying the elements that surrounded me and the impressions I had was not only impossible, but also would prevent me to relax and enter the receptive mode that was necessary to enjoy this “session”, and thus could ruin my experience. Mould on a branch, a bubble of soap and a pink marble stone were enlarged to (or beyond) a point where I couldn't recognize them anymore; the smells were too complex, and foods and drinks too fermented for me to identify; and the vibrations of the music transmitted through Nimrod Astarhan's synesthetic technology were infinitely more complicated than the bass vibrations I know from big concerts and parties. So I just laid back and “hung around” with my senses, simply spending time with this molecular realm of sensation that is also a realm of the unknown, of otherness.

## Conclusion

In *The Senders*, slowness translates in a calm yet sensorially vibrant slow atmosphere. This general mood *emerges* from music, smells, light, things, the movement quality of the senders; *immerses* attenders; and invites them to enter a relaxed and sensitive state where deep perception becomes possible.

Like *Slow Dance*, this atmosphere generates experiences of slowness by involving duration – not in the sense of lasting long, but in the sense that it binds atomized moments of experience together (*cf.* 1.1, 2.4): in both pieces, things are, change and move (also when they stay in place) in ways that avoid abrupt stops, shifts or interruptions.

Where *Slow Dance* challenges the usual conception of dance by slowing down to a point that undermines its understanding as a flow of movement, *The Senders* pushes the challenge of Cvejić's body-movement bind even further (*cf.* 2.3): by choreographing sensations, (all entities in) a space, or even an atmosphere, it conceives dance as something that can be effectuated by something else than human bodies.

Böhme's definition of atmospheres echoes almost literally what Erdman and Dahl intend with *Slow Dance*. The movement research of this piece has been focused especially on the question of how to create a slow dance that vibrates in the space and transmits “something” to the audience.<sup>43</sup> I have the impression that the combination of a slow pace, a vibrant movement quality, an unpredictable choreography and a unforeseeable yet steady dramaturgical build-up produces the “slow atmosphere” with which this piece fascinated me. The details of how this happens, however, would need to be discussed elsewhere. If slowness in *Slow Dance* doesn't only translate in a slow pace, but also in a slow atmosphere, then maybe, instead of identifying slowness in dance and choreography with the compositional strategies I mentioned earlier (*cf.* 4.1), one could imagine using slow atmospheres to do so. And ‘slow atmospheres’, would be atmospheres that invite deep perception by slowing down.

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<sup>43</sup> This is something Erdman and Dahl shared during our first Skype meeting about *Slow Dance*, in February 2019.

Against this backdrop, 'slow dance' could be understood to be pieces that, by creating slow atmospheres, facilitate the deep perception of molecular thingness. In what follows, I will investigate what kind of aesthetic experience this enables (Chapter 5) and how this generates a spectatorial organization that promotes alternative ways of being-with (Chapter 6).



The Senders at Espace Moss, Brussels, in August 2019, photography by Julie Calbert.

## Chapter 5: Aesthetic Boredom

We have seen that slowness in the form of a slow pace or atmosphere can provoke a shift in one's perception. Because slowness, especially in a climate of haste, can trigger impatience, challenge common attention-spans, and thus potentially bores, the present chapter explores the role of slowness, perception and boredom in aesthetic experiences. Noë suggests that engagement with art is inseparable from an everyday engagement with the world and gives boredom a central role in the coming about of aesthetic experiences. Building on his views, I propose 'aesthetic boredom', as a particular type of aesthetic experience that takes place in slow atmospheres.

### 5.1 Aesthetic Experiences According to Alva Noë

To start with, in *Strange Tools: Art and Human Nature*, Noë insists on seeing art as an activity rather than an object.<sup>44</sup> He compares art to many things, but mainly, as tells the title of his book, he sees it as a "strange tool". Like language extends human minds, and a pen or a hammer extend human bodies, art is a *tool* that extends the range of what humans are able to do. If we humans are organized beings and most (if not all) our activities are organized activities, then art is a tool to investigate the way we are embedded in those organizations. Somehow, like philosophy, art is a tool to practice critical, cognitive activity *with*.<sup>45</sup>

Yet art is a *strange* tool; a tool that cannot be *used*. For Noë, engaging with art is something humans do in connection with their environment and everything they know. In other words, it is an activity that takes place with the whole of one's life and everything one knows about the world as background. Art is a strange tool because it abrogates precisely this background in which tools make sense. It forces to ask: "What is this?"; and to take a stand on one's relation to what is usually taken for granted (*Strange Tools* 101). That's why art can be seen as an interruption.<sup>46</sup> "Choreography", Noë writes, "is the interruption (or subversion) of dancing" and "painting is the interruption of picture making" (*Ibidem* 103). But art doesn't stay there, on the meta-level

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<sup>44</sup> This is an idea that has become familiar since the affective turn. "Performative turn manifested as a paradigm shift from written text to performance consisting of various 'texts' (speech, bodies, costumes, lights, music, etc.) which all express and produce meaning. Affective turn, which brought the focus on the embodiment, the bodily experience of a situation or event, not predetermined by the meaning, came as a subsequent challenge for dramaturgy" ("Space After Perspective" 1). Mieke Bal (2018), in slightly more abstract terms than Noë, proposes to see art as an *act* or *event*, rather than as an object ("Activating Temporalities" 84).

<sup>45</sup> Seeing, eating, breast-feeding, having a conversation, walking, driving, dancing, are all examples Noë gives of organised activities. He writes: "our lives are structured by organized activities, in the large, in the small [...] these structures of organization are not of our own making [...] We are not exactly slave to them [...] But we are, or are at least liable to get, lost in the complex patterns of organization that make up our lives." (*Strange Tools* 10)

<sup>46</sup> Bal also insists on art's interrupting character. As she has it, art needs to interrupt the imperceptible because self-evident stream of everyday life in order to exist: "Art interrupts those endless flows of the breath of everyday timespace. To say that art most fundamentally interrupts is refraining from defining art ontologically—to say what it *is*—and instead, saying what it *does*; such a statement means considering art as an *act*. And indeed, acting, including the agency it implies, takes place in time, interrupting time's self-evident, hence, imperceptible stream. The impossibility to define art and the need to resort to considering it an act comes from the dual, paradoxical status of art. Both its relative autonomy and its sociality are crucial aspects." ("Activating Temporalities" 89).

of critical reflection on how humans are organized. As a reorganizing practice, it also loops back into the very organizations that it has interrupted and transforms them (Ibidem 31).

Now, precisely because it disrupts “business as usual”, and is useless, art makes one *stop doing*, and “confronts [one] with a situation that makes boredom a natural, a spontaneous response” (*Strange Tools*:116). For Noë, boredom is not just an unavoidable pain, or a pitfall, but is necessary for art to have a transformative power:

“The pictures in the clothing catalogue show you something you can buy; the architect’s model lays out something you can build. But the choreography on the stage? The painting on the wall? These are cut off from dancing, or showing, or learning. They stop you dead in your tracks. That is, *if you let them*. If you suspend. If you interrupt. If you enter that special space and that altered state that art provides or allows. Art situations have this in common with religious spaces like churches. They are places where so much can happen but only because nothing really happens. They are spaces for self-transformation.” (*Strange Tools*:115, emphasis by the author)

For Noë, aesthetic experiences don’t befall one mysteriously, but are something one needs to *allow to happen*. He considers these experiences as achievements, because they require one to actively allow interruption.<sup>47</sup> Art settings ask to suspend hyperactive habits of engagement that “take the winds out of the sails of boredom” (*Strange Tools* 115). From a place of suspension where, like in churches, “nothing really happens” that could drive away boredom, one needs to find a way in, a way to turn the artwork “on” – or allow the work to turn oneself “on”. Thus, after actively allowing suspension, one needs to also actively allow a work to “speak back” in order to “enter that special place and that altered state that art provides or allows”. This altered state is the state one enters when having an aesthetic experience.<sup>48</sup>

## 5.2 Boredom

I have mentioned in Chapter 1 how the current culture of haste, acceleration, achievement, and 24/7, is inhabited by an excess of activity, a tendency to do and do simply “for the sake of doing” (24/7 15). According to Ben Anderson (2014), there is a correlation between this hyperactivity and boredom: boredom has come to describe the psychological state it is used for now only in the middle of the nineteenth century, which coincides with the industrial start of modern acceleration (139).

For Noë, boredom is an affective state of anxiety that comes up in the absence of anything to *do*: a plan, structure, task or obligation that would keep one from feeling trapped in an endlessly vast present without meaning (*Strange Tools* 113-114). And for Han, it comes up when time is experienced as empty, as not

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<sup>47</sup> In the light of Han’s critique of today’s “achievement-society” (*cfr.* 1.2), Noë’s use of the word “achievement” asks for being nuanced. It is different from the achievement-spirit that induces excessive activity, because it requires suspension: for Noë, you need to *let art stop you dead in your tracks*.

<sup>48</sup> Some works make this task harder than others, or sometimes one just lacks the information, the background, to turn it “on”. Noë refers to Jonathan Burrows’ idea of an implicit contract between a work and its audience. For Burrows (2010), “the artist provides the clues, the materials, needed to complete the transformation” (*Strange Tools* 117; Burrows 38). Like in all communication, both parties involved are responsible for the interaction to work.

fulfilling (*The Scent of Time* 79).<sup>49</sup> When attending art in general, and slow dances in particular, artworks ask to suspend usual ways of engaging. It can happen that one doesn't know what to do with this suspension, doesn't see "the point", experiences the situation as meaningless, and therefore, quite naturally, feels bored.

For Han, who builds on Heidegger's profound boredom (*The Scent of Time* 78-84), today's frenetic resolution to act is more *responsible* for the emptiness and meaninglessness that causes boredom, than it is a way to counter it.<sup>50</sup> If meaning consists of relationship (Ibidem 81), and boredom is an experience of meaninglessness in a culture where excessive activity causes alienation by preventing true relationships to take place (*cf.* 1.3), then "boredom can be seen as the flip side of excessive activity" (Ibidem 84). In this circuit of boredom and activity that bites its own tail, slow performances might bore, because they interrupt the constant flow of activity that gives an illusion of fulfilment, but they at the same time carry a potential to break the spell of boredom at its root, for they invite to step out of the hyperactive game.

### 5.3 Aesthetic Boredom

I propose 'aesthetic boredom' as a particular kind of aesthetic experience that takes place especially in slow performances. We have seen that Noë presents boredom as a natural reaction to any art because it questions one's mode of engaging with the world. Aesthetic boredom doesn't differ much from Noë's understanding of the aesthetic experience. I see it as a state of sensorial, cognitive and affective binding<sup>51</sup> with a work of art that requires a suspension of usual engagement with the world (and thus potentially boredom), and yet takes place with one's whole knowledge of the world as a background. I integrate the notion of boredom to this concept in order to call attention to how slowness is shunned in a society of haste, and to highlight the world that is suspended and takes place at the background of this experience precisely as a world (or society) where boredom is obsessively avoided, and where overstimulation and hyperactivity mean to create an often false impression of fulfilment, and chase away boredom. As already hinted to above, I propose aesthetic boredom as a way to understand the potential of slow dances to break the spell of boredom at its root, and thereby step outside of a hyperactive game.

The state I associate to aesthetic boredom is relaxed and characterized by contemplative lingering. When attending slow dances, like *The Senders* and especially *Slow Dance*, intertwined with moments of impatience, boredom, and distraction (I start thinking about all sorts of things unrelated to the work), I

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<sup>49</sup> Even in Buddhism, boredom is believed to be one of the last things the Buddha has been struggling with, even after being enlightened. In Buddhism, it is often described as a craving (*tanha*) for activity, distraction, fun, excitement, external sources of energy. But beyond a craving, it is also seen as a form of aversion, an inner conflict. That which is present is experienced as being not-enough, or not-fulfilling. This aversion is a sign of alienation, of an incapacity to "connect". The key to find connection again lies in mediation: stopping all activity and observing what is there.

<sup>50</sup> "He [Heidegger in his later work] understands that it is precisely an exaggerated subjectivity which makes profound boredom possible in the first place – that not more of the self, but more of the world, not more of activity, but more of lingering can break the spell of boredom." (*The Scent of Time* 83)

<sup>51</sup> Here, I am also indebted to Bal, who refers to Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten: "For Baumgarten, aesthetics is based on an experience of binding through the senses in public space. [...] The verb *binding* contains a promise of connectivity; of an event of getting acquainted, cognitively as well as affectively, in the present" ("Activating Temporalities" 93).

experienced moments in which I attuned to the molecular thingness that became perceivable to me.<sup>52</sup> Actively allowing the work to turn me “on”, I attuned to it and connected with it sensorially – I practiced deep perception. This came together with a relaxed state that has much in common with what Han calls “contemplative lingering”, or “*vita contemplativa*”, and proposes as way to reintegrate duration in today’s atomized time (*cfr.* 2.4).

When I make relaxation central to aesthetic boredom, that first of all involves a physical, sensorial, kinaesthetic state that abandons the tension that usually accompanies contemporary hyperactivity and overstimulation. Yet this relaxation is also cognitive and affective, and thus exceeds the body. This goes almost without saying in a cultural scene where the division between mind and body has already been extensively questioned.<sup>53</sup>

Where Noë calls the aesthetic experience an “altered state”, I propose to explicitly couple aesthetic boredom to a specific kind of altered state, namely Han’s contemplative lingering or *vita contemplativa*. This state is the somehow passive “power not-to” that doesn’t serve any purpose, and allows all that is to be marvelled at rather than used.<sup>54</sup> On a cognitive level, it contrasts with the calculating, labouring thought that marches like a soldier to resolve this or that question, or to produce more knowledge. Instead, it lingers, wanders, even dances around, ready to observe whatever is there (*The Scent of Time* 107-114).

Yet neither the relaxed state of aesthetic boredom, nor Han’s contemplative lingering equal total “switching off”, lazy inactivity or distraction – which in a society of haste can be seen as the flip side of hyperactivity. On the contrary, both go with an active “collecting [of] oneself” and “a gathering of the senses” (*Ibidem* 87). They are not “open to whatever happens”, but “[offer] resistance to crowding, intrusive stimuli” and “instead of surrendering the gaze to external impulses, [they steer] them in a sovereign fashion” (*The Burnout Society* 21). Where boredom goes with a disconnection with one’s environment, aesthetic boredom goes with a movement towards it.

On the level of ways of relating, I would like to think of aesthetic boredom as detached and at the same time “friendly”, a quality that Han also attributes to the contemplative gaze because it “lets happen, come to pass, and agrees instead of intervening” (*The Scent of Time* 113). Unlike what Lepecki identifies as neoliberal, instrumental rationality, the contemplative attitude doesn’t aim at domination by reifying,

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<sup>52</sup> While attending *The Senders*, I didn’t go through boredom before entering the “special space”, the “altered state” of rich and detailed sensation that the piece offers. Maybe I entered aesthetic boredom straight away? Maybe it costed me very little effort to allow the work to touch me? Compared to Slow Dance, the relaxed-focus attention involves less responsibility here. Less effort needs to be made because stimuli are brought to the audience by the senders. All one needs to do is relax and attune to the sensations. For some people this is easier than for others.

<sup>53</sup> For example, Eleanor Bauer explores in her solo *A Lot of Moving Parts* (2018) the relation between writing, thinking and dancing. The performance is joined by booklet with the same title that comprises essays and poems. Bauer introduces the word “bind” as a contraction of “body” and “mind” to go beyond the distinction, that, according to her, remains present in the term “body-mind” (no reference available).

In *Out of our Heads* (2010), Noë defends that consciousness is not something that happens inside one’s brain, but something one *does*. It thus intrinsically involves the body.

<sup>54</sup> Objects leave their status of tool or instrument (*cfr.* Lepecki on Heidegger 2.5) and become mere (molecular?) things one can marvel at instead of using them: “The term *vita contemplativa* [...] connects to the experience of being in which what is beautiful and perfect does not change or pass - a state that eludes all human intervention. The basic mood that distinguishes it is marvelling at the way things are.” (*The Burnout Society* 14).

appropriating or consuming, but “*goes easy on* [things], letting them be in their own space or radiance” (Ibidem 76). Like contemplative lingering, I propose aesthetic boredom to be at the same time detached, so that one “does not absorb the object into [oneself]” (Ibidem 77), doesn’t consume it, instrumentalize it, reify it; and very near while it simply “marvels at the way things are” (*The Burnout Society* 14).

Aesthetic boredom is a state of experience. Like all experience, it extends durationally.<sup>55</sup> But as a state that arises especially in slow atmospheres, and a state of gathered relaxation and contemplative lingering, it accepts even more to take the time that is given in the slow atmosphere. On a sensorial level, because it invites to take all the time perception needs, aesthetic boredom is a state in which it is possible to sense more, or at least differently. It is remarkable how Han attributes to the contemplative, lingering gaze, characteristics that I have associated to deep perception. According to him, there are levels of reality that are only accessible to this gaze: “things that are subtle, fleeting; inconspicuous things, minor things; things that hover or retreat, which evade any violent efforts at their capture” (*The Scent of Time* 76). These levels of reality are very similar to what I have called molecular thingness.

## Conclusion

When one manages to engage with a piece of slow dance beyond the boredom, distraction or impatience that its slowness might trigger, one accesses the specific type of aesthetic experience that I coin “aesthetic boredom”. It combines relaxation as the suspension of an almost compulsive tendency to act in the view of achieving goals, to a state of contemplative lingering that, in all friendliness and without intervening, marvels at the way things are. As such, it is a state that favours the deep perception of molecular thingness.

Where boredom, in moments of suspension of a distractive hyperactivity, makes sensible the lack of meaning, fulfilment and relationship in a deeply alienated contemporary situation, aesthetic boredom does the opposite: it allows to bind sensorially, affectively and cognitively with one’s environment, and thus potentially recovers relationship, meaning and a feeling of fulfilment.

In the next chapter, the last one of this thesis, I will have a look at the political implications of aesthetic boredom: how the state can open up to alternative ways of being-with.

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<sup>55</sup> Noë and Bal both insist on the temporally extended nature of art (as event) *in general*. Art takes time not only because, as an event or act(ivity) rather than an object, it unfolds through time, but also because aesthetic experiences rely on sensorial perception; and perception – Bal presents it as an obvious fact – takes time (“Activating Temporalities” 85, 93, 101). Even though, when considering the slow, live performances that are the subject here, thinking of art as a temporally extended phenomenon is very obvious, this thinking about art as temporally extended *by nature* changes how to understand the slowness in slow dances. For example, my incapacity to experience *Slow Dance* as “one” choreography due to its slowness now seems to make something sensible that, even if it is not always noticed, could be true for art in general. Indeed, it appears as the manifestation of what Noë means when he writes: “Events [also art-events], in contrast [to objects], are creatures of time. They are temporally extended in nature. They are never whole. At the beginning, they have not yet achieved a conclusion. At the end, their beginning is done with.” (Noë, “Experience of the World in Time”, 2006: 28) Maybe *Slow Dance*, with its slow pace, exacerbates and makes sensible a characteristic of art *in general*, namely that it takes time. Then, we could say its slowness (slow pace and atmosphere) reach a sensitive point where art’s virtual but real potential of being perceived as what it always (but not always experienceably) is: a temporally extended event that is at each moment only partially present.

## Chapter 6: Atmospheres of Resonance

I have developed aesthetic boredom as a conceptual tool to approach the aesthetic experiences slow dance can lead to in a context where haste leaves little space for certain kinds of perception and experience.

In two recent articles, Vujanović (2018, 2019) coins 'landscape dramaturgies'. Just like I do with 'aesthetic boredom' and 'slow dance', she explicitly develops her concept to approach performances in the context of a "fast-changing, turbulent and supersaturated social environment" ("Meandering Together" 1). Where 'aesthetic boredom' focusses on the individual aesthetic experience one can have when attending performances that challenge modes of engaging that are the rule in this context, in this final chapter, I build on Vujanović's 'landscape dramaturgies' and Rosa's 'resonance' to propose 'atmospheres of resonance' and shed light on how slow dances organize collective spaces of experience.

### 6.1 Landscape Dramaturgies

Vujanović understands landscape dramaturgies, first and foremost, as giving voice to a recent tendency (she mentions performances between 2014 and today) to consider affect and experience as the main performative tissue instead of a superposition of semantic layers, and thus regard a performance as "an affective and meaningful event, an expressive social situation, a shared experience, a here-and-now of human coexistence and communication" ("Space after perspective" 1). As such, landscape dramaturgies, like *The Senders* and *Slow Dance*, offer semantically vague spaces, where any form of narration or representation, however abstract, is not the main interest when it is not absent. Although Vujanović avoids giving formal characteristics, clearly stating that "these performances do not form a new movement and the differences between them are bigger than what they share" ("Meandering Together" 4), she mentions "usually long, slow, and spatially stretched performances" ("Space after perspective" 2), as well as "wide, composite, and tentative spaces of cognition, affection, and sensation" (Ibidem 4).

Vujanović alludes to "straying" ("Space after perspective"), "meandering" ("Meandering Together") and "spending time with" to describe the spectatorial attitude she adopts when attending the semantically vague spaces of landscape dramaturgies, and compares it to the experience of visiting an exhibition or a museum. It is a kind of attending that doesn't require a focused attention: one can feel free to step in and out or be distracted, without fear of getting lost, or miss an element in the narrative chain, since there is none ("Space after perspective" 6). This "meandering" resembles the contemplative lingering I have associated to aesthetic boredom. Like lingering, straying and meandering are activities that instead of going straight to a goal, extend in time or space; take detours; hesitate; pause. They take place when there is time; when there is no haste. Moreover, this way of "spending time with" also has something friendly and disinterested in the sense that it doesn't pursue any goal.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Vujanović calls it "easy-going", "undemanding" and "pretty pleasing" ("Meandering Together" 6). By "let[ting] [her]self "enjoy them, be with them, get to know them... postponing the transformation of that experience into the professional

The lingering, meandering attention that landscape dramaturgies and slow dances invite might be pleasing and gentle, but it also demands responsibility from the attender, because the time and space they open can be used to practice contemplation just as well as consumption or absentmindedness (“Meandering Together” 7): one needs to turn the artwork “on”. Usual ways of directing attention are challenged in landscape dramaturgies because attenders are left in a semantically undetermined space without indications of where to look, or how to approach what they perceive. This is certainly the case for slow dances that, with a slow atmosphere, bring attention to a molecular plane that precedes individuation and therefore necessarily also evades semantic determination. For Vujanović, how to collectively inhabit these semantically vague spaces is a question of perspective.

Since the beginning of modernity, the technique of representing space three-dimensionally on a two-dimensional surface with a single-point perspective has defined our way of seeing and thinking the world with its hierarchies (“Space after perspective” 3; Bleeker 2008:12).<sup>57</sup> At the same time anthropocentric and individualistic, the single-point perspective puts the human individual at the centre of the world as its observer, and the author-creator at the centre of artistic creation as the one that implicitly guides the experience of the work. Vujanović observes in landscape dramaturgies a distrust in this organization (“Space after perspective” 2-3).

This distrust is present in *The Senders*, where Yeini functions as a modulator who brings the works of various micro-authors in tune; as well as in *Slow Dance*, that is collaboratively choreographed by Dahl and Erdman. Like many landscape dramaturgies, these works resonate with a recent interest in more horizontal, less hierarchic ways of organizing ourselves on mental, social, affective as well as political levels. This concern for finding other ways of organizing ourselves reaches beyond the social into environmental issues when also other than human agents come into play, like it is the case in *The Senders*.<sup>58</sup> When attuning to molecular thingness as *The Senders* and *Slow Dance* invite to, the distinction between what is human and what is not disappears together with divisions between subjects, persons and objects as well as semantic units. What remains are fluxes of sensation. Like I have suggested that one cannot enter molecular thingness without being absorbed by it oneself (*cf.* 3.2), Vujanović sees a landscape as “landscape of things” where one can only enter it as a thing oneself.<sup>59</sup>

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engagement by the tools and notions with which [she] was already familiar” (“Meandering Together” 4), she practises a way of relating to these pieces that tend towards horizontality. Unlike what Lepecki’s “forensic specialist” (*Singularities* 175-176), she doesn’t treat the pieces as an object she needs to analyse, appropriate or consume, and doesn’t deny what Han would call their otherness, but rather simply spends time with them, as a friend would.

<sup>57</sup> The single-point perspective replaced a more abstract, Gods-eye perspective for observing the world. This “emancipatory move” (from God’s eye to the human eye) goes way beyond optics, and is the same emancipatory move that mark, for Han, a shift from history as a progression towards a God-given fatality, to history a progression towards a human-made better future, and, at the same time, the beginning of acceleration (*The Scent of Time* 29).

<sup>58</sup> “This proposition [the democratization of organizing the social] becomes even more complex when other than human agents come into play. And in these performances they often do. Because of that the question of being together in today’s landscape dramaturgy goes beyond the social-political matters of democracy and opens up a debate on human existential condition, which is never only social.” (“Meandering Together” 9)

<sup>59</sup> With the term landscape dramaturgies, Vujanović calls for a new understanding of the word “landscape”. She decidedly proposes to deviate from the common understanding of landscape as a surface modelled and portrayed to serve human needs. Instead, a landscape would simply be “the morphology of the Earth’s surface” (“Space after perspective” 1) – a definition that

In the absence of a single perspective, it is unclear which perspectival organization takes over in the vast and open space of landscape dramaturgies. Vujanović distinguishes three possibilities. A first option is “shifting personal views”. Rather than one, central perspective, pieces propose a multitude of scattered perspectives where each has the right to see differently but where no-one sees the whole picture. This option doesn't really challenge present organizations of seeing and thinking, for its combination of pluralism and individualism is symptomatic of a neoliberal way of life.<sup>60</sup> The second option is the “cancellation of the personal view on a shared space altogether” (“Meandering Together” 9). This happens when works “give an impression of not being composed and meant to be watched by anyone in particular”, and where bodies “are all present on the stage all the time, but look unaware of and disinterested in being watched”, which gives an “undetermined – if not equal – importance and value [to] everything that is there” (“Meandering Together” 9).<sup>61</sup> And finally, she suggests the option of “sharing view”, a mode of attending that is “both individualistic (distraction is decidedly personal) and communal (sharing a durational observation with other humans onscreen [or onstage] and off)” (“Space after perspective” 8).

This last option seems interesting and might almost correspond to what happens in *The Senders* and *Slow Dance*. Yet because, for Vujanović, landscape dramaturgies are often performances that “do not address us” but are “dramaturgically turned to themselves and their inner world” (Ibidem 7), I would like to call on Rosa's ‘resonance’ to highlight how, as I propose to see it, these pieces *do* address their audience.

## 6.2 Resonance

As an antidote to the alienation that acceleration causes, Rosa proposes ‘resonance’ (2019)<sup>62</sup>, a reciprocal, mutually responsive relation between self and world. In resonance, both the self and the world call upon each other, respond to each other, and potentially transform each other (*Alienation and Acceleration* 100). For Rosa,

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underscores the need for “rethinking the position of the human mind and human agency in the world” (“Space after perspective” 1).

<sup>60</sup> “One is shifting personal views, which destabilizes a clearly displayed ground and scatters it in a multiplicity of perspectives and particles, such as in *Groove Space*. In these performances the audience and performers share the space, and the audience look for the performance around. Usually they don't manage to see all the materials created by performers because other people are around and obstruct their gaze or the scenes are happening simultaneously. Due to shaping the audience as a mass of individuals who all have the right to their personal view while there is still a whole that no one can properly see, I'd consider these and similar performances a symptomatology of neoliberal social configuration expressed in the vocabulary of plurality. This dramaturgical tactic is inherited from postmodernism and is now intertwined with social networking and the experience of daily life of urban smart mobs.” (“Meandering Together” 8) “Since this proposal in principle maintains the multiplication of perspectives within the frame of having rights to singular views, I don't find these and similar performances especially critical or visionary but I do consider them an accurate symptomatology of the social organization in neoliberal capitalism, which is, in theory, referred to as the multitude.” (“Space after perspective” 5)

<sup>61</sup> The main question Erdman and Dahl started from was “how to radiate, vibrate, transmit energy to the audience while moving slow?” A question they were less busy with when performing durational pieces for example with Mårten Spånberg. There the piece was just there for itself without bothering much about the audience being there. So, Erdman and Dahl were very much busy with relating to the audience and the space while dancing. Maybe that's something that helped making it so vibrant and attracting my attention.

<sup>62</sup> The English translation, *Resonance: A Sociology of our Relation to the World*, has recently been published. My account on ‘resonance’ is only based on the short speculations Rosa starts to suggest in his conclusion of *Alienation and Acceleration*, and what he clarifies in his interview with Thijs Lijster (2018). In further investigations, Rosas' more extended account of resonance could contribute to elaborate my concept of ‘atmospheres of resonance’.

“a ‘good life’ in the end might be a life that is rich in multi-dimensional experiences of ‘resonance’; a life that vibrates along discernible ‘axes of resonance’” (Ibidem 101).

As he explains in an interview with Thijs Lijster (2018), Rosa thinks of ‘resonance’ as a critical tool to question capitalist competition, as well as the typically modern promethean stance of reifying and instrumentalizing everything that surrounds us. Indeed, relations of resonance appear outside the realm of profitability and investment, unlike what Rosa calls “*Ruhrung*”, where the experience belongs exclusively to the subject who decides to relate in a sentimental way to things (Lijster 42). Rather than psychological or emotional — and therefore only belonging to the subject —, the relation that appears in resonance is an existential or ontological one.<sup>63</sup>

Because in art other ways of relating and being in the world can be explored, it is a sphere, like religion, where experiences and axes of resonance can emerge. The task of art according to Rosa is to create transformative experiences of resonance rather than — like for example Hollywood does — mere oases that offer a temporary refuge from the maddening swirl of contemporary acceleration (Lijster 50).

Because they invite to attune and let oneself be affected and even absorbed by a realm of molecular thingness, a realm that exists on an ontological level below psychology and relations of instrumentality, *The Senders* and *Slow Dance* could be considered to offer experiences of resonance. Slow dance performances, then, could be imagined as performances that invite resonance by slowing down, and together create an axis of resonance.

### 6.3 Atmospheres of Resonance

As I hope it has become clear above (*cfr.* 6.1), *The Senders* and *Slow Dance* could be considered landscape dramaturgies. Yet I have the feeling they *do* address their audiences. When attending *Slow Dance*, although the dancers rarely look at their audience, I had the impression that the piece was calling upon me, attracting my attention, radiating, vibrating for me and all other attenders as if as if saying: “hey! I am here for you, you came to see me, so now look at me!” – unlike most durational slow pieces that, lasting more than three hours, cannot reasonably do so. In *The Senders*, I have often thought of the senders as “sensorial caretakers” for everything they do is there to “serve” the senses of attenders.

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<sup>63</sup> “Whether or not the world resonates with us does not seem to depend much on the cognitive *content* of our conceptualization of the self-world-relationship. Quite to the contrary, whether or not we find stories about a benign God or an enchanted ‘deeper’ nature plausible or attractive quite likely depends on our pre-cognitive ‘being in the world’: If this world feels uninviting, cold and indifferent, those stories gain little credibility. Nevertheless, it is quite obvious that the cognitive structures of our self-world-conception have some influence on how we experience the world, too. If you believe, for example, that Satan lurks behind every corner, you might start to feel the world to be a hostile place. And if you believe in *Rational Choice* theories which claim that it is the sole goal of human beings to (instrumentally) satisfy their preferences and utility-functions, you should not be surprised if the world appears to be utterly ‘silent’.” (*Alienation and Acceleration* 101)

The concept is also a tool to unmask false solutions to alienation (like estheticizing a walk through the city by listening to music through headphones) and claims to authenticity (like a yoga class where you supposedly go to “make contact with yourself” but really just work your abs for summer beach time, in between a work meeting and Tinder date) which Rosa calls “echo chambers” as they don’t resonate but only echo the projections of a narcissistic self (Lijster 41).

Where for Vujanović entering a landscape of things as a thing seems to go with indifference,<sup>64</sup> I, on the contrary, observe in the movement towards molecular thingness a possibility for resonance. Indeed, in *The Senders* and *Slow Dance*, molecular thingness is not synonymous of indifference, but, on the contrary, of a vibrancy and radiance that reaches out and affects, “touches” the attenders if they allow it, and even brings transformation by causing a shift from molar to deep molecular perception.

This idea would need to be developed elsewhere, for this thesis is close to its end. Yet in short, rather than addressing an imaginary someone in particular (like the traditional single perspective), many individual persons only partially (like Vujanović’s “shifting personal views”), no person in particular (like Vujanović’s “cancellation of the personal view altogether”) or everyone individually and collectively (like in Vujanović’s “sharing view”), slow dances might be seen to address *everything* “pre-individually”, which automatically implies a sense of collectivity. Slow dances don’t only suggest more horizontal, less individualistic and less anthropocentric organizations by undoing singular perspectives, but, more precisely, by sinking into an ontological realm that precedes individuation altogether, where distinctions between individual and collective, or human and other-than-human simply don’t exist. Moreover, I propose that slow dances establish a relation of resonance with this multiple, pre-individual *thing* that fills the space and includes what we refer to as “audience”.

Vujanović proposes to call the space of landscape dramaturgies “a space after perspective”. The space of slow dance is one where a slow atmosphere *imbues* everything, invites the deep perception of molecular thingness and favours the experience of aesthetic boredom. This space is less spacious and more immersive than Vujanović’s landscape dramaturgies, and it creates situations of resonance. I call it an “atmosphere of resonance”.

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<sup>64</sup> For example: “The main curiosity of this and other performances presented above is that *they do not address us*; they are *dramaturgically turned to themselves* and their inner world. Thereby, they enhance an *indifferent thingness* of the performance landscape, where we really need to think and examine how to get in.” (“Space after perspective” 7, emphasis mine); “It may be especially cogent if we associate the landscape with an *indifferent thingness* of the world in the moment of the epochal questioning of the Anthropocene and indeed detrimental results of humans playing the main role in the life of the Earth.” (Ibidem 1, emphasis mine).

## Conclusion

Along these pages, I developed ‘slow dance’, ‘haste’, ‘molecular thingness’, ‘slow atmospheres’, ‘deep perception’, ‘aesthetic boredom’ and ‘landscape dramaturgies’ to try and approach the experience of slowness in two pieces of choreography. By developing these concepts, I have tried to half-grasp an un-known zone that Lepecki probably would consider part of the darkness, that, referring to Crary (2013), he sees as a “critique of enlightenment as an aesthetic and political project” (*Singularities* 20, 55-84) – a darkness that a culture of haste tends to eradicate. New concepts were necessary to get to know this realm of otherness, because it doesn’t let itself approach easily with language as we know it. I hope to have done so in a way that doesn’t confine it but leaves space for its complex multiplicity and allows it to maintain a part of mystery.

Along six chapters, I have tried to understand if and how, in a society of haste, aesthetic boredom as the aesthetic experience of slow dance creates alternative experiences of being-with.

I have portrayed today’s context of haste as a society where competition serves the acquisition of ever more Self(ie)-fulfilment, disenchantment goes with a refusal or incapacity to relate to otherness, alienation distorts one’s relation to self and world, a hyperactive standstill impedes structural changes, and all this is experienced as an inert, unquestionable given.

In this context, I have come to understand slow dance as performances where slow atmospheres allow the experience of a state I call ‘aesthetic boredom’. This is a particular type of aesthetic experience where relaxation combined to an attitude of ‘contemplative lingering’ suspends the tension that goes with one’s almost compulsive tendency to *act*, comprehend, grasp, appropriate or make productive – a tendency that is the rule in the competitive environment of haste –, and instead allows for affective, cognitive and sensorial binding with a plane that I called ‘molecular thingness’.

To perceive molecular thingness, this is, to experience ‘deep perception’, a shift is needed from the perception of the world on a plane that is modelled by language and structures of thought, to a plane that precedes any kind of individuation and that therefore has an intrinsic pre-individual character and escapes full identification, grasp and comprehension.

Since one cannot experience this molecular plane without entering it oneself, slow dances create spaces that challenge hierarchic, individualistic and anthropocentric ways of organizing the social as well as broader-than-human environments. Indeed, by setting conditions that make a molecular plane experienceable, these pieces create immersive situations of reciprocal, sensorial connection that I call “atmospheres of resonance”.

In atmospheres of resonance, slow dances invite experiences of being-with that are horizontal rather than hierarchical and that relate indistinctively to the whole environment rather than being anthropocentric. They encourage contemplative lingering where the most common modes of engaging are driven by logics of productivity, sensorial, cognitive and affective binding with otherness in a Self(ie)-centred culture, and potentially offer experiences of resonance in a context of alienation. They do this in a way that involves the whole performative setting, including attenders with their bodies and spectatorial attitudes.

If 'slow dance' pieces offer experiences of resonance with molecular thingness by slowing down, then all 'slow dance' pieces together could be imagined to create an *axis* of resonance, where being-with-molecular-thingness can be repeatedly experienced.

Slow dance answers Kunst's, Lepecki's and Cvejic's call for addressing the conditioning of an all-absorbing neoliberal consumer-society, where art is no longer thought of as autonomous; and Lepecki's demand for dances where "the person is not to be conceived of as the only form within which life is destined to flow" (11). Doing so, the two slow dances I discuss disidentify dance from its common understanding as a flow of movement (*Slow Dance*) and as something that is performed by a body (*The Senders*), in a paradigm where a tendency to abandon the body-movement bind has already been explored.

Where Kunst puts forward duration as a way to counter the conditioning of a society of haste, both pieces create a sense of duration – not in the sense of lasting long, but in the sense that they bind atomized moments of experience together. As such, they exacerbate two characteristics of art in general: (1) they evade the logic of effectiveness that rules a society of haste, (2) they make art sensible as an event that unfolds progressively through time.<sup>65</sup> In *Slow Dance*, temporality translates in a floating and fascinating slow atmosphere where the passing of time becomes suddenly *sensible*, which opens to seeing time as a reality towards which one can (or even has the responsibility to) consciously relate.<sup>66</sup> In *The Senders*, a hypnotic, sensitive and calm atmosphere makes time almost dissolve: an hour often feels like fifteen minutes. By offering an experience radically outside of it, this piece shows that haste is merely optional. Both make today's time-regime appear otherwise than as an unquestionable given.

Finally, where Lepecki suggests singularities to counter this conditioning, I propose to see both pieces as singular events of slowness and molecular thingness. Like Lepecki's singularities, they are collective and transindividual (even pre-individual), and they escape instrumental grasp. Moreover, they are events where, through slowness, a *change* becomes actual: a shift happens from a tendency to instrumentally relate to a molar plane of objects to a resonant way of being-with molecular thingness.

As the abundant footnotes show, the question investigated is much broader than the scope of this thesis can encompass. I see it as a spiderweb of ideas, relations and concepts, from which I could pull several threads to be developed separately. For example, I could develop atmospheres of resonance building on Rosas' new publication (2019), analyse how slowness affects one's perception of time and death, explore the parallels between slowness, silence and darkness, or investigate the potential of deep perception to re-enchant a disembodied society. I especially think of Donna Haraway's (2016) ecofeminist thought – with, for example, her notion of making-with or *symptomiosis* – and Strauss' *Slow Reader* as fertile grounds to further

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<sup>65</sup> As I mentioned in a footnote above (*cf.* 5.3) this is a whole line of thought that could be developed elsewhere.

<sup>66</sup> For example, a colleague attendee had the phrase "What am I gonna do with my one, single life?" playing as a mantra in his head while attending *Slow Dance*.

conceptualize slow dance. And ultimately, I am curious about the relation between slowness and the feminine, because both are often associated with notions like listening, resonance, care and not-knowing.<sup>67</sup>

To close, I believe discourse on slowness is of paramount importance in a political context of growing cuts in funding for the arts. Art is one of the few realms in society where vague, inefficient, ungraspable, un-known things can be related to. Alongside darkness, vagueness, not-knowing and inefficiency, slowness seems to be “in the air” as something positive – and maybe even vital. Something that has been and still is much repressed in a society of haste, but that we slowly realize we need in order not to suffocate in an excess of Self, of the same, in an exhausting circuit of work, consumption and discard, of spectral change, and little freedom.

As Han suggests, contrary to what liberalism proclaims, freedom lies in relation, not in the absence of it (*The Scent of Time* 31). Doesn't relation, like perception, require slowness? Maybe if today we were asked to invent a new god for our future, she would be a goddess of slowness.

16 752 words

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<sup>67</sup> For example, in Strauss' Slow Research Lab and *Slow Reader* -- Is it a coincidence that the five projects I followed are led by women?

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