

**Master Thesis**

**Re-imagining Contemporary Choreography:  
Exploring choreographic practices in the post-moving era**

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## Abstract

Focusing on the European dance scene after the mid-1990s a great emergence of dance practitioners redefined what dance could be by enlarging their creative methods, tools and objects. The established incessant movement was no longer considered to be the central element of composition. Similar artistic strategies still prevail up to the present, where the boundaries seem to be expanding ever more. Stimulated by this, in my thesis I look at the latest choreographic practices and their implications on a post-moving era. Drawing on André Lepecki's *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the Politics of Movement* (2006), Efrosini's Protopapa PhD "Possibilising dance: a space for thinking in choreography" (2009) and Bojana Cvejić's *Choreographing Problems: Expressive Concepts in European Contemporary Dance and Performance* (2015) I examine the expanded choreographic practices in the following choreographic works: *69 Positions* (2014) by Mette Ingvarlsen and *Time has fallen asleep in the afternoon sunshine* (2010) by Mette Edvardsen. My hypothesis is that Ingvarlsen and Edvardsen's performances are exemplary of these developments. On the performance analysis of these works, I have explored what they have presented as singular choreographic practices through their artistic strategies by activating specific tools and methods. The idea of 'language choreography' is discussed as a common place for both. In conclusion, my main aim has been to analyse and evaluate how contemporary choreography in this post-moving era has been redefined in these works and what the resulting implications are for making, performing and attending.

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## Introduction

“Silence as sonorous rest also marks the absolute state of movement”<sup>1</sup>

### 1.1 On my personal motivation: general thoughts

The topic of my Master’s thesis *Re-imagining Contemporary Choreography: Exploring choreographic practices in the post-moving era* stems from my general interest in the dance studies via a theoretical and conceptual thinking, and even more specifically derives from how attractive the current practices of this artistic field are to me.

I still remember my thoughts and my critical reflections when I read about this well-known incident <sup>2</sup>among the dance community that occurred at the International Dance Festival Ireland in 2002 after the performance *Jérôme Bel*, created by the French choreographer Jérôme Bel. In brief, the festival was taken to court by an audience member after the performance, as he argued that the piece did not contain “a single step of dance” <sup>3</sup> and was full of nudity. This makes evident that the main disagreement relates to the question of why this piece was included in a dance festival and reveals how the idea of movement used to be an integral part of any dance work. Undeniably, this affair can be seen as a landmark in the history of dance, as it implies a radical shift of what can be conceived as dance, though this change had started about a decade earlier within the European context.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London and New York: Continuum, 1988), 287.

<sup>2</sup> For more information, read the article “The creeping threat of censorship” by Michael Seaver in *Irish Times*, April 15, 2006, <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/the-creeping-threat-of-censorship-1.1038944> , accessed September 6, 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Una Bauer, “The Movement of Embodied Thought. The Representational Game of the Stage Zero of Signification in Jérôme Bel”, *Performance Research: A Journal of the Performing Arts*.13.1 (2008): 35-41.

<sup>4</sup> Jeroen Fabius mentions that, “something seems to be happening. The beginnings of a 'New Wave' is the title of a contribution by JeanMarc Adolphe in *Ballett International* magazine which he extends a year later, again in *Ballett International*. In particular he refers to Meg Stuart, Caterina Sagna and Vera Mantero, saying that their work does not depart from dance technique. Rather he sees in them a suspicion regarding the celebration of the forceful dynamics of the body so central in dance of the eighties in Europe. This generation is looking for ‘informality’ and the human dimension of the body” in “The Missing history of (not conceptual) dance”. Available on [https://www.atd.ahk.nl/fileadmin/afbeeldingen/lectoraten/lectoraat\\_the/Jeroen\\_Fabius\\_The\\_missing\\_history\\_of\\_not\\_conceptual\\_dance\\_pdf.pdf](https://www.atd.ahk.nl/fileadmin/afbeeldingen/lectoraten/lectoraat_the/Jeroen_Fabius_The_missing_history_of_not_conceptual_dance_pdf.pdf), accessed January 12, 2018.

Today, sixteen years later, a lot of critical debate is still taking place regarding such categorization, when similar non-movement-oriented performances were categorized as part of the dance genre.<sup>5</sup> These doubts or disagreements regarding the lack of “dance” in some pieces enhanced my curiosity to explore more deeply what it means to create dance today, how and in which way the practitioner’s tools and objects have been expanded, and finally which are the aesthetic limitations if there are any.

## 1.2 Primary reflections on a new dance era

The ontology of modern dance is directly related to the idea of movement. This can be reflected in John Martin’s statement in 1933 that “the discovery of the actual substance of dance, which is to be found to be movement”.<sup>6</sup> But what is the current profile of this artistic field (keeping in mind Jérôme Bel’s case)? New ways about making, thinking or writing about dance appear after the mid-1990s, where new forms in the European contemporary dance scene questioned the medium of movement and pushed the limits of their creative process. Focusing on the last two decades, this tendency is maintained and is expanding towards even more radical practices, where the boundaries of dance are becoming really obscure and a concrete interpretation is not a simple task. Dance under this refreshed identity “is no longer the never analysed, beautiful expression of somehow natural feelings through the body”.<sup>7</sup> A great emergence of new practitioners in 1990s, such as Jérôme Bel, Xavier Le Roy, Meg Stuart, Vera Mantero or later Boris Charmatz, Jonathan Burrows, Mårten Spångberg, La Ribot, Martin Nachbar, Ivana Müller, Mette Ingvarsen, Mette Edvardsen redefined the conventional definitions and new modes of expression through various choreographic strategies.<sup>8</sup> The term choreography covers this new tendency better compared to the traditional terminology of dance due to its openness, though a historical affiliation between them always exists. Ric Allsopp and André Lepecki observe the following:

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<sup>5</sup> A useful source of the critique about this non-movement tendency is the text “Dance and Not Dance” by Johannes Birringer in *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* (27) (2005): 10-27.

<sup>6</sup> John Martin, *The Modern Dance*, (replication of the original edition, first published in 1933, New York: A. S. Barnes & Co.), (Princeton, NJ: Dance Horizons, 1989), 6.

<sup>7</sup> Bauer, “The Movement of Embodied Thought”, 36.

<sup>8</sup> Meg Stuart’s *Insert Skin#1- They Live in Our Breath* (1996), Jérôme Bel’s *The Last Performance* (1998), Xavier Le Roy’s *Le Sacre du Printemps* (2007), Mette Ingvarsen’s *The Artificial Nature Project* (2012), Mette Edvardsen’s *Oslo* (2017) are choreographic examples of this tendency .

Stable and historical definitions of choreography, as inscriptions of movement characterized through compositional approaches to bodily movement in time and space, have moved towards choreographic approaches that question such normative relationships between movement, composition and the production of dance, and expand the notion of choreography as an art that includes a wider range of conceptual tools, materials and strategies.<sup>9</sup>

This statement supports the notion of choreography as a term that can host any imaginary artistic practice and strategy, where any potential object, beyond the movement, can be accumulated as part of the dance discipline.

In recent years a research debate around this new dance era has emerged, indicating the importance of this evolvement. A great amount of new texts<sup>10</sup>, other theoretical discussions and workshops are attempting to reflect on this refreshed identity of the field and its particular tendencies. At this point, it is noteworthy to mention two conferences that took place and gave a unique chance for dance professionals to gather together – theoreticians, practitioners, dance critics – participants from other fields such as visual arts, cultural studies, etc., and, of course, a wide range of audiences. In 2012, a three-day conference in MACBA in Barcelona instituted by the label “Expanded Choreography. Situations, Movements, Objects...”<sup>11</sup> took place. The purpose of the conference was to introduce different perspectives and to expose new discourses on choreography. Later, in 2015, another intriguing dance meeting took place in Stockholm with the title “Postdance – beyond the kinesthetic experience and back”.<sup>12</sup> This dance conference was an assemblage that aimed “to really find time and space to reflect on the

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<sup>9</sup> Ric Allsopp and André Lepecki, “On Choreography”, *Performance Research*, (2008). 13:1, 1-6.

<sup>10</sup> Two examples of these texts are “The missing history” of (not) conceptual dance” and “Dance and Not Dance” by Johannes Birringer.

<sup>11</sup> An event organized by the University of Dance and Circus Stockholm, the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA), the Fundació Antoni Tàpies, and the Mercat de les Flors, with the support of the Swedish Research Council and the Swedish Arts Grants Committee, on the occasion of the exhibition *Retrospective* by Xavier Le Roy at the Fundació Antoni Tàpies. Devised by Mårten Spångberg. <https://www.macba.cat/en/expanded-choreography-situations>, accessed November 4, 2017.

<sup>12</sup> A conference organized by Danjel Anderson (artistic director of MDT, a venue for experimental/contemporary dance in Stockholm), Gabriel Smeets (artistic director of MDT, a venue of Cullberg in Stockholm) and Andre Lepecki (professor at Stockholm University of the Arts), at the venue MDT in Stockholm in October 2015. <http://mdtsthlm.se/archive/175/>, accessed November 4, 2017.

developments and forces that have shaped choreographic imagination from the 1960s up to today”<sup>13</sup>, as the abstract on its website announced. In both contexts, the participants positioned themselves regarding dance or choreographic extended practices through their experience (as practitioners) or even by trying to articulate a more theoretical/philosophical perspective to this tendency (dance scholars/theoreticians/dance critics). The meticulous study of the extracted material (audio-video material or texts) from these two meetings contributed much to the initiation of my personal theoretical research through their argumentation and propositions on this post-moving era that I intend to scrutinize in my thesis.

### **1.3. Research question**

The central axis of this thesis emerges from my necessity to explore and analyze the notion of contemporary choreography through certain prominent examples of these recent developments, where movement is not the basic tool for composition and the practitioners expand their methods and choices. I will insist on the use of the term ‘choreography’ and I will explain further below how this seems to be a more efficient choice for encompassing the contemporary form.

At this point, it is essential to refer briefly to the incorporation of the adjective ‘contemporary’. Drawing on Agamben’s definition, “contemporariness is, then, a singular relationship with one’s own time, which adheres to it and, at the same time, keeps a distance from it. More precisely, it is that relationship with time that adheres to it, through a disjunction and an anachronism”.<sup>14</sup> Thus, to be ‘contemporary’ is to request a proximity status with one’s own temporality. Provided that, in this thesis I pay attention to the specific artistic temporality that we are experiencing at this moment, I find this characterization to coincide with my focal concerns. Without ignoring that which is contemporary in our time has principal shared references with what happened in the 1990s dance scene. Therefore, an interrelation and a conjunction are inevitable in our research route. It is noteworthy that the recent years have seen

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<sup>13</sup> This quotation is extracted from the official website of MDT <http://mdtsthlm.se/archive/175..>, accessed May 3, 2017.

<sup>14</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *What is an apparatus? and other essays* (Stanford, California, 2009), 41.

quite a debate on the notion of ‘contemporary’ in a dance context, which I do not intend to explore further here.<sup>15</sup>

I will study two selected works: *69 Positions* (2014) by Mette Ingvarstsen and *Time has fallen asleep in the afternoon sunshine* (2010) by Mette Edvardsen. My hypothesis is that Ingvarstsen and Edvardsen’s performances are exemplary of the developments observed by Allsopp and Lepecki (quoted above) in how choreography here can no longer be understood as an inscription of movement characterized through compositional approaches to bodily movement in time and space, have moved towards expanded choreographic approaches and mainly towards the notion of language. This hypothesis raises the more concrete question about what then, in these cases, constitutes choreography, consequently bringing me to my main research question:

*What do propose these works as choreographic practices through their choices instead of the idea of an incessant movement?*

This main question brings up further relevant sub-questions that I must deal with in order to find the appropriate response to my main inquiry. It seems imperative to investigate further:

- How has dance altered its profile through the years?
- Of what does the relationship between choreography and dance comprises?
- Why is the term ‘choreography’ considered to be more adequate for the current profile of the sector?
- How can choreography be defined?
- How can the choreographic turn be defined in the absence of movement through specific practices?
- In what ways has language replaced movement in these choreographic contexts?
- How do these choreographic works affect compositional logic and modes of spectatorship?

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<sup>15</sup> For this debate see Randy Martin, “Dance and Its Others,” in André Lepecki, ed. "Of the Presence of the Body: Essays Dance and Performance", *Dance Research Journal* 3.9/2 (2007): 103.



## 1.4 Methodology and structure of the thesis

Following the introductory part in the Chapter 2, I will examine the notion of choreography as a way to justify my selected title and the articulation of my main question within this research. First, I emphasize the modification of the term ‘dance’ in different temporalities. These thoughts are extracted as a combination of various books and texts that I have studied during my effort to perceive dance history. Moreover, in the same part I reflect on the relationship between dance and choreography. To clarify more analytical my selection of the notion of choreography, I intend to expose its further connotations. To achieve this, I will draw on a wide range of selected contemporary definitions of choreography in order to display the extended potentialities which enclose the notion, and to enhance my attempt to compose my own definition of this field as a combination of selected elements of these proposals. Apart from this, I analyse further the characteristics of this ambivalent dance genre that appeared after the 1990s in Europe and is still active today, where the artistic strategies appear closely related to the term that I have proposed. This investigation seems beneficial, as my case studies seem at a first sight to share commonalities with this category.

After my first exploration of the notion of choreography and the demonstration of the identity of the genre represented thereby, in the Chapter 3 I draw on recent theories of dance studies in order to build a strong theoretical framework, to support my argumentation and to search for potential answers to my main question. In the attempt to construct my primary theoretical frame, I chose two specific publications that have contributed drastically to the evolution of a strong critical theoretical thinking in these developments on dance as the main core of my argument. To begin with, I focus on the much discussed book by the dance theorist André Lepecki *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the Politics of Movement*<sup>16</sup>(2006), which is regarded as the first significant and radical publication on how dance has been transformed since the early 1990s in Europe. He deals with the work of choreographers that challenge common sense notions of dance by reducing or eliminating the idea of movement. This limitation of bodily expression has been aptly defined as ‘exhausting dance’, a term which was coined by Lepecki.

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<sup>16</sup> André Lepecki, *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the Politics of Movement* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2006).

In addition, I will make a short reference to the PhD research “Possibilising dance: a space for thinking in choreography”<sup>17</sup> (2009) by Efrosini Protopapa that operates as correspondent to Lepecki’s approach<sup>18</sup>. The second vital theoretical source of my thesis will be the publication *Choreographing Problems: Expressive Concepts in European Contemporary Dance and Performance*<sup>19</sup> (2015), by performance theorist and philosopher Bojana Cvejić. Her central argument is the existence of a disruption between body and movement and a profound turn against the conventional form of theatrical representation, which she carries out by applying Deleuze’s logic of expression theory to produce her own theoretical model of how, by posing a distinctive problem, the choreographer generates certain expressive concepts and affects the way of performing, making and attending. At this point, and to avoid any misunderstandings, I consciously chose these sources due to their strongly related argumentation with my research focus, without ignoring the existence of several other theorists that have engaged with these ideas in this field.

In the Chapter 4, I focus on the works I selected in order to follow new creative compositional paths instead of incessant movement. Mette Ingvarsten and the Mette Edvardsen both have a dance educational background and have been active in the dance field as dancers or performers, besides creating their own works more intensively recently. I describe each of the selected performances separately in order to figure out their unique features that move away from physical dance and have developed in other directions. I will pay more attention to those elements that I apply in my theoretical frame. Following the descriptions, in the same part I aim to give potential responses to my main research question and all the aforesaid sub-questions through performance analysis. More specifically, I observe that the use of the notion of language is common to their compositional structure. Under this observation, I show how these works challenge and reshape dance from its usual understanding towards specific expanded practices in choreography, and specifically towards the composition of a language choreography. I will examine what the range of spatial choices available and how they alter the modes of attendance. In discussing the two performances and their practices, I will enrich my

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<sup>17</sup> Efrosini Protopapa, “Possibilising dance: a space for thinking in choreography” (PhD Thesis: Roehampton University, 2009).

<sup>18</sup>Lepecki’s main theoretical argument in this publication is that “dance’s relation to movement is being exhausted” in *Exhausting Dance*, 1.

<sup>19</sup> Bojana Cvejić, *Choreographing Problems Expressive Concepts in Contemporary Dance and Performance* (Springer, 2015).

theoretical frame with complementary publications and texts such as *Moving Together: Theorizing and Making Contemporary Dance*<sup>20</sup> (2015) by Rudi Laermans and the PhD research “Expanded choreography - Shifting the agency of movement in The Artificial Nature Project and 69 positions”<sup>21</sup> (2016) by Mette Ingvartsen.

In the last chapter, I present my conclusions, summing up my findings and giving my own perspective on this issue. By specifically articulating and exploring my thoughts and critical reflections, I hope to make my own contribution to the ongoing debate in dance studies about what choreography ‘is’ and how it is practiced today.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Towards the notion of choreography**

In this chapter, I bring the notion of choreography as the key word in my line of argumentation in order to clarify the specific enunciation of my research question and my thesis title, retaining always in my mind the selected works that I analyze afterwards. To obtain this, I look back – briefly – to the broad category of dance and its transformative identity through the years with regard to definitions and its features. By doing this, I aim to arrive at the current period and justify why the term choreography suits the era that I focus on better due to the latest expanded practices, while always retaining a historical connection to the broad category of dance. I comment on the link between the terms dance-choreography. Within this orientation, I discuss further the notion of choreography and expose some of existing interpretations, as it seems to be as an open term that can be defined in various ways. After this, I deal to a greater extent with the genre of practitioners in the European dance scene (from the mid-1990s to the present) whose pieces can be categorized under the label of choreography, and at this point I intend to mention the ongoing dispute concerning the appropriate denomination of the meaning and

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<sup>20</sup>Rudi Laermans, *Moving Together: Making and Theorizing Contemporary Dance* (Amsterdam: Valiz 2015).

<sup>21</sup> Mette Ingvartsen, “Expanded Choreography: Shifting the agency of movement in The Artificial Nature Project and 69 positions” (PhD Thesis, Lund University Publications, 2016).

practiced of choreography. I will explore how they have evolved their artistic practices, as they do not centralize their creative route to the idea of movement, and how they position themselves in the art sector. This first part of my theoretical perspective is applied later to the cases studies of Ingvarsten and Edvardsen, as they present commonalities with this tendency.

## **2.1. From past to present; from dance to choreography**

As the central object of study in this thesis aims to explore the notion of contemporary choreography and its strategies through the lens of two specific works, it is necessary to revisit dance history and its evolution through the years up to the current era, where the term choreography has gained a central position in dance. This process provides a sufficient informative content to allow us to comprehend how the term ‘dance’ always alters its profile where it is defined using different terminology, to identify possible connective links among the different dance genres and successively to justify why the term choreography is proposed here as more suitable to the latest artistic tendencies, on which this research is focused.

Although the term ‘dance’ is not used in my research question and the term ‘choreography’ is the central terminology in my research trajectory, due to the expansion of the creative methods in the European scene after the mid- 1990s, is fact that a powerful interrelation between them exists, where their limits are often thoroughly blurred. A difficulty arises when a specific artistic piece needs to be categorized. Doris Humphrey in *The Art of Making Dances* illustrates this powerful association by proposing that “the art of making dances is called choreography and dance is made out of choreography”.<sup>22</sup>This demonstrates a strong intersection among the terms and an ongoing affiliation. However, at this particular historical moment that I seek to explore, the question arises as to how this has been reconsidered and why the use of choreography is becoming more dominant.

The entire history of the dance artistic field is a series of innovations and successive changes. Different terms define different eras. What connects the pioneers of every era is their ability to imagine and propose another version of the reality that is given to them. No future creative step cannot be made without considering that which preceded it.

Recalling the most influential historical moments – in a Western context – enhances our mapping to this consecutive replacement of terms and enacts a valuable way of conceiving how

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<sup>22</sup> Doris Humphrey, *The Art of Making Dances* (Grove Press, 1959), 40.

the body, its movement, and by extension the idea of what constitutes dance, has been rearranged. The classification of the boundaries of every period is not an easy task, but it is still essential to cite a short outline of these historical turns.<sup>23</sup> Isadora Duncan, with her focus on a natural and free movement, Rudolf Van Laban, with his idea of individual expression, and the rest of dance figures such as Loie Fuller (USA), Ruth St Denis (USA), Martha Graham (USA), Mary Wigman (Germany), and Kurt Joos (Germany) with their concern for free movement, are the fundamental figures of modern dance. Merce Cunningham with his rejection to the ethos of modern dance and his introduction of a choreography by chance, where any random phenomenon can be a potential agent for a compositional strategy, appears as the pioneer of the American avant-garde. Judson Dance Theatre with Trisha Brown, Lucinda Childs, Steve Paxton, and Simone Forti, with their betrayal of the conventional theatrical space and the established movement, identify the period of postmodern dance. Pina Bausch, later in the 1970s, with her German tanztheater, amplifies the idea of dance in a more theatrical version. William Forsythe's (Germany) post-modern ballet mixed visual arts as a way of breaking the strict rules of classical ballet. Jan Fabre's (Belgium) amalgamation of dance, theatre and visual arts and Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker's (Belgium) formalism, with a clear minimalistic tendency, are indicative examples of the 'Flemish wave'<sup>24</sup> in the mid-1980s that redefined America's and Germany's contemporary dance scene. These are some- of the practitioners (among many) that have contributed to the modification of dance identity. The central axis of all these different periods, from modern to postmodern, from dance-theatre to contemporary dance, is an incessant challenge to the approach that focuses on the kinetic aspect of bodies in motion, where a diversity of dance techniques serve and differentiate their particular desires.

Subsequently, in the mid-1990s, a new generation of choreographers based in Europe mistrusted the conventions surrounding the nature of dance and so enlarged their methodological strategies (an analytical approach to this genre is touched on below). Although the verb 'mistrust' is a strong term, it indicates the vigorous necessity of the practitioners to reclaim their position and the identity of the medium dance in the art world. The established movement from the previous generations was not the main issue. This is the period in which some began to doubt whether the term 'dance' was sufficient to host this wide range of

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<sup>23</sup> This historical outline is extracted from the publications *Rethinking Dance History: A Reader* by Alexandra Carter (ed.) (Psychology Press, 2004) and *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post-Modern Dance* by Sally Banes (Hanover, Connecticut, Wesleyan University Press, 1987).

<sup>24</sup> As Rudi Laermans clarifies, contemporary dance "was a lively and multi-faceted practice that was currently being renewed within Flanders itself" in *Moving Together*, 20.

practices. Mårten Spångberg in his lecture “Post-Dance, an Advocacy” in the Post-Dance conference in 2015 (as mentioned in the introduction) highlights the restrictions of the term ‘dance’ to a great extent. Spångberg says that, “what we know is that dance is no longer enough. Either the term dance becomes too convoluted and not host contemporary practices nor its relations to contemporary contexts, environments, concerns, ecology (in this wider sense), critical theory or philosophy”.<sup>25</sup> Spångberg’s refusal to accept the term ‘dance’ is based on this rapid displacement of the practitioner’s objects and the incorporation of non-dance creative methodologies merging with other disciplines, artistic or not. In the same text he proposes that a division might be constructive due to the overall mutation of the field, thus:

We need to divorce choreography from dance and equally dance from choreography. However, just because there is a divorce going on it doesn’t say there isn’t love, it is just a matter of breaking the spell and allowing choreography to be something else than the mother of dance or what is the other way around”<sup>26</sup>

A proposition like this is perhaps an attempt to break the imperative correlation between them. It might be a romantic approach, intended to pause any further discussions regarding whether something can be categorized as part of the dance sector. At this point, it seems important to mention that such an exaggerated viewpoint is consistent with the overall profile of Spångberg. Although he has a lot of expertise and is very active in the sector, he is considered to be the ‘bad boy of contemporary dance’<sup>27</sup> due to the way that he creates his own works, and his occasionally extreme comments. In this sense, his profile allows him to articulate these kinds of opinions. Without doubt, I find his approach very interesting, but, ultimately, I am not sure how realistic this proposed divorce is for the sector. It is my firm belief that, though here a clear distinction is drawn between the period in which choreography has been used and the rest of dance history, as discussed above, it should always be estimated as part of the same historical line when the latest practices are analyzed. The idea is that, due to its openness, choreography

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<sup>25</sup> Mårten Spångberg, “Post-dance, an Advocacy” in *Post-dance* edited by Danjel Anderson, Mette Edvardsen and Mårten Spångberg, (MDT, 2017), 350.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 359.

<sup>27</sup> This comes from the article by Lyndsey Winship, “Mårten Spångberg, the bad boy of contemporary dance”, as published at *The Guardian*, July 5, 2013.

Available on <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2013/jul/05/marten-spangberg-epic-dance>, accessed March 19, 2018.

symbolizes the more refreshed evolutionary environment of the same sector, rather than a denial of its past.

## **2.2 On Choreography: challenging the notion**

If the first concern were to replace the term ‘choreography’ instead of that of ‘dance’, this would require a more analytical investigation in terms of its possible definitions and the way that it is linked to the latest forms that I refer to in my research pathway.

Although the term ‘contemporary dance’ is apparently the most frequently used to describe the descriptions in an artistic program of a dance or of a performing arts festival or a dance house, it gives a somewhat one-dimensional perspective on this specific genre due to the wide range of non-established styles that it covers and its further extensions. Bojana Cvejić verbalizes her doubts on this identification when she explores works of the analyzed generation in her publication that I reflect in more detail in the subsequent chapter. She explains the limitations involved in the use of this term thus:

Contemporary dance serves merely to distinguish the present-day production of dance from the coexisting historical or canonical forms and styles, of, originally, Western European theatrical dance (ballet, “classical dance”, also referred as “academic dance”), or from other non-Western dance traditions as well as dance forms with non-art (social, therapeutical, etc.) purposes. <sup>28</sup>

According to this account, contemporary dance is directly relevant, having a changeful and moving nature that cannot easily support a limited or non-moving context. Cvejić’s doubts derive from the diversity of current practices, where the range of styles has expanded and the presence of movement is not the essence of the logic of composition. From this viewpoint, she suggests the term ‘choreography’ or ‘performance’ as an alternative (or ‘choreographic performance’) as a more apt option, in order to define what is happening in this challenging era and within its extensive context. Both affiliated terms indicate how the creative role and task of the choreographer has been repositioned and has been intermixed with tools or artistic

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<sup>28</sup> Cvejić, *Choreographing Problems*, 9.

methods borrowed from other forms of art or even from daily life. As she remarks, the choreographer “distinguishes her work from a traditional notion of craftsmanship in composing bodily movement”.<sup>29</sup> Through this development, the practitioner’s boundaries can be challenged and her creative perspectives augmented.

Currently, my agreement with Cvejić’s approach is becoming much more explicit, hence the choice of the notion of ‘choreography’ (the term ‘performance’ could being an alternative) in the title of this thesis. My short but still essential ongoing research in this field has revealed the necessity for using a broader range of terminology as a strategy to analyse this particular moment of dance history, especially in relation to the works that I examine in the following chapter.

Nevertheless, the term ‘choreography’ has been much investigated in the past<sup>30</sup> and lately has opened up to new ideas. Multiple definitions have been proposed by different practitioners, focusing on its contemporary form; and those who are active in this field, such as choreographers, dramaturgs, theoreticians or dance critics. Each approaches the notion in a different way due to their individual position in the sector, and their personal research and experience.

William Forsythe stated in 1998 that choreography involves “organizing things in space and time”<sup>31</sup>, and in another text proposes that “a choreographic object is not a substitute for the body, but rather an alternative site for the understanding of potential investigation and organization of action to reside. Ideally, choreographic ideas in this form would draw an attentive, diverse readership that would eventually understand and, hopefully, champion the innumerable manifestations, old and new, of choreographic thinking”.<sup>32</sup> Xavier Le Roy defines it as “artificially staged action(s) and/or situation(s)”.<sup>33</sup> For the theater director Jan Ritsema, “choreography is thinking about the organization of objects and subjects in time and space on

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>30</sup> Looking back, the term ‘choreography’, dating from Thoinot Arbeau’s 1589 dance manual *Orchesographie* by Thoinot Arbeau and Laure Fonta (Forni, 1888) and is consistent with the era of modernity, where the entity of the dancer’s body is strictly attached to her kinetic ability. Additionally, Susan’s Leigh Foster publication *Choreographic Empathy: Kinesthesia in Performance* (London: Routledge, 2011) is a useful tool for anyone seeking to explore the transformation of the term choreography over the centuries from its inception.

<sup>31</sup> Helmut Ploebst, *No Wind No Word: Neue Choreographie in der Gesellschaft des Spektakels / New choreography in the society of the spectacle* (München: K. Kieser, 2001), 165.

<sup>32</sup> William Forsythe, “Choreographic Objects” (2008), Available on <https://www.williamforsythe.com/essay.html>, accessed January 13, 2018.

<sup>33</sup> Corpus Web, 2001 online journal, theme “What is Choreography?” <http://corpusweb.net/tongue6.htm>, accessed September 6, 2017.



stage”.<sup>34</sup> Jonathan Burrows, giving another intriguing perspective, says that for him “choreography is about making a choice, including the choice to make no choice”.<sup>35</sup> Spångberg hints at a wide perspective, stating that “choreography indeed is a set of tools but that the tools are generic and hence can be applied more or less successfully to anything, both in respect of production and analyses”.<sup>36</sup> The sociologist Rudi Laermans points out that “the choreographic delineates precisely the writing space in which movements and non-movements are simultaneously fixed and rationalized, meticulously recorded and efficiently ordered”.<sup>37</sup> These are selected propositions regarding how the term can be defined, illustrating its vast and multidimensional identity. Thinking about these definitions I can observe common elements between them. Each work can be interpreted as a synthesis of elements of the aforesaid proposals.

If I try to synthesize of all the aforementioned propositions, it becomes beneficial to create my own definition of choreography, based on my individual comprehension of the topic. Thus, choreography is a vast creative imaginary platform for the articulation of thoughts, concepts, questions, actions, aesthetics and philosophical thinking. Practitioners are able to choose any selected compositional method or strategy having the potential to activate human and non-human elements, movement and non-movement tools or objects, in order to evolve a concrete performative idea in time and space, and as such to manifest their own creative thinking, allowing an open route for reclaiming the choreographer’s position in respect of expanded practices. This proposition regarding the term ‘choreography’ is applied to my selected works.

### **2.3 A non-danciness genre: To move(ment) or not...?**

All the above definitions indicate that the term ‘choreography’ has developed an ever-expanding sense (to which I have added my own definition) that promotes the idea of an unfolding field of experimentation where the practitioners grasp the chance to employ a multiplicity of tools and methods in their creations. This open platform for experimentation can be linked directly to the dance generation that turned up on the European dance scene from

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Jonathan Burrows, *A Choreographer's Handbook* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 7.

<sup>36</sup> Spångberg, “Post-dance”, 362.

<sup>37</sup> Laermans, *Moving Together*, 91.

the mid-1990s and is still active in our own temporality. Mette Ingvarsten and Mette Edvardsen and their selected works are part of this artistic genre due to their openness to compositional structure, as discussed in Chapter 4. As this genre constitutes our focal interest, it is essential to look at it in more depth.

Lepecki says that, from early 1990s, “a variety of choreographers coming from diverse training background, different social and national contexts, conflicting aesthetic lineages, and sometimes dissonant political views have dedicated themselves to explore the role of dance within the broader realms of art and of society”.<sup>38</sup> As a consequence, this observed divergence of the profiles of active practitioners led to a wide range of research trajectories, creative methods, aesthetic results and ultimately their individual proposals regarding their vision of the nature of choreographic. Each one activates her personal toolbox due to her socio-political background, her academic training (or lack/limited amount of it), and, most of all, her personal aesthetic preferences, in order to position her artistic identity. As a common place all question the medium of dance and its potential objects.

The new tendencies of the dance sector of the mid-1990s were not based on the precondition that movement must always be the focus of activation, but followed ideas related to the conceptual art of the 1960s and 1970s. The principle idea of this genre is of the essence of the creative process, leaving behind the traditional aesthetic and material content. This genre was a reaction against the commodification of art, as long as the desire to dematerialize a work and link it with a deeper philosophical thought process. Alexander Alberro in his publication *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity*<sup>39</sup> (2003) describes this movement as a type of rebellion against the regime of the institutions and the commercial direction of the art. The physical presence of the art object no longer mattered and thus there was a clear shift of the aesthetic experience. The term ‘conceptual dance’ (Konzepttanz)<sup>40</sup> was introduced in order to categorize these new developments in the dance sector in the mid-1990’s. As Pieter T’Jonck affirms in his lecture in *Klapstuk 11: bis*<sup>41</sup>, “Conceptual dance came to be perceived as a hybrid, a rival definition of contemporary dance that seems to be at odds with the more general practice of contemporary dance”.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Lepecki in Carter, *Rethinking Dance History*, 171.

<sup>39</sup> Alexander Alberro, *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity* (MIT Press, 2003).

<sup>40</sup> Fabius inform us about this term in his text “The missing history of (not) conceptual dance”.

<sup>41</sup> A meeting in Belgium (2004) organized by the choreographer Jérôme Bel due to the incident in Ireland mentioned in the Introduction of this thesis.

<sup>42</sup> Pieter T’Jonck, “*Klapstuk #11bis*” (Introduction). Available on <https://www.sarma.be/docs/809>, accessed March 2, 2018.

Extensive debates regarding the appropriateness of such labels have taken place. As well as ‘conceptual dance’, terms such as ‘anti-dance’, ‘non-dance’, ‘spectral dance’ and ‘reflexive dance’<sup>43</sup> are among those which have been proposed. I have already named a few of the representative works in my introduction. At this point, I consider two choreographic examples that belong to this artistic category among this long list. Xavier Le Roy’s *Product of Circumstances*<sup>44</sup> (1999) is an autobiographical lecture-performance that articulates artistic and scientific methods, using verbal communication and body expression in order to present an autobiographical route. Ivana Muller’s *We are still Watching*<sup>45</sup> (2012) has the form of a “reading rehearsal” in a theatrical space in which spectators read a script together and gradually, through their decisions, perform as a community, gradually changing the aesthetic as a result. Le Roy’s and Muller’s use as basic tool, the medium of language, as in my two main cases studies. Vera Mantero’s following statement captures the ideas of the aforementioned practitioners and the openness on their artistic choices, where a new range of objects activate their creative thinking. She argues that:

I am not a dancer, I don’t want to be a dancer, I want to do whatever I feel like doing, I want to do whatever is necessary to do. It’s not obvious to make dances in terms of theatrical, composed dance. [...] I don’t make dances. I make performances.<sup>46</sup>

In spite of sharing common perspectives concerning to the desire to reposition the objects of dance and the medium of expression, these practitioners do not wish to be classified under a common label. The observed amalgamation of various tendencies into this generation does not easily lead to a collective classification. Laermans points out that, “in marked contradistinction to the historical movement of Conceptual Art, the notion of conceptual dance is neither publicly defended and interpreted by individual artists, nor widely claimed by a self-conscious generation of dance makers who produce stylistically related works”.<sup>47</sup> Additionally, a great argument against this identification is the fact that, within the history of dance, every dance or choreography expresses ideas/concepts. A possible differentiation with the past, as Cvejić

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<sup>43</sup> Jonathan Burrows curated a debate with Bel, Le Roy, and Cvejić, titled "Not Conceptual," in the series of talks called "Parallel Voices," at Siobhan Davies Studios in London in 2007. [https://www.siobhandavies.com/watch\\_listen/2007/10/03/test/](https://www.siobhandavies.com/watch_listen/2007/10/03/test/). (Accessed November 2017).

<sup>44</sup> For more information see Xavier Le Roy’s official website <http://www.xavierleroy.com/>, accessed February 8, 2018.

<sup>45</sup> For more information see Ivana Muller’s official website <http://www.ivanamuller.com/>, accessed February 8, 2018.

<sup>46</sup> Vera Mantero in Ploebst, *No Wind No Word*, 54.

<sup>47</sup> Laermans, *Moving Together*, 206.

claims, is that “from the 1990s on, concepts are being thematised and discussed for every choreographic work of the new practices”.<sup>48</sup> According to this viewpoint, in this specific era the research of certain ideas is probably more exposed at the centrality of the way of thinking and creating. The practitioners, through their creative process, focus on investigating their ideas or thoughts by doing extensive research and combining this with theoretical tools, without insisting on a strict, concrete, high-aesthetical outcomes on stage. Sometimes concrete terminology sounds too generalized or too provocative or simply too inadequate. What matters more is to explore this tendency more deeply. Additionally, this line of argumentation supports my choice of choreography as it is can host unlimited artistic practices.

As common ground among these practitioners I can identify their desire to question the established medium of dance (a.k.a movement); their desire to do the following: to play with an abundance of new creative tools; to integrate variable materials (text, sound, objects, new media, projections etc.); to avoid the dark auditoriums; and to place the idea of dance in a different context by limiting elements that used to be constitutive of dance. Lepecki refers to this European dance scene by concluding that “the end result looks more like a subtraction. And what is being subtracted by the proposals from the European choreographers... is the word ‘dance’”.<sup>49</sup> This argument coincides with my speculations with regard to the relation between dance and choreography as presented above.

Throughout this chapter, I have shown how the dance sector always alters its profile due to new inspirations and the need for regular redefinition, aiming through this examination to reach the point of focus of my research. I have explained my choice of the term ‘choreography’ through the consideration of multiple definitions and I have tried to compose my own definition. Furthermore, I have drawn on the fundamental characteristics of this dance genre in order to shed light on the identity of this new era and by extension to support the performance analysis part as my cases studies.

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<sup>48</sup> Cvejić in Laermans, *Moving Together*, 206.

<sup>49</sup> Lepecki in Carter, *Rethinking Dance History*, 180.

## Chapter 3

### Theorizing a post-moving trend

In the previous chapter, I have argued about the choice of the term choreography in this thesis as a broad label that can cover all these new expanded practices that I am trying to explore, by looking as well at the relationship between dance and choreography. Moreover, I have exposed dominant characteristics (the remote from the incessant movement; the focus on concrete ideas; the integration of a wide range of materials such as text/language, sound, objects and projections; the expansion on the selected spaces of presentation, etc.) of this genre of dance, where the choreographers push the creative boundaries. In this chapter, I will take these initial thoughts one step further by attempting to build a theoretical frame which can deal with and support my main research question exploring the possibilities of contemporary choreography and the specific connotations they imply for compositional form. What is most significant in this artistic tendency is how the traditional focal point of bodily movement has been reconsidered. Thus, publications (extended or shorter) have appeared and still do appear, trying to articulate deeper what has happened in this field, to theorize it and at the same time to propose different analytical orientations regarding how we might discuss this subject currently and in the future. I will discuss mainly two selected publications – *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the Politics of Movement* by Andre Lepecki, and *Choreographing Problems Expressive Concepts in Contemporary Dance and Performance* by Bojana Cvejić – which seem to construct a critical debate reflecting on the topic. Additionally, I will refer more briefly to the PhD research “Possibilising dance: a space for thinking in choreography” by Efrosini Protopapa, as a complementary tool to Lepecki’s argumentation. Within this critical debate I will consider some basic points, their common places, and I will aim to construct my own framework that will contribute to my analytical approach of the two selected performances made in the following chapter.

#### 3.1. Towards a different ontology: towards a betrayal of kinetic status

As a starting point of this moving debate, I will draw on the influential book *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the Politics of Movement* (2006) by the eminent performance theorist

Andre Lepecki, an important essay on dance research that has dramatically opened the dialogue around the new strategies in the dance field and is, without doubt, a useful tool for supporting the design, of my theoretical line of reasoning. These strategies refer directly to the current generation in the European scene that I have already evaluated in the previous chapter.

The central argument of Lepecki is that “dance relation’s to movement is being exhausted”<sup>50</sup> and that in all contemporary choreographic attempts what is more evident is “the betrayal of the bind between dance and movement”.<sup>51</sup> Through his statements, he makes apparent the dominance of a moving profile in the dance sector, whereby a distinct division between dance and movement in the period examined takes place. The suggestions of ‘exhaustion’ and ‘betrayal’ are crucial for him; and their introduction into this research vocabulary clarifies a radical shift to what was considered the normative condition. Keeping in mind these characterizations, this dissertation investigates how these terms can be relevant to the cases of Ingvartsen and Edvardsen, in response to their singular approach to movement throughout their suggested set of practices.

All these new tendencies, where the movement does not appear as the central point cannot leave unaffected the ontological status with its relevant features. As a method of examination in this essay of this disengagement between dance and movement (or the other way around), he retrospectively analyses the fundamental features of modern’s dance ontology in terms of the sovereignty of incessant movement. To do so, Lepecki interrelates the nature of the ontology of modern dance with the general project of modernity and its historical references. The dominant trend of modernity is its kinetic aspect, as has been discussed thoroughly by the sociologist Harvie Ferguson in *Modernity and Subjectivity: Body, Soul, Spirit*<sup>52</sup> (2000) and the philosopher and cultural theorist Peter Sloterdijk in “Mobilization of the Planet from the Spirit of Self-Intensification”<sup>53</sup> (2006). In consequence, Lepecki applies these significant cultural theories on modern dance ontology, which also appears to be settled by a constant mobilisation. The American critic, John Martin (see introduction, p. 5), wonderfully captures the focal idea of modern dance’s ontology by stating that "all dance is essentially one in so far as it is the cultural externalisation of the inner, emotional force of some kind in terms of body

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<sup>50</sup> Lepecki, *Exhausting Dance*, 1

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>52</sup> Ferguson claims that “the only challenging element in Modernity is the propensity for movement, which becomes, so to speak, its permanent emblem” in Lepecki, *Exhausting Dance*, 7.

<sup>53</sup> Peter Sloterdijk, subsequently, emphasizes this orientation through his writings by stating that “Progress is movement toward movement, movement toward increased movement, movement toward an increased mobility” in “Mobilization of the Planet from the Spirit of Self-Intensification” , *The Drama Review*.50.4 (2006):36-43.

movement”.<sup>54</sup> This strong link between body and movement clarifies that the self-expression of the dancer’s body is the principle in modern dance and traditionally turns always towards the kinetic. The body’s movement has been the central motif in that specific temporal and aesthetic context, creating an inseparable relation.

The conventional ontology of modern dance has been deeply re-evaluated due to its constant changes. As Lepecki concludes, this shift in practice “performs a critical act of deep ontological impact”.<sup>55</sup> The meticulous study of the evolution of dance up to the contemporary choreographic era – as presented in Chapter 2 – offers new modes of conceiving the nature of the current dance’s ontology and provides the tools to conceive better the contemporary forms. A good observation from the past demonstrates a series of transformations in the history of dance and its characteristics, with all the further implications on its profile that these changes have brought about. Thus, in the context of ‘exhaustion’ and ‘betrayal’, the practices gain an identification of a ‘slower ontology’, a term coined by Gaston Bachelard in his essay on the *Poetics of Space*<sup>56</sup> (1994). Focusing on Bachelard’s slower ontology, Lepecki tells us that it is “an ontology of multiplications and intensifications, of energetic fluidities and micromovements, an ontology of vibrations and delays, an ontology in delay”.<sup>57</sup> This is to say that the expected energy of movement has been limited or, in the most extreme cases, has disappeared, where it has acquired an alternative form or forms, eventually being reflected through new elements in the creative process or the aesthetic result. The notion of movement is actualized through other selected compositional elements (such as text/language, digital tools, projections, sound and above all through a concrete performative idea) and is activated via the power of the imagination during the process. The idea of a ‘slower ontology’ will be put into question in the performance analysis part, as I aim to figure out which elements actualize this new type of energy instead of an incessant moving condition. I will focus, mostly, on the usage of the notion of language that is profound in both my examples and affect the whole creative process and, at the end, a way of attending to them and perceiving the context. This observed ontological turn, through concrete choices, seems to be an adequate way to examine what happens in these choreographic strategies.

Apart from the expansion of tools that I presented in the specific section on this genre, Lepecki focuses more on the initial identity of dance as ‘flow or continuum of movement’,

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<sup>54</sup> Martin in Lepecki, 3.

<sup>55</sup> Lepecki, *Exhausting Dance*, 1.

<sup>56</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, Trans.M. Jolas, (Boston: Beacon, 1994).

<sup>57</sup> Lepecki, *Exhausting Dance*, 64.

which seems to have been replaced by ‘kinaesthetic stuttering’, ‘stilling’ and ‘hiccupping’<sup>58</sup>. As the notion of stillness always comes into sight in these kind of practices, as a contradiction to continuous movement, it seems imperative to further extend my reflection on this. These radical practices result from the effort to comment and explore on the conventional notion of representation, which was the centre of the performing arts until recently, and at the same time function as an alternative proposal for a possible creative process. In Cvejić’s publication, the refusal of representation and its signification is discussed.

Talking metaphorically the presence of silence does not mean any denial of sound, and the presence of stillness does not mean any denial of movement, but on the contrary they both involve a way of rethinking the way a dance performance is constructed through different means, and to explore the field of microperceptions in the absence of kinetics. At this point, it is beneficial to draw on the notion of ‘microperception’<sup>59</sup>, where in an artistic context is not something perceived at the first level or interpretation of a performance, but is becoming more recognizable from its affects during the attendance of the spectators. This relates to the idea of a slower ontology and the energy that can be generated through other creative tools that I am interested in, to expose and examine my performance analysis section further. I will like to observe how they have repositioned the movement through their choices; and how an alternative form of movement is produced. Lepecki argues with the concept of the ‘still-act’, as coined by the anthropologist Nadia Seremetakis, appears to be that moment when established historical flow is disturbed. She says that stillness “is the moment of exit from historical dust”.<sup>60</sup> The still act is a choice that leads to a reinvention of the established historical elements and, by extension, to the traditional ontological status that I analysed before. It is a way for the dance sector to reclaim its position and identity towards new corporeal and embodiment compositions, and to repositioning the dancer’s presence solely towards a moving status. As such, in this new context, the still-act reshapes the normal modes of perception.

What I aspire to search for are all the noticed potential micro-perceptions in Ingvartsen and Edvardsen’s compositions that result from this ontological turn towards slower forms, where the idea of movement has been exhausted and ‘ideas’ or ‘concepts’ prevail.

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<sup>58</sup> Lepecki, *Exhausting Dance*, 2.

<sup>59</sup> Massumi states that “Microperception is not smaller perception; it’s a perception of a qualitatively different kind. It’s something that is felt without registering consciously. It registers only in its effects”. Extracted from “Of Microperception and Micropolitics”, An Interview with Brian Massumi” by Joel McKim. INFLexions No.3. 15<sup>th</sup> of August 2008. Available on <https://mydesiringmachines.wordpress.com/2015/11/29/of-microperception-and-micropolitics-an-interview-with-brian-massumi-15-august-2008/>, accessed June 2, 2018.

<sup>60</sup> Nadia Seremetakis in Lepecki, *Exhausting Dance*, 12.



### 3.2 From exhaustion to tiredness

Lepecki's publication opens a beneficial discourse in order to rethink the identity of a dance performance and assess the current principles in choreographic creation. In addition, it undeniably encourages the dance community to reflect on this controversial topic and to evaluate what kind of dance is being betrayed through these practices.

To discuss the idea of 'exhaustion' and what it means for the current profile of dance, as used here to approach this no-movement tendency, I refer in a short to Efrosini Protopapa's PhD research, "Possibilising dance: a space for thinking in choreography" (2009). Protopapa takes a step beyond the thoughts of Lepecki in an attempt to respond to and reflect on this controversial, much discussed book, and, by extension to identify the possibilities of such choreography.

Protopapa refers to Deleuze's essay "The Exhausted"<sup>61</sup> (1997), which makes an articulate distinction between what it means to be exhausted compared to what it means to be tired. The argument is that there is no possibility of anything happening in a state of exhaustion and no prospect in the future of further action. In contrast, in a state of tiredness, a state of exhaustion is never reached, where the task of possibilising is inextricably linked. In the context of dance, Protopapa reminds us that, though the practitioners seem to be tired (fatigue), they are not at a final stage of action. She explains that "is why and how we still move, still make and perform choreographic works; this is why we still watch and discuss; this is why we still teach, still learn, still write".<sup>62</sup> Thus, the potential for creation remains and a general creative action is involved in the status of being tired.

Protopapa uses a more open – and somehow more optimistic – terminology to examine the new practices where movement has been limited or has disappeared. However, although Lepecki's 'exhausting' dance can be seen to be a strong term, according to my own interpretation, this choice strengthens his argumentation and emphasizes the radical changes that have occurred in the sector rather than denying any further action from the practitioners. To consider this concept in a little more depth regarding this difference in terminology, the initial impression of a juxtaposition between these two theoretical approaches is not substantial, as at the very end they share common perspectives on dance as an era of change

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<sup>61</sup> Gilles Deleuze, "The Exhausted", in *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. M.A Greco (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

<sup>62</sup> Protopapa, "Possibilising dance", 20.

and redefinition. In the next chapter, I employ the context of these definitions (exhaustion and tiredness) and their further significations in greater depth, rather than trying to decide which one is more efficient. I am more interested in explaining my search for the essence of these propositions: how this ontological turn happens in my concrete choreographic examples and the rapprochement towards movement it entails.

### **3.3 On expressive concepts: Differentiating between making, performing and attending**

To continue the formulation of the theoretical framework, the recent publication *Choreographing Problems Expressive Concepts in Contemporary Dance and Performance* (2015) of the performance theorist and maker Bojana Cvejić extends the research on this hotly debated issue about the current nature and production of dance and prolongs the creative dialogue. Although in her writing she does not focus on a direct way to formulate the key theoretical terms (ontological turn, stillness, exhaustion or tiredness) that have been discussed extensively above, her focal interest visibly interrelates and interconnects with similar issues on the practices of choreography and its connotations.

This publication illustrates the relation between philosophical thinking and experimental choreographic practice. As a starting point for her research, she aptly reminds us of the principal idea of modern dance by mentioning the two operations of “the subjectivation of the dancer through (emotive) self-expression and objectivation of movement through the physical expression”.<sup>63</sup> To be more explicit, on one hand self-expression creates the necessity of the body (the dancer) to express itself and to move as an autonomous subject where movement is regarded as the trace of her subjectivity, while on the other hand the body becomes an instrument, an object of articulation. Reacting to this, Cvejić makes an appreciative attempt to challenge this established declaration by exploring the latest choreographic strategies and their creative methods, where desubjectification and disobjectification are recognized as the constructive points for breaking the dominant closed relation between body and movement. This principal is already positioned beforehand and as such strengthens Lepecki’s analysis on the shift to a moving ontological status.

However, Cvejić’s research approach is slightly different, and somehow more extended, in comparison to Lepecki, as she does not claim that the relation of dance to movement has been exhausted. Although her concept can be linked indirectly to my interpretation of the

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<sup>63</sup> Cvejić, *Choreographing Problems*, 20.

terms ‘exhausted’ and ‘tired’, indicating, as discussed above, a redefinition of the nature of choreographic composition, on which Cvejić gives her own perspective. The correlation between the body and movement is still to be examined through proposed choreographic works (where bodies and movements exist in abundance, though in some there is no motion or the motion is not produced by a living form on stage) in Cvejić’s dissertation, though this seems to have acquired a different orientation and, as a result, refreshed arrangements between them are emerging. As she specifically articulates:

Once movement and the body are not entangled in an organic regime defined either by unity in the act of expression or in the form of the object, their relationship does not exist by nature, nor it can be claimed as natural. It remains disrupted and hence constructed or reinvented by various procedures of adequation between the body and the movement rather than through the body-movement synthesis.<sup>64</sup>

This publication explores certain choreographic works<sup>65</sup> which, though representative of the current profile of the European dance scene, share as common ground the fact that the onto-historical synthesis between the body and movement is disrupting and denaturalizing. All these practitioners explore selected aspects of the conventional tendency of theatrical dance. Notions of body, time, space, movement and audience have been put into question via their compositional choices, where bodily movement is not seem the key element, as it used to be. Some of these notions and their manner of reshuffling are discussed in my two cases studies.

Cvejić, by following the logic of expression as introduced by Gilles Deleuze’s *Difference and Repetition*<sup>66</sup> (1968), builds her own theoretical framework in order to perceive the creative procedure of the selected performances. The structure of her methodology comprises three operations, where elements of these operations can develop my analytical perception of the compositional logic of my cases studies. First, each practitioner criticizes one or more aspects of the determined regime of representation (body, movement, time, etc.) which has been identified through practices in the field of dance history.

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>65</sup> Choreographic works such as those by Jonathan Burrows and Jan Ritsema, Eszter Salamon, and Boris Charmatz, among the others.

<sup>66</sup> Cvejić marks the ontology of Deleuze’s ideas by noticing that they “are problematic and differential: they engender thought in the form of problems and conceive or express the sensible by difference, rather than identity” Deleuze in Cvejić, *Choreographic Problems*, 48.

At the second stage she determines and poses one or more problems, as identified in the initial critical approach. Each problem addresses a certain pathway of sensibility and thinking, and by extension in composing a performance. According to Cvejić, each performance is structured by three differential modes of expression – making, performing and attending – where each one has the potential to pose a different problem in its own context and due to its specific necessities. These ideas express the problems or, in other words, paradoxes of the established arrangements – among body, movement, time, perception, attendance etc. – trying to give solutions. As Cvejić states:

Problem-posing is a matter of invention that entails a time of unlearning and ungrounding the knowledge of possibilities that reproduce rather than create unforeseen movements, bodies and relations.<sup>67</sup>

In the third operation they formulate expressive concepts. Compared to Deleuze's concepts these are not philosophically radical, remote from the broad notion of choreography and its existence. On the contrary, there is a substantial link to the practice, as they reinforce a further investigation of the dance field. They actualize these particular concepts within the frame of a specific performance composition. Talking further about these expressive concepts, it is imperative to focus on their distinctive nature, as their specific meaning is constitutional in the context of a singular performance, signifying that is not a repetitive creative choreographic strategy of a practitioner solely in relation to a particular work.

Reflecting on her theoretical approach, I investigate the concepts Ingvarsen and Edvardsen address in their works in Chapter 4. I do not intend to apply her methodological approach in a strict form, nor to search for connections with philosophical thinking. I am more curious to give my own response to their proposed concepts through my individual performance analysis and interpretation, as an alternative creative pathway. I will examine certain notions that have been repositioned in these contexts and made remote from the conventions of theatrical representation and kinetic status. I will scrutinize which choreographic tools alter the three modes of expression (making, performing, attending). These singular artistic routes, without doubt, has been constructed after reflection on the problematic of traditional forms and the established ontology.

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<sup>67</sup> Cvejić, *Choreographic Problems*, 220.

Throughout this chapter, I have drawn on theories (Lepecki, Protopapa, Cvejić) about this post-moving era. These theories are relevant to these contemporary choreographic practices that I will analyse in the following chapter, directly or indirectly. What I have attempted through this brief theoretical section is to find the associations among these proposed analytical approaches and to build my own framework. My main argumentation reveals a non-movement tendency, or better a rapprochement to a constantly moving status that leads to refreshed choreographic compositions and affects the elements of the creation.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Towards expanded practices and their poetics: On Mette Ingvarlsen and Mette Edvardsen**

In the previous chapters, I sought to build a framework about the profile of the recent choreographic compositions and its proposed method of theorization. Within this theoretical frame, as my central axis for analysis and extension of further thoughts, in the current chapter I will focus on the two selected choreographic examples – *69 Positions* by Mette Ingvarlsen, and *Time has fallen asleep in the afternoon sunshine* by Mette Edvardsen – and especially on their compositional choices. Firstly, I give closer descriptions of the pieces in my attempt to highlight their structure. Then, I try to point out the relation between my selected theoretical model and their practices. I will aim to show what they propose and define as choreography into these contexts, having always in my mind the given expanded definitions. I will deal with the choreographic turn in the refreshed ontological context, where I will argue about the way that movement has been exhausted (or tired) and has been replaced by the idea of language choreography in these two artistic frames. With this in mind, I will explore what kind of concrete concepts they propose in their contexts and what choreographic practices and tools are activated in their linguistic environment (making, performing). I do so in order to discuss the spatial choices and what these imply for the audience's engagement (attending). My research orientation and the line of my argumentation is also extracted from the observed commonalities between them.

## 4.1. Description of the performances

### *69 Positions* by Mette Ingvarstsen

The first chosen performance of analysis is Mette Ingvarstsen's performance *69 Positions*<sup>68</sup>, premiered in 2014. It is the first part of an ongoing series of performances on sexuality and the public sphere entitled the *Red Pieces*.<sup>69</sup>

*69 Positions* is a guided tour, as a format of an alternative version of a lecture-performance, signed and performed by the choreographer herself, in a constructed white cube resembling an exhibition space of contemporary art, where the performer and the audience co-exist throughout. Ingvarstsen is the conductor of the tour and the one who provides all the necessary guidelines during its actualization. The articulation of her research trajectory through the medium of language as a distinctive means of expression dominates and constitutes an element that subsequently seems worthy of discussion in an extended way. This performative tour deals with the notion of sexuality and leads the visitors through the space via archives of sexual performances, images, books, texts and films to explore and travel through different moments of its history. Everything is positioned as objects in a gallery. In her attempt to comprehend the position and the status of the body over time, she uses a time travel approach, taking the participants from the sixties up to somewhere in the future. The piece lasts for about two hours and is divided into three sections that each provides its own informative content, involving different qualities of interaction and different ways of being together in time and space. Although the conceptual content can activate an efficient vehicle in order for someone to grasp the frame of sexual liberation through its aesthetic and social associations; and can provide a chance to research aspects of

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<sup>68</sup> For more information see Mette Ingvarstsen's official website

<http://www.metteingvarstsen.net/performance/69-positions/>, accessed December 2, 2017.

<sup>69</sup> The cycle also includes her piece *7 Pleasures* (2015) and the conference *The Permeable Stage* (2016), a theoretical and performative meeting for reflection on the politics of sexuality. The first edition of it was a 10-hour long performative conference aimed to exploring the politics of sexuality, body and the private/public sphere with lectures, performances, interventions, panels at Kaiatheater in Brussels. Among the participants were Claire Bishop, Mette Edvardsen, Daniela Bershan, Eszter Salomon, Mette Ingvarstsen, Caroline Godart, Anne Juren and Gerald Kurdian. For more information see [http://www.metteingvarstsen.net/research\\_project/the-permeable-stage-a-performative-conference/](http://www.metteingvarstsen.net/research_project/the-permeable-stage-a-performative-conference/), accessed December 2, 2017.

the socio-political dimension in depth, I intend in this performance analysis part to focus on compositional structure and its further significations.

The first section is a reference to the sixties' aesthetic approach to sexual utopia. As a starting point of her lecture, Ingvarlsen welcomes the audience, gives a general overview of what is going to happen and clarifies the aim of this performative verbal tour. She begins with citing her initial creative idea to re-enact or reinterpret the performance of the American artist Carolee Schneeman's *Meat Joy* (1964) by re-staging the original cast of the piece. She presents the entire communication with Schneeman via email in the form of document focusing on the dissuasive answer received from her when asked about reconstructing the piece in this format. Instead, this is the moment where she starts to make a verbal re-enactment of *Meat Joy*, by making an analytical description of the score and the choreographic composition. In addition, she uses her performative body to show selected parts of the choreographic construction. In different moments, she invites the audience to physically participate by embodying the performer's positions, to improvise by following her directions in such a way as to interact. Beside the narrative and participatory part, the compilation of complementary tools in the space build up a vivid connection with this piece and its further connotations. The same creative strategy is employed in the reenactments of Anna Halprin's *Parades and Changes* (1965), the Performance Group's (1968) and Yayoi Kusama's naked protest outside the New York Stock Exchange (1968).

Moving forward, the second section of the archival tour is an exploration of the body and its sexual behaviour, as has been expressed from three past choreographic compositions of Ingvarlsen. *Manual Focus* (2003), *50/50* (2004), *to come* (2005) put into question the notions of nudity, pleasure and desire under the prism of the social structure and the idea of the collective body. In this section, similar practices and, by extension, tools are used as a method of restaging the pieces and exposing their fundamental semantic intentions. The choreographer's intimacy with their structure and the specific content and context becomes evident through her speech. A continuous interaction with the audience takes place, where the visitors are always free to move into the space, to change positions and alter the focus of their concentration (images, books, texts, etc.).

The third and final section is a demonstration of diverse sexual practices. She exposes old kind of practices and shows possible future methods, too. As common ground, all these practices, based on the use of non-human elements – mostly daily things (lamp, desk) or more strange objects, and even more abstract things (an imagined statue). The active participation of

a random selection among the visitors assists the performer to clarify her narrative pathway. This is the less participatory section. During the whole performance the visitors constantly change positions within the designated space and retain an intimate communication with Ingvarlsen.

In this alternative lecture performance, the referred compositional elements are put into question in order to enhance my understanding of the ways in which, in this post-moving era, the boundaries of what constitutes choreography have been extended. I will try to evaluate the fundamental tool of language as a clear choice that leads the verbal tour, the position of movement through the strategy of re-enactments, the selected space and the active role of the spectators.

### ***Time has fallen asleep in the afternoon sunshine* by Mette Edvardsen**

The second performance that is an object of analysis in this thesis is Mette Edvardsen's performance *Time has fallen asleep in the afternoon sunshine*<sup>70</sup>, premiered in 2010. This is a one-to-one site-specific performance where the action unfolds in libraries<sup>71</sup> and plays with the ideas of reading, recital and storytelling.

The idea is based on the science fiction novel *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury (published in 1953). This novel envisions a future society where books are forbidden and "firemen" are obliged to burn any books found. The books in this social context are considered dangerous and so the citizens must search for happiness remote from knowledge and thinking. Fahrenheit 451 is regarded as the temperature at which book paper starts to catch fire and burn. As a result of this condition, an underground community of people learn books by heart in order to preserve them for the future. Edvardsen was inspired by this novel and creates in this piece a library of living books.

Regarding the concept of the performance, the performers memorize a book of their choice and appear to be 'live' or let's say 'living' organisms who pass their time within the library. They hang around, walking, chatting with each other, sitting in chairs, exploring the shelves of

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<sup>70</sup>For more information see Mette Edvardsen's official website, <http://www.metteedvardsen.be/projects/thfaitas.html>, accessed December 2, 2017.

<sup>71</sup> When the conditions do not allow Edvardsen to present the work (absence of funding or time most commonly), she has been encouraging organizations around the world to present their own versions of the project.



the library, and observing what's going on. It seems that they have occupied the space in a discreet way the space. The visitors of the performance choose a book they would like to "read" and, when they arrive in the entrance of the library, the performer-book welcomes the visitor and presents herself by mentioning just the name of the book. "Hello, I am Bartleby the scrivener", the book says, for example, and then they walk together to the specific spot in the library chosen the performer-book choosing. This is the moment that the dancer starts presenting its pages using her unique expressive means, while eye contact is maintained throughout the recitation. Along with the storytelling, the library continues to maintain its own daily action. People walk around, reading their printed books, surfing on the internet, looking for books on the selves, sometime observing the action of the performance without disturbing it. To this extent, a multiplicity of actions happens at the same time, in spite of each one maintaining its own individuality and rhythm. Each slot has a specific duration (around 40 minutes) and when the time is over the visitor goes to the exit, accompanied by her personal book. However, if she is willing to listen to more pages of the selected book, she has the chance to return to the library to continue the narration. Language is again the basic tool for communication and transmission of the central concept, as in Ingvarsen's performance.

#### **4.2. A choreographic turn: two examples of "exhausted" movement**

At a first reading of these two choreographic works and their compositional elements, it becomes obvious that both can be recognized as characteristic examples of this generalised choreographic turn, this conceptualizing turn that has been realized from the mid-1990s in the European dance scene. The fundamental common ground of this turn on the dance field, as analysed in the theoretical part of this thesis, is a profound rejection of modern's dance ontology and its requirement for incessant movement, at the same time displaying an exemplary tendency towards the expansion of compositional tools. Before proceeding with a further examination of the particular elements that co-create their singular choreographic proposals, it is vital to decipher how they challenge the idea of movement and reevaluate the established ontological status corresponding to Lepecki's theorization.

From one side in Edvardsen's work the notion of dance/physical movement is totally absent in this one-to-one meeting. The performer-book and the visitor follow a short route by walking in order to reach the selected spot in the library space, and then they remain in stillness with only some micro-movements during the narration. On the other hand, in Ingvarsen's piece

during the verbal tour a distinctive moving part is involved in the composition. This happens when she strives to present parts of the re-staged selected works either only with her own body or collectively, when she prompts the visitors to interact with her. Although an integration of movement occurs, this is not intended to articulate the principle of self-expression of the inner feelings of the performer as in the past, but principally boosts the expression and evolution of the concrete concept (I will elucidate this argument in the following sub-chapter) of the performance and strengthens her speech. This approach relates with Cvejić's terms, 'desubjectification' and 'disobjectification', as the new direction that seem to occur between movement and body. To a degree, these two choreographers displace this kinetic conventional ontology by following singular choreographic methods, repositioning the established parameters of modern dance and, in such a manner they make remote the idea of dance as a pure bodily movement. Their practices confirm that movement is no longer regarded as the one and only constructive element that has to be presented in a conventional form in order to get a project the label of a choreographic piece. In Siegmund's words:

Every decision within the context of a choreographic structure to release through strategic absences the presence of dance (of dance as such, of the dancer's bodies, of dramaturgic phrasings, of structure), inevitably touches upon...that fundamental absence allowing dance to appear.<sup>72</sup>

Every choreographic choice is of equal significance and is categorized as a wider range of possibilities that hosts the notion of choreography in its extensive profile. The total absence (Edvardsen) or partial presence of movement (Ingvartsen) in these two cases seems a clear dramaturgical strategy arising from the particular needs of each performance.

Following these observations, it becomes apparent how Lepecki's attempt to theorize the so-called 'exhausting dance' and by extension Protopapa's approach of 'possibilising dance' can be applied in these two works. An open dialogue is generated, while a necessity emerges to draw on these theoretical proposals. Both indicate how the practitioners of this artistic generation seem to be 'exhausted' or 'tired' from few or more established elements from the past history of dance, and in particular with the idea of pure movement or the general approach of modernity. Nevertheless, as previously mentioned, they still try to find the energy to create

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<sup>72</sup> Siegmund in Laermans, *Moving Together*, 50.

and to be flexible in different artistic and cultural contexts, and to propose their own perspective of how this dance medium could be transformed in this current situation. These complementary theoretical suggestions apparently suit our specific case studies, as these practitioners suggest their own singular artistic context in order to host their concrete ideas by limiting or even making the movement remote and by impelling new tools in their individual artistic map.

This wide orientation on the choreographic field, where a displacement of the dominance of movement is evident, brings to mind how the composer John Cage conceives what music is and its potential components. He says that “the material of music is sound and silence”<sup>73</sup> and continues that “we should listen to the silence with the same attention that we give to the sounds”.<sup>74</sup> This statement is defined by the two extreme points of the same spectrum and offers a radical approach to a musical composition and its interpretation. In a dance context, this can be translated to mean that a creative dance spectrum has the potential to cover all movement (like sound) and non-movement (like silence) manifestations. All are possible versions of the same medium and all have a different functionality and ultimately lead to different interpretations. The practitioners in this mode of deconstruction of the traditional forms can choose which parameters they desire to actualize in their specific works in order to compose the desirable aesthetic result and offer an expedient experience, while keeping the same type of respect in their toolbox.

Going back to Lepecki’s publication, in the limited presence or the total absence of a clear kinetic mobility, a space is given to an alternative version of how a moving environment can be expressed. This is based on the idea of ‘microperceptions’ that can exist in relation to each unique form and can be found even in terms of the most motionless status. In both proposed choreographic practices, the living books (Edwardsen), or the guided tour (Ingvarlsen) create micro-movements through articulated words, the internal structure of the body and the embodiment of thinking. In the next section, I scrutinize how the use of the medium of language in both pieces activates a metaphorical pathway of movement and how, through this, an embodiment stimulation takes place.

Regarding this contemplation, both examples can support the idea of a ‘slower ontology’, as reintroduced by Lepecki (and coined by Bachelard). This type of ontology, which is significantly different from modern ontology, opens up the possibility of searching for way in which the idea of movement can be perceived in still-acts. An intensive physicality is not the

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<sup>73</sup> John Cage in Laermans, *Moving Together*, 32.

<sup>74</sup> Cage, *Silence, Lectures and Writings*. (Wesleyan University Press, 1961), 32.

presupposition in this reestablishment, where an internal energy of different elements (such as language) can modify the perception.

I have argued in this subchapter about the ontological turn though the shift in thinking about the moving condition. To close, I will refer to Invargsten's *Yes Manifesto*<sup>75</sup> (2004), where she utters a clear statement of how she desires to differ her position in comparison to the well-established parameters that dominated the prior ontology and how she envisions the dance field. By all means, in each choreographic work she tracks some of these conditions due to the desired creative structure. The basic principles of this manifesto can be easily identified in Edvardsen's work too. Through the following analysis, some of these elements are considered.

### 4.3. The idea of a language choreography

As the examination of Lepecki's and Protopapa's theoretical propositions has argued, both choreographic compositions are considered as part of this choreographic turn, while a repositioning of the traditional kinetic domination has brought its their own dimension to the relation between body-movement. Moving forward, Cvejić's theoretical model provides us with a suitable frame to look more deeply into their particular practices. As discussed above,

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<sup>75</sup> Yes to redefining virtuosity

Yes to "invention" (however impossible)

Yes to conceptualizing experience, affects and sensation

Yes to materiality and body practice

Yes to expression

Yes to un-naming, decoding and recoding expression

Yes to non-recognition, non-resemblance

Yes to non-sense/illogics

Yes to organizing principles rather than fixed logic systems

Yes to moving the "clear concept" behind the actual performance of

Yes to methodology and procedures

Yes to editing and animation

Yes to style as a result of procedure and specificity of a proposal (meaning each proposal has another "style"/specificity, and in this sense the work cannot be considered essentialist.)

Yes to multiplicity, difference and co-existence

This manifesto is part of her piece *50/50*, Premiered in 2004 at Mousonturm, Frankfurt. See <http://www.metteingvartsen.net/performance/5050/>, accessed February 2, 2018.

the choreographers in this genre pose certain problems in relation to established elements of representation, building concrete choreographic ‘expressive concepts’ in order to carry out their critique of selected elements, to formulate their ideas and ultimately to propose singular choreographic compositions. Making, performing and attending, as she argues, are affected through these concepts.

By striving to succinctly explain my own interpretation of the concepts presented in these works, I have demonstrated that choreography can be understood as guided tour or an experiential research presentation (Ingvarlsen), and as the moment of reading and attending to that reading (Edvardsen). Notions of body (in relation with movement), space, spectatorship are observed as the three basic elements which seem to problematize the practitioners in both examples, where they are trying to question and to redefine. Given this observation, I will try to investigate how they deal with these performative aspects through activation of specific tools and methods, as alternative artistic practices instead of incessant movement. By doing this, I aim to comprehend how they have reinforced the choreographic turn through their choices, with a focus on the elements identified above. Thus, through these observations I desire to comment on their individual differentiation in terms of making and performing (notions that are interrelated).

As mentioned in the introduction, a strong common key element is found both pieces – though in a different form – which involves language: a frequent compositional choice to this post-moving era, as a proposed investment that replaces the idea of movement and leads to a refreshed compositional logic with its relevant implications. Here, the language prevails as a vehicle for expression and as a fundamental tool for exposing certain concepts (guided tour and reading experience, respectively). This has been extracted and presented in previous detailed descriptions. At this point, it becomes necessary to insist that the use of language differs from how the same medium is activated in a theatrical context, as it does not aim to represent characters and their stories. In a dance context, the existence of text replaces the functionality of movement (with other selected objects or tools that appear in these works) and shapes the time and space under the open rules of a choreographic construction.

In Edvardsen’s performance, everything operates through language. The main idea of *Time has fallen asleep in the afternoon sunshine* is based on the logic of narration, where each performer memorizes a book of her choice and recites a part of it to the visitor of the living library. The selected book is the basic textual material which actualizes in time and space and finally functions as the medium for transmitting the central concept. The performer embodies and articulates the lines of the selected book that have been memorized. In other words, the

lines of the book penetrate through the bodily presence of the performer, but at the same time of the visitor. Edvardsen parallelizes the practice that follows into the preparation of this context with the creative method that exists in a process of a “pure” dance piece. She expresses her viewpoint in an interesting way by stating that:

To memorize books is comparable to memorizing dances and movement, which has been interesting to discover and to think about. Learning prose or poetry by heart, like dance, is not about acquiring content or information.<sup>76</sup>

Edvardsen’s argumentation attributes the logic of her choreographic composition and shows how she tries to be consistent in her own extended way. The working qualities and tools that she has acquired from more traditional forms of dance appear to be the field for inspiration and a base for appropriation in an advanced frame. The movement has been replaced by words and the incessant physicality of the performers has given space to a mode of stillness or a mental motion. Moreover, this statement implies that, for her, the primary artistic goal is to develop her idea into this chosen frame where she does not aim to push the performers to learn a text by heart, as an alternative form of theatre (as mentioned previously regarding its difference to a theatre text). There is no representational intention, her focal point being more the creation of a live experience. What matters more is the context, and not the literary content in this project, the connotations of which I refer to extensively in the next section.

To continue, in Ingvarsen’s work, language leads the guided tour as the whole procedure reminds one the idea of a performative lecture on issues of sexuality. As I remarked in the description, language predominates as the basic methodological tool in order to convey thoroughly and precisely all the collected information around the notion of sexuality and its different aspects through time. This is her selected creative way of directing the spectators to follow her route of thinking into the different stages of this performance and to motivate them to get involved in her proposed experiential participatory pathway. The existence of the language seems to be again, as in the living library, a highly conscious choice in order to develop the concept of the project. This aptly raises the issue that, in her own words, “what I know is that thinking in concepts and concerns that clearly relate to society is strong in my

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<sup>76</sup> Mette Edvardsen, “The Picture of a Stone”, in *Post-dance*, 215.

work and for the moment it feels important to expose those ideas in an explicit manner through language’.<sup>77</sup>

In this alternative lecture performance or in this speaking tour, it becomes imperative to focus a little further on a specific intriguing use of the medium of language. I am referring to all these verbal reenactments (the notion of reenactment<sup>78</sup> is also a frequent strategy for the latest practices) that take place during the realization of the performance. To define the term, ‘reenactment’ is a repetitive strategy in the performing arts sector – which is further applicable in various sectors such as in music and historical research – that aims to revisit pieces from dance history, to open a fertile dialogue with them and ultimately to reposition them in a new context.

This is a strategy that undoubtedly affects and shapes dance memory preservation. The most common route of this practice is a refreshed rapprochement through movement by reworking existing material, but Ingvarsten in *69 Positions* invents a verbalized creative pathway to revisit the past, as a substitute. She produces, or better reproduces, certain choreographies or artistic manifestations of the past through speaking. The words become the tool for transmitting their structure and exposing certain parts of these works. This seems an alternative way of deconstructing the kinetic form, an oral elucidation of the choreographic score, and eventually consists of her singular proposal of producing a new reality for the works from the past. In addition, she enriches the narrative part by presenting certain movement patterns through her own body or the bodies of the audience for a more thorough presentation. By offering the guidelines through her speech, boost the visitors to be part of her re-enactments. In all this, the rest of the exposed materials – images, books, videos – function as complementary but surely necessary elements in her creative trip into the past.

As a consequence, in these works it becomes apparent that the decision to create a linguistic environment is central. What both propose in these two pieces is the idea of a ‘language choreography’, though they do not reject their artistic background and its specific qualities. They maintain and negotiate through their own personal vision the basic structural elements of a more conventional choreographic composition. The concentration on the medium of language in a distinctly personal manner in my examples can easily be regarded as their

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<sup>77</sup> Ingvarsten, “Expanded Choreography”, 103.

<sup>78</sup> For further research about the notion of ‘reenactment’ you can see the publication *The Oxford Handbook of Dance and Reenactment*, edited by Marc Franko (Oxford University Press, 2017).

specific artistic proposal in the aforementioned choreographic turn. They both provide a new investment in terms of meaning within this creative process, as they construct the whole form on the possibilities that language can offer, leaving behind the dominance of bodily expression. In Cvejić's direction, the choreographers question the medium of movement and radicalize the way of making and consequently performing their material by reinforcing the possibilities that a verbal means can offer.

Of course, the proposed 'language choreography' is linked directly with my individual expanded definition of choreography in Chapter 2<sup>79</sup>, as an indicative version of its significations. I composed this definition in my attempt to make evident that the practitioners have an abundance of tools and methods at their disposal in order to elaborate their creative thinking and to compose their performative idea. These two works, undeniably, can be defined through this context, as they articulate their performative idea by activating selected tools (mainly language) and methods. As such, they reclaim the position of their sector without having to follow certain creative rules. Mette Edvardsen observes this increased tendency towards the notion of language and its extensions. She points out that:

There has been a return in aesthetic practices over the last years, and also in dance and choreographic practice, language, text and writing has developed in various forms within our art form. But again, this interest in text and writing is not a shift towards another discipline or art form (theatre, literature), but within the field and practice of dance and choreography.<sup>80</sup>

From my personal experience as a spectator, I very much agree about this tendency. I have already referred to it briefly in Chapter 2, as part of the observed characteristics for this dance genre that I analyse in my thesis (I gave two examples of this tendency). All of these choices demonstrate a trend towards the deconstruction of the traditional vocabulary of dance and a curiosity to invest in the possibilities that new mediums can offer, though this occurs in each practitioners' particular way of writing their compositions in their specific performative contexts. Thinking about the idea of a language choreography more critically, thoughts are generated regarding the classification of these works to the genre of dance and not to an expand

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<sup>79</sup> See Chapter 2.3, p.17

<sup>80</sup> Edvardsen, "The Picture of a Stone", 219.



genre of literature or maybe theatre. Venke Sortland in her text “Writing in three dimensions” about the work of Edvardsen raises her doubts on the task of writing and ultimately concludes that:

In Edvardsen’s case, however, this is immediately clear to me – for here the task of writing occurs in time and space and the text is permeated by the bodily presence (of both performer and observers). Or, as Edvardsen herself described it in an interview for *scenekunst.no* in 2015: “Choreography is a way of writing. I don’t write with pen and paper but by composing in space and time.” In other words, an interpretive space arises between changes in the text’s materiality and contextualisation and the time it takes to perform, making this work chorographic and physical.<sup>81</sup>

I agree with Sortland’s approach, as the total context in which any idea based on language and its specific operations into this frame need to be understood in detail. The evaluation of the specific context enhances a more adequate classification of each artistic project. This argument can be considered to be an additional valuable source to my previous demonstration of the recently expanded profile of choreography through the taking up of various tools, which in this case is language. Moreover, Edvardsen’s approach about choreographic composition is a further contribution to all the selected definitions that I have presented above. Thinking of choreography as a way of writing is about how one practitioner can view the creation of her choreographic score. Writing and its expression is a way to develop a vivid imaginary world in space and to offer an experience based on a specific creative idea that can always change within the performance timeframe. Laermans introduces an even broader association between writing (by extension language) and choreography, remarking that “every choreography indeed resembles a book – and once finished in view of the premiere it starts to dominate its environment like a law-enforcing text”.<sup>82</sup> Reflecting on this approach, a choreographic score can be prepared and exist as a detailed text and as an autonomous entity, without even having a performative version. Finally, the way of presenting this text in performance can be in multiple versions, according to the concrete intention of the choreographer.

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<sup>81</sup> Venke Sortland, “Writing in three dimensions”, (2017). Available on <http://www.metteedvardsen.be/texts.html>, accessed January 4, 2018.

<sup>82</sup> Laermans, *Moving Together*, 90.

#### 4.4. On space dynamics and its embodied affects

In the previous subchapter, I supported the idea of a ‘language choreography’, as a differentiated form of making and performing. In this section, I delve more deeply into how these concepts modify the attendance of the audience (in Cvejić’s terms), looking meticulously at how this is intensified through spatial choices. This modification clearly comes from their need to critique the established representational forms of spectator and space.

Beyond question, the selected spaces in which actions take place each work and host the choreographic idea as a clear dramaturgical choice that offers specific connotations and dynamics for the compositions. Both of the choreographers have rejected the conventional theatrical spaces or black boxes where traditionally dance pieces most commonly take place in these productions. Ingvarlsen has created a white moveable construction that reminds of a small-scale exhibition hall of contemporary art where a guided tour takes place. Edvardsen chooses different public or private libraries around the world without adding any further set design to the existence location. Concerning these two distinctive spaces, additional reflections can be generated regarding their operation.

Ingvarlsen in her PhD research “Expanded choreography - Shifting the agency of movement in The Artificial Nature Project and 69 positions” (2016), among the others, analyses the score of *69 Positions* via a detailed presentation of the compositional structure and a thorough demonstration of the dramaturgical strategies. She gives her own personal, theoretical and practical approach to the logic of her creation, where each particular element that concludes in the composition is revealed and their functionality investigated. According to Ingvarlsen, this piece has been created under the idea of ‘soft choreography’, a term coined by herself. She proposes that this type of creation is “an organization that would not rely on a clear separation between me and you (the performer and the spectator), the stage and the auditorium, an encounter and a constructed event”.<sup>83</sup> This signifies that her deep artistic aim to create that which cannot stand without the presence of members of the public and above all without the incessant interaction among human and non-human elements that coexist during the actualization of the creative process in time and space. In this sense, the choice of a space like an art exhibition hall without a stable auditorium is directly linked to her expectation of forming this proposed type of condition. This concrete performative space boosts the idea of the desirable nature of flexibility and launches the possibility of developing various expected

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<sup>83</sup> Ingvarlsen, “Expanded choreography”, 3.

or impetuous associations among the performers, the visitors and the rest of the performative material (archival objects). There is no a clear disjunction between the performer and the visitor in terms of space limits and the final result can ultimately travel in multiple directions. This makes evident that the aforementioned set design is not a random choice but serves the particular needs for the best possible evolution of the choreographic idea and its singular features. The performative space is transformed into a creative playground and serves the initial concept, where all the constructive elements that coexist in the space have an adaptable dynamic and are not determined by an absolute form. As a contradiction, Ingvarsten puts forward the notion of ‘hard choreography’, where the whole structure in such works is so accurate and predefined without having an open identity able to allow considerable changes or transformations at the moment of its realization; (though a dance piece can never be exactly the same due to its ephemeral nature, as the interpretation of the performers might change).

Thinking now about Edvarsdén’s performance and principally the library as the space which hosts the performative idea, it is becoming explicit how consistent this spatial choice is in relation to the basic concept. The choreographer aims to compose a living organism of books in their natural environment. The visitor is being predisposed from the very beginning of her attendance at such a location for what might occur due to the peculiar connotations of the surroundings and how this project relates to the category of books. As the project happens every time in a different library and geographic location that has its own specific history and aesthetic quality, a singular atmosphere pre-exists, and a natural scenography causes relevant feelings.

Searching for further implications for the progress of the process in such a spatial context, it seems that the notion of a ‘soft choreography’ can be easily adopted. As in *69 Positions*, Edvarsdén also creates a real time situation where everything can fluctuate due to the dynamics of the different relations that develop in the selected library. Again, the performance can never be exactly the same, due to the mental and bodily connection between the performer-book and the visitor, their internal communication, the surroundings of the library and the general action that unfolds around are components that affect the adaptability of the performance, which vary with each performance. Additionally, in this piece the memory of the performer can influence the performance in its own way in the recitation process and as an aftermath can affect the way the material is transmitted by provoking analogous reactions. All these factors generate multiple intensifications of the way a visitor can perceive the idea and the ways in which the aesthetic result can thus be affected.

Soft choreography is an open concept that provides a vast array of potentialities and determines diversely the rhythm of the choreography. This approach is reminiscent of another definition on choreography and its potential operation proposed by Spångberg, who suggests that “instead of thinking choreography as a set of generic tools, that however generic has strong telos, can we consider choreography a technology, a set of opportunities that are interrelated but non-directional”.<sup>84</sup>The choreographers play and interplay with the space, time, rhythm, the qualities of the performer, the disposition of the spectators and all the rest of the existing various tools. All these components are connected in various ways and can co-create an alternative version of the same artistic concept.

The idea of softness as a structural concept and as the constitutional tools for these choreographic compositions alters, it affects and shapes the perception of the spectators during their attendance. The intimate contact between the performer-book and the visitor in Edvarsen’s living library in a one-to-one meeting or the close communication – spatially and practically – between the performer and the spectator in Ingvarsen’s performative exhibition is unlike attending a conventional theatrical space, where the spectators stay silent in the dark auditorium without any mobility or further action. The spectator’s awareness in these two works constitutes a new challenge in terms of how someone attends to the performing arts in such refreshed contexts. The spectator, more than ever, has to develop an active presence (let’s avoid the term ‘interactive’, as this has acquired a different connotation through the years) in order to be immersed in the proposed concept or more simply to enjoy the time of her attendance.

As stated above, *69 Positions* consists of a moving part when Ingvarsen re-enacts parts of previous works, but without having such a strict structure. This, of course, does not imply that the frame is completely arbitrary, but that it is mostly based on the idea of flexibility in the moment of its activation, which entails risk-taking. The performer follows a certain process where specific guidelines are provided but where the participatory contribution of spectators that encompass the whole performance creates disparate possibilities of multiple transformations of the basic initial material. To be more explicit, the audience moves freely into the space and observes the material that exists around it, while in certain moments it can grasp the performer’s open invitation for participation in order to help her to evolve the performative tour. The audience will not have the same level of willingness to participate every

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<sup>84</sup> Spångberg, “Post- dance”, 366.

time and surely will not behave in the same way. The participatory contribution cannot be identical. Inevitably, the various actions provoke different reactions from the side of Ingvarsten, as she must adapt in a different manner to each repetition of the performance. The audience's socio-cultural background, a more or less intimate relation with the field of arts, the level of concentration, and of course the dynamic of the group are factors that formulate and modify the evolution of the procedure. All these time-based conditions transform the space and provoke multiplies dynamics, prompting the configuration of a particular type of collective behaviour. All the contracting parties are directed to interrelate and interplay consciously or not. On the other side, in Edvardsen's performance a more silent dialogue evolves between the two sides, as the visitor mainly follows the recitation of the performer. It seems that, in this case, a mental connection takes place that is powerful because of the evident proximity. The intimacy enhances the power of the imagination. I analyse below how this affects the visitors' perceptions.

In these two pieces, the choreographic compositions acquire the form of an experience, where the principles of representation, carrying a more oriented and somehow limited structure, have been abolished. Edvardsen proposes a reading experience where the performer-book has its own body and voice and transmits her knowledge or context by using memory. When the visitor meets her living book from the first moment, a personal relation starts evolving. Ingvarsten conceives a performative tour where she keeps the audience always alert to follow to her guidelines. Inevitably, in these two cases an encounter of intimacy between the performer(s) and the spectator(s) evolves. Regardless of how active the spectators are, their presence is crucial to the existence and evolution of each performance and acts as co-creator to the procedure. The visitors, like the performers, leave their trace in the space and, without them, nothing can actualize. A shared space is creative where traditional storytelling is reshaped into a refreshed format for transmitting material. Edvardsen talks about the experience that she expects to generate from this project, claiming in her lecture "Choreography as Writing"<sup>85</sup> that "I am interested in what traces a performance leaves and how it continues to live as an experience and materialises as a memory – and to challenge the notion of performance as transient and immaterial". As both of these projects are really intense, the audience cannot easily be unaffected, regardless of whether or not they like the final aesthetic result. The

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<sup>85</sup> Mette Edvardsen, "Choreography as Writing", April 6, 2018, organized by Dansehallerne (Copenhagen). Available on <https://vimeo.com/256053139>, accessed March 5, 2018.

projects propose to be treated as a living experience and to provoke motivation for evolving reflections, even after the end of the performance.

As new modes of attending have been proposed in our cases, brand new sensations are generated. Ingvartsen characterizes this specific work as a ‘discursive practice performance’. According to her, this performative genre has a dynamic functionality in this frame, as the production of the discourse has the ability to shape a new reality, or, in other words, to form parallel micro-choreographies through the power of the imagination in her performative tour, through the forceful description of past works offers the chance to the visitors to imagine how was their score. The narrative discourse enhances the creative thought of the visitors to produce further images in their head that coexist with that which exists during the real time of the performance. A similar functionality can be applied to Edvardsen’s narrative tour, as the visitors can produce images in response to the recitation of the books. Rudi Laermans explicitly refers to this tendency to shape their artistic forms around certain ideas/concepts. He suggests that, “dance ideas are performed thoughts, with every idea being a multiplicity distributed over countless events and immanent to a great variety of precepts and affects”<sup>86</sup>. It is as if an imaginary journey evolves that constructs multiple variations of elements and enriches perceptions during the evolution of the process.

In this Chapter, I have focused on the two selected works, beginning with analytical descriptions formulated by using elements of the theoretical propositions. I traced their compositional elements in my attempt to outline how they reposition the established idea of movement (Lepecki, Protopapa), as part of the observed choreographic turn of the examined dance genre. I have sought to examine what they propose as expanded choreographic practices and how they construct their performative ideas, having as a key tool the medium of language. Lastly, I have insisted on their spatial choices and the role of the spectators as fundamental constructive aspects in their creations.

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<sup>86</sup> Laermans, *Moving Together*, 220.

## Conclusion

To summarize, the aim of this thesis was to show how the notion of choreography (by extension the dance sector) after the mid-1990s in the European dance context expanded its practices in various directions when the emergence of a wide range of practitioners redefined dance. Choreography, as part of the historical outline of the dance sector, has opened up the possibilities of what the practitioners could create in this ever-expanded era. I have mainly argued that the choreographers have extended their creative tools and methods remote from the established incessant movement of a traditional dance context. As such, a post-moving era appeared (though they are still practitioners that use movement as the basic compositional tool).

To sum up my research trajectory, I have briefly looked at the way dance always alters its profile due to the propositions of its representatives during different time periods. I have given some selected definitions of the term choreography in order to justify my conscious choice of this term in my thesis title and structure. Having exposed these various approaches, I composed my own definition based on my personal view in relation to its observed characteristics and potentialities. Thereafter, I focused in depth on the fundamental features of the dance genre that appeared in the European dance scene after the mid-1990s and is still currently active. Furthermore, I have analyzed conceptual tools from recent theories that scrutinize this post-moving era (Lepecki, Protopapa, Cvejić) as a way to extract constructive theoretical arguments that would support my performance analysis section. After the theoretical part, I focused on my selected choreographic works (*69 Positions* by Ingvarthsen and *Time has fallen asleep in the afternoon sunshine* by Edvardsen). By scrutinizing their compositional elements, I have examined what they have proposed through their creations as expanded choreographic practices. What I have mainly observed is the use of the medium of language as their central compositional tool in a distinctive way in each case and so have proposed the idea of a 'language choreography'. Having this in my mind, I have evaluated, its implications on making, performing and attending as a method to make my performance analysis more coherent and critical.

Taking into consideration the aforementioned pathway, it is important some last thoughts, as a way of doing my personal critical reflection about this post-moving era. Focusing on the recent developments, I think that the choreographic sector is undeniably a broad platform that can host any performative idea without specific limitations or restrictions. What becomes evident, is a displacement of the medium of dance towards expanded directions. This

displacement is related to a distinct removal from the established element of movement and the incorporation of a great variety of tools, objects and methods. Talking about this displacement, I want to make clear that, though the kinetic element has been limited or even disappeared, this does not mean that the practitioners reject or do not respect their past and the tools that this is linked to. The rich vocabulary of their dance educational background or the archival material from dance history can always function as sources of inspiration and re-use. This tendency is linked more with a need for redefinition, re-articulation, development and change rather than a denial of previous modes of practice.

The new methods indicate the necessity for choreographers to reclaim their position in the art world. This need is combined with a hybrid environment which is gradually evolving, where the boundaries among the various art sectors are totally blurred in the contemporary era. The choreographers manifest, in this way, their desire to open a creative dialogue with practitioners from other, artistic and no-artistic, sectors. As such, methods of exchanging and sharing of ideas, thoughts, tools and methods always come into sight. The ambition to reposition and expand of their artistic strategies seems a beneficial way of shaping a platform where the professional boundaries can be challenged. For me, it is significant how the cultural practices can be shaped, influenced and primarily improved through interactions with others that probably have similar and complementary interests and, of course, through collaborative methods. This turn to cultural production can construct alternative structures to approach and envision the established forms. Under this prism, this post-moving era is a conscious choice and by extension a political act, repositioning the sector of dance in the art world. Their refusal to the ongoing mobility is like a protest about the established velocity of a neo-liberal model.

Reflecting on the notions of displacement of the medium and reposition of the choreographers as artists, I can state that the incessant exploration of artistic strategies and the tendency for radicalization enhances the identity of the sector to stay vivid and promising towards new refreshed perspectives, as a dynamic sector that can continuously redefine itself. At any time, the choreographers can propose and add something brand new to their artistic field, following the needs of the art world, the socio-political structures, the demands of each era and of course their personal visions.

Considering the future of choreography, I do not know if we are going to a better or worst era, though it will certainly be a different one. The reconstruction of previous ideas or the advent of new ones can always keep the choreographers alive to a different artistic reality. With respect to the previous era, artistic research is an incessant process that has no limits and there is room for improvement and change and as such it creates a fertile pathway for the production



the knowledge. A return to a pure moving era is also a possibility. The future is yet to come and we cannot predict it. But, any transformation is desirable as it provides us with the time and space to enhance our interest for further research, critical thinking, reflection and to retain a fruitful dialogue. To close this essay, I choose to draw on John Cage's words, "I can't understand why people are frightened of new ideas. I'm frightened of the old ones".<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Cage, *Silence*, 85.

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## Appendix

### *69 Positions*<sup>88</sup>



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<sup>88</sup> Photos extracted from the official website of Mette Ingvarsten. Available on <http://www.metteingvarsten.net/performance/69-positions/>, accessed May 2, 2018.

*Time has fallen asleep in the afternoon sunshine*<sup>89</sup>



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<sup>89</sup> Photos extracted from the official website of Mette Edvardsen. Available on <http://www.metteedvardsen.be/projects/thfaitas.html>, accessed May 2, 2018.