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KINESIS 8

ISBN (Paperpack) 978-952-7218-18-1
ISSN (Paperpack) 2242-5314
ISBN (PDF) 978-952-7218-19-8
ISSN (PDF) 2242-590X

PUBLISHER
University of the Arts Helsinki, Theatre Academy

GRAPHIC DESIGN
BOND Creative Agency
www.bond.fi

COVER IMAGE
Sammi Landweer

LAYOUT
Atte Tuulenkylä, Edita Prima Ltd

PRINTED BY
Edita Prima Ltd, Helsinki 2017

PAPER
Scandia 2000 Natural 240 g/m^2 & Scandia 2000 Natural 115 g/m^2

FONTS
Benton Modern Two & Monosten

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Introduction

A study of the literature of the past thirty years, particularly how dance scholars and artists alike have theorized risk-taking in dance, shows that risk-taking is very often alluded to as an engagement with or the pursuit of the unknown. It also shows that such engagement or pursuit is more present in improvisation than in choreography, improvisation being often articulated in opposition to choreography[1]. In this relation of opposition, choreography is identified with planned and previously decided-upon forms and improvisation as a practice in which at least some decisions are made in real time, spontaneously. In short: the more unplanned, unknown and spontaneous the action, the more risk-taking will be involved.

Study of the same literature shows, in addition, that risk-taking in dance (engaging with the unknown) is often alluded to in relation to other notions such as trust, failure, listening, control, decision-making, and responsibility. These, however, are not often exposed in detail or in context. My intention here is to shed more

1 Choreography (from the Greek khoreia 'dance' + graphein 'to write') is often conflated with other terms such as (dance) composition, writing, inscription, structure, law, the given and even product creativity. Examples abound of how authors move seamlessly between the terms composition and choreography, using them as synonymous. Doris Humphrey's book, *The Art of Making Dances* (41, 45, 46, 66, 92), is a good example; another is dance scholar Susan Leigh Foster's *Reading Dancing,* in which, despite the fact that Foster does *not* present choreography and composition as the same, the close proximity of the terms in the text leaves room for ambiguity (99-185). Foster becomes more explicit in her genealogy of the notion of choreography in her later book *Choreographing Empathy.*

light on these notions and, by extension, to investigate the nature of risk-taking in dance beyond the assumptions regarding the alleged opposition between improvisation and choreography. I will do this by means of an examination of two pieces, *Faust* (1993) by American Mary O'Donnell (Fulkerson), a dance for thirteen dancers that is highly structured but clearly improvised, and *Pororoca* (2009) by Brazilian Lia Rodrigues, a dance for eleven dancers that is meticulously choreographed but often perceived as improvised[2].

My choice of the work of these two choreographers is, other than my involvement with O'Donnell's *Faust* as dancer and a profound admiration for the pioneering work of both, based on the fact that both choreographers have made pieces that, in their overall form, are closed (set), but both employ open and non-prescriptive strategies to come to it. It is how different their strategies to set the overall form are that is productive for my attempt to unsettle the usual opposition between choreography and improvisation. It will also help me show that an understanding of what risk-taking in dance entails becomes clearest when one perceives improvisation and choreography as always related dynamically, tangled up in the various ways of knowing that any one dance fosters and requires. This includes an awareness of the potential encounter with the unknown *within* the dance. Thus, even in a dance as meticulously choreographed as Rodrigues' *Pororoca,* improvisation will always take place, however minimally. In other words, here I propose that improvisation and choreography, as well as the unknown and the known, are dimensions of any dance danced by a human, dimen-

2 One can refer to their biographies and a list of their works in the Appendix section at the end of the book.

sions that are always present, but to different degrees, depending on the dance. Moreover, these differing dimensions are never fully determining of any one dance, because a dance is always more than the sum of its dimensions. Consequently, risk-taking itself cannot be fully known *a priori* either.

My choice of the work of these two choreographers is also based on their approach to improvisation, the scope of their work and the vast web of references they make use of and produce. These enable me to make my point about improvisation and choreography being differentially entangled (not in a relation of opposition) and, following from this, that knowing and not knowing—also differentially entangled—condition, but cannot determine whether risks that matter to the work are taken or not. Thus, following sociologist Ulrich Beck[3], I here propose risk as a highly hybrid and dynamic object.

Clearly, the above characteristics are not unique to *Faust* and *Pororoca*. One can find similar methodologies that weave materials set in advance with improvised materials in real-time in the work of many choreographers, as, for instance, in the work of William Forsythe. A crucial difference, however, between Forsythe's work and *Faust* and *Pororoca* is that in his choreographies the movement materials used are often highly codified at the level of form, following well-known dance techniques (ballet) that are intimately shared, if not by the whole ensemble then by most of the dancers. In *Faust* and *Pororoca*, arguably more in *Faust*, dancers do not share a common heritage in terms of formal training and so the movement

3 Beck drew on Bruno Latour's Actor Network Theory. See, for example, Beck's *World at Risk* (2011), Deborah Lupton's *Risk* (1999) or Zinn's Social Theories of Risk and Uncertainty (2008).

material they as a group produce is not only a huge mix of different techniques and styles but also different levels of proficiency in these. This makes reading the works—as an audience member and as dancer within the piece—a challenge, less easy for one dancer to predict what another dancer might do in each moment. This is more so in *Faust*. Moreover, the way these works make use of improvisation is not to be confused with what can be found in a contact improvisation jam where the issue of repeatability of movement forms or patterns is very different. For example, a movement form might repeatedly re-appear in a contact jam, such as a roll over the back of a body or a lift, both of which might have been practiced beforehand in other similar circumstances, but are not consciously planned, as is the case with specific movements in *Faust* and *Pororoca*, more so in *Pororoca* than in *Faust*.

Another reason for choosing these two works concerns the demands put on the dancers, demands contingent to the problems posed in each piece. In *Pororoca* the problem is how, in an almost entirely meticulously written choreography, to maintain the original freshness and vulnerability occasioned not only by the close encounters between dancers during the creation process, but also by their experience of rehearsing the work in the context of a Brazilian favela. In *Faust,* the problem is how to act according to the paradoxical principle *Responsible Anarchy* (RA), to fulfill the overall formal requirements of the work without knowing exactly how. More on this below.

Yet another reason for choosing these two works is that freedom and subject emancipation in them do not arise from so-called spontaneous self-expression or resistance against the mainstream conventions of art, as was the case in early modern dance. Both choreographers undoubtedly experiment with the past, but do not

reject it outright. Freedom is neither to be found in the idea that movement can somehow be objectified as if there was no subject 'doing' it, as was the case in the 1960s. Moreover, neither are these works necessarily a criticism of or an exhibition of distrust of theatrical representation, nor an attempt to challenge the audience's recognition of what is depicted or performed on stage—as was found in the 1990s and early 2000s—although both works can be said to be open as to how they can be understood and interpreted, as is consistent with their non-prescriptive methodologies. Lastly, the seventeen years separating the making of these two works capture a certain shift from economic abundance to scarcity, concurrent with the growing omnipresence of neoliberal values and their unwilling and 'almost innocent'[4] internalization by artists, illuminating the kinds of risk-taking engaged with by the one choreographer and perhaps not by the other.

It is important to mention that I here approach improvisation as a critical participant observer. My long-term experience in the studio, on stage and in higher vocational education affords me detailed insight into the meanings the practices of performing, thinking, and teaching improvisation are infused with. I have also used an internal conflict[5] in which I simultaneously understand, identify with, *and*

4 I here borrow the expression 'almost innocent' from theater director Jan Ritsema, who in a Q&A session for *Spike* said the following: "Artists are the expression and incarnation of western values like free individualism. They carry these values inherently, transporting and transferring them almost innocently. They are missionaries of capital often disguised as its opponents. In this sense, they are representatives of capital's perversity (...) all by themselves, but not without capital holding power over the profits. Instead of slaving for somebody else, many more people will become their own slaves. Artists seem to be the explorers, guinea pigs, and teasers for this new economy."

5 I here borrow the word 'conflict' from how Duncan Gilbert (aka Doran George) describes his own experience in the same context.

reject the usual rhetoric of and around improvisation. This arose because I learnt improvisation in an environment in which it was thought that one should either forget or unlearn traditional dance training and ideals, because there was a belief that these would diminish one's creativity as well as hinder the so-called 'naturalness' of the body. In this context, improvisation and the somatic training strongly accompanying it became a labor by means of which I should 'undo' myself to become another self, supposedly better, freer and as such also more capable of a creativity that would produce novelty. Respectable as I was, coming relatively fresh from a non-West European and non-North American context, I tried undoing myself, unlearning what I had learnt and, in so doing, I undoubtedly found myself acquiring relevant knowledge, such as how to improve my anatomic alignment and enhance my movement efficiency. However, I was never able to fully buy into this 'undoing' simply because I could not propel myself towards performing an ideology I did not fully understand—due to the lack of contextual self-criticism exercised by some of those disseminating this ideology—nor, after reflecting on this, could agree with. I could not fully say yes to a culture that could not embrace who I was and where I came from. Most importantly, I could not embrace a culture that thought itself in the position to suggest, and even prescribe, what personal and artistic freedom should be or look like. Clearly, I do not think freedom is 'something' one must be educated into, but rather 'something' education is for.

Much time has now passed and I have come a long way in coming to terms with my internal conflict. Dance improvisation and the somatic techniques accompanying it have continued to develop and have generally become an integral part of the mainstream dance culture. However, not much has changed in the way improvisation

is perceived, especially by younger dancers, who often lack critical knowledge of the past and, seduced by an uncritical and dated rhetoric that promises freedom, equality, originality and authenticity, end up reproducing a tale born in the 1960s and 1970s that today has become substantially more complex. Radical forms of the past do not necessarily provide us with the tools to deal with the present. This book therefore builds on questions I have asked for many years about the assumptions of the culture in which I learnt improvisation, assumptions that, despite work done on many fronts, persist. Part of my motivation in undertaking this research has been to at least expose these assumptions.

Closely connected to the above, in this book I rehearse examining another claim, namely that for dance improvisation to attain a status as an art practice that is affirmative and critical, its practitioners must, counter-intuitively perhaps, rehearse resisting some of its most celebrated attributes, such as spontaneity, freedom, flexibility, autonomy and immediacy, and pay more attention to something one usually ascribes to choreography: conscious knowing and planning. The reason for this is that in advanced capitalism[6] the very attributes celebrated in improvisation fuel a flow of production that does not strengthen the position of the artist and their work. This is not a new or exclusive-to-dance-improvisation phenomenon, but in advanced capitalism it has undoubtedly become pervasive in unprecedented ways. Could the labor dancers engaged with inside the two choreographies I examine here tell us something about risk-taking beyond dance and our ability to counter such flow? My

6 Advanced Capitalism here refers to today's stage of Capitalism and its pervasiveness throughout. The term overlaps, in various degrees, other denominations such as neo liberalism, financial capitalism or post-Fordism.

tentative answer to this question is that if improvisation is to be more than just a means to an end, or a makeshift, it must also involve a kind of planning that is fugitive (following Professor of Strategic Management Stefano Harney and Professor of Performance Studies Fred Moten) or choreopolitical (following dance scholar André Lepecki). Risk-taking then becomes more than a negative force one must avoid, a demand one must obey or a commodity that sells. It becomes a dynamic and positive force, one that enables transformation beyond the individual self.

To frame the claims and propositions I make in this book more sharply, in what follows I will elaborate a bit more on how I see the imbrication between dance improvisation and advanced capitalism, the practice of improvisation itself, risk-taking in the arts as well as ideas that are relevant to the work of O'Donnell and Rodrigues. In the end, I briefly outline how I worked towards this book as well as its structure.

0.1 Knowing–Not knowing and Responsibility

One can safely say that improvisation and risk are ubiquitous notions—they are everywhere—and that we know but a small fraction of all that there is to know of what was, is or will be. In this book, I fully acknowledge that not knowing is the mode in which we mostly find ourselves. Refusing to acknowledge this would be a delusion, necessary at times, granted, but nevertheless a delusion. That said, I deliberately chose to move away from the notion of the unknown (or not knowing) as being the main motor behind improvisational risk in dance. My main reason for this is my uneasiness with the claim that the practice of improvisation and the not knowing attached to it (in my view, too quickly and uncritically) is synonymous with or

leads to individual freedom; a freedom that apparently also liberates one from responsibility or obligation towards the other.

The much-cited passage from Spinoza (Ethics III, Prop. 2, Scholium), positing that one can never totally understand or know in advance what a body can do, what its potential is, has often been put forward as a way of explaining the alleged inability of one person to take responsibility for what the body of another can do. Dance scholar Ramsay Burt's lecture "Reflections on Steve Paxton's Magnesium" is an example of this, where he argues that, referring to the above-mentioned passage from Spinoza, there is a kind of responsibility that is not so much about obligation or duty, but one that comes from an open, creative, ethical way of thinking.[7] In 2009, Burt explicitly refers to Spinoza to posit that the potential of the body always exceeds our understanding of what our bodies can do (*What a Body can Do*, 205) [8]. Similarly, but focusing on the ethical dimension of this lack of understanding, scholar and philosopher Philipa Rothfield convincingly points to the fact that, because of this lack of understanding, one can never know *a priori* the 'good' of the body either. 'Goodness' for her inheres in the body's increasing power to act. Thus, in an encounter with others, the body can become more or less powerful (potent)[9].

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7 Lecture given on Apr. 6, 2011 at Tanz Quartier in Wien. Web. 02 Nov. 2015 <http://vimeo.com/22515367>. Burt further elaborates on this in his latest book *Ungoverning Dance,* where he proposes that responsibility, not a duty in a legal sense, rather "entails an openness to difference that manifests itself in an inclination beyond the self towards the world" (234).

8 Essay published in Burt and Birginshaw (2009) *Writing Dancing Together.*

9 Social scientist Jamie Pitman sheds light on what this 'more or less' good entails in the political philosophy of Spinoza. According to Pitman, one can understand power as *potestas* or *potentia*. *Potestas* is power that is fixed, constituted and

Other prominent authors, such as philosopher Brian Massumi in his essay "Do you know what a Body can do? # 2", also refer to Spinoza's *Ethics* to shed light on the potential of the body and one's inability to ever know this potential fully. Massumi provides revealing, rigorous and highly differentiated accounts of how this is *indeed* so. He also acknowledges conscious thinking and reason as being constitutive of experience, but seems to choose to focus his analysis of human bodily experience in the moment before it becomes conscious.[10] He focuses on instances in which conscious cognition and deliberation would clearly either be a hindrance to the action performed. From this perspective, one could say that Massumi privileges affect over conscious cognition. Affect, and the unknown as something language cannot properly capture, because affect is faster than conscious thinking and the unknown omnipresent[11].

I entirely agree that language cannot fully capture either affect or the unknown. However, I do not think that not fully knowing what a body can do or what its potential is leads to an inability to consciously know what a body can do, certainly not in highly structured approaches to improvisation such as the ones I examine in

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stands for a transcendent authority; it is rational and deals with rights and wrongs. *Potentia* on the contrary is power that is fluid, dynamic and constitutive; it is immanent and stands for self-affirmation, not, however, based on ideas of what is right or wrong, but on situated experience. It is pragmatic, contingent. *Potentia* is the power both Burt and Rothfield refer to.

10 I owe this insight to Evelyn Wan's Research Master Thesis: *The Temporality of Methodologies: Re-reading Radical Empiricism, Phenomenology and Process Philosophy through Dance*.

11 Artist and philosopher Erin Manning provides, in *The Minor Gesture* (2016), an enticing account of how consciousness, agency, language, habit and movement may arise in terms that are both more than human and neuro-diverse.

this book, which are very different than the event Burt, for example, alludes to in the example above.[12]Hence, unknowing, rather than not to know or not knowing, might be a better way to shed light on what goes on in dances such as *Faust* and *Pororoca.* Unknowing as a modality of knowing by means of which one deals with the 'known' in differential manner: neither fully ignoring it, nor allowing it to fully determine the action *in the moment*.

Indeed, while the kind of responsibility that dancers face in *Faust* and *Pororoca* does not entail an obligation and does indeed come from an ethical way of thinking, the problems O'Donnell and Rodrigues pose to their dancers in these pieces show how difficult responsibility and an ethical way of thinking are to attain in action. This will become clear later in Chapter 5 when I examine the two pieces. For now, let me consider the larger culture within which dance today takes place; a culture called by sociologist Frank Furedi and others a *Culture of Fear,*[13] as well as of innovation and creativity.

0.2 *Culture of Fear* and Innovation in Advanced Capitalism

It is safe to say that, at least since the events of 9/11 in the USA and the global financial crises of 2008, we have been living in the grip of a *Culture of Fear*, that is, a culture that capitalizes on fear. Such a culture focuses on precautionary and preventive measures,

12 <http://artforum.com/video/mode=large&id=38324>. Web. 22 Oct. 2015

13 One can think of the *Culture of Fear* either as deliberately manufactured or as arising spontaneously out of historical developments. For me, this differentiation does not really change how fear 'performs' in the world we are living in today, given what it produces. Other authors who have written about this include sociologist Barry Glassner and philosophers Brian Massumi and Stefan Skrimshire.

locking us in the present and undermining, across society, any spirit of lavish experimentation and positive risk-taking, including in the arts. One can find an example illustrating this in an article posted on the website of the Dutch Council for Culture[14] diagnosing the current state of the arts in The Netherlands as one for audiences who want to have fun, expecting that an art event be, above all, a means for having an experience.

The production of such experience requires a creativity that, in our globalized commodity market, caters to the insatiable appetite for so-called new and innovative products. Such creativity has in fact become the main drive for "economic prosperity and well-being" (Hallam and Ingold 1). Its logic goes like this: the more trade of a product, the more variations of this same product are produced, which in turn leads to more consumption, ultimately generating more wealth and economic growth, at least to those who plan and own the processes of production. This is to say that the rate of demand for so-called innovative products becomes faster, due to the incessant 'need' for new commodities in the market. The growing speed of access to so-called innovative experiences or products required by consumers entails, moreover, that the journeys of those in charge of being creative, that is, of conceiving and delivering innovation, have become considerably shorter, so much so that

14 <http://www.cultuur.nl/actueel/nieuws/cultuurverkenning-wat-zijn-belangrijke-ontwikkelingen-en-trends/item3109>. Web. 26 Jun. 2014. For a similar criticism, refer to Frie Leysen's speech, delivered upon receiving the Erasmus Prize on Nov. 12, 2014. Leysen makes a plea for art that disturbs instead of one that pleases and for the audience to be a partner in an adventure, not a consumer. Web. 2 Jan. 2015.
<http://www.erasmusprijs.org/?lang=en&page=Nieuws&mode=detail&item=-Speech+Frie+Leysen+online>.

one cannot avoid asking whether producing novelty is possible or even desirable under such conditions, especially from within the arts. Hence, the question concerning novelty in the arts becomes a question about the kind of creativity involved in dance, particularly improvisation. Is it different from the one requested by the market, one capable of providing an antidote to its logic or, on the contrary, is it its fuel and best example? Or, put differently, could dance and a focus on the improvisatory within it show us how to critically rehearse countering the logic of the market (innovation)? I will rehearse an answer to this question in the Epilogue.

Alongside the pressure to innovate cultivated in advanced capitalism—a pressure one could tentatively call a pressure to improvise—there is a kind of fear: the fear of lagging behind, of not being up-to-date or in the moment. Such a fear entails, of course, something else than the fear of death in a terrorist attack, for example. However, when considered in conjunction with the risk aversion that a *Culture of Fear* induces, this fear of lagging behind and of not being able to produce the 'new' paradoxically propels one to take risks, precisely so that one does not lag behind. This entails a living 'in the present' strongly dictated by the future. As such, fear and risk become the two sides of the same coin, one entangled with the other. According to philosopher Stefan Skrimshire, this happens in a form that does not so much physically touch as it "lurks in the background" (35), fear becoming "an unnoticed conditioning, a background radiation saturating existence" (Massumi cited in Skrimshire 34). I think it is crucial that artists become consciously aware of this in order not to, unwillingly, internalize and reproduce values and norms that do not support their work nor their ability to act on their own terms.

Ethnomusicologist Mark Laver, in a critical examination of the rhetoric employed in discourses around innovative business leadership and consultancy projects, unveils how similar this rhetoric is to the one employed in discourses around music improvisation.[15] Even though he does not use dance as his object of observation, what he extracts from music discourse is present in dance as well. He suggests that the kind of creativity involved in both domains—business leadership and music—include the following notions: autonomy, which amounts to diffuse leadership and horizontal (non-hierarchical) forms of decision making; passion, which registers as personal dedication and emotional commitment in conjunction with dialogical predispositions; risk, which is the disposition to take chances and think outside the box; innovation, which is a notion growing directly out of risk, being the determination to keep things forever new and fresh and as such also the ability to respond to challenges and engage with the immediacy of the here and now; and full-bodied listening, which is the kind of dialogue that must happen in order for leadership to be shared, passion to be maintained, risks to be collectively taken and new ground to be discovered.

At first glance, all these terms seem to point to a kind of agency that, in its insistence on the 'present moment' (improvisation), defies both past and future, allowing one to engage with the future in ways that have not been charted in advance (choreography). Here, I want to suggest that the characteristics described by Laver underpin what artist and performance scholar Jon McKenzie in *Perform or Else* has called 'the imperative to perform' which, in the case of

15 A whole issue of the *Journal for Critical Improvisation* engages with this problem: Vol. 9 No. 1. *Ethics and Improvising Business*. Web. Sept. 14, 2014. <http://www.criticalimprov.com/issue/view/163>.

art, entails a demand or challenge placed on the artist to, through the art work and its production, continually expose, criticize or perhaps even trespass norms. In short: to think outside the box.

Paradoxically perhaps, following the logic of economic growth briefly described above, precisely because of this logic of fast, repetitive, and ongoing innovation, transgressing the norm by thinking outside the box has itself become a norm. Consequently, the products arising from this pressure to innovate arguably take away from art its potential to create difference and critical distance. Moreover, because advanced capitalism, under the label of innovation, turns creativity and its methods as well as the experiences arising therefrom into commodities with exchange value, the work of art is, thereby, placed into a framework that primarily assigns value to cultural production according to its economic viability and profitability, a framework, moreover, whose conditions many artists have internalized, including those that complain about such a framework. Artists thus have become less able to provide endogenous[16] criteria for what is good, creative or innovative, leaving this task entirely to the market. This is the reason I here problematize the proximity between the rhetoric of improvisation in the arts (usually said to challenge the norm or convention) and that of advanced capitalism, under the umbrella rubrics of creativity and innovation. This proximity turns the already problematic imperative to perform, i.e., to efficiently enact goals based on already determined ways of knowing into an arguably even more problematic one, that is, the imperative to improvise, i.e., to efficiently enact goals, but now apparently not having planned the 'how' in advance nor possessing all

16 I borrow the term from artist Alana Jelinek.

the necessary means for enacting the stated goals. This is perhaps not a new phenomenon; as Michael Hardt posits: "It is only newly pervasive" (Hardt cited in Jackson 25).

One cannot deny that innovation and the kind of creativity associated with it in advanced capitalism is one of the possible outcomes of artistic production. Innovation in and of itself, however, is not necessarily always a good thing. More precisely, to follow artist Alana Jelinek, innovation becomes a capitalist trope "instrumentalized for profit, understood as good when it increases or consolidates profit" (138) and, I would add, the creativity employed to create such innovation becomes a form of 'smart' opportunism. The creativity involved in improvisation that I advocate in this book is crucially different because from the very start it does not offer easy, immediately visible or recognizable clues as to its future form, success, transferability, consumption and hence also profitability; it does not, as it were, efficiently enact goals.

0.3 Choreography - Improvisation in Advanced Capitalism[17]

In these last twenty-five years, choreography has been defined and engaged with in many ways, so much so that one could perhaps say that improvisation, the usual diametrical 'other' of choreography, can now be seen as one of its many possible forms. Having apparently become an all-encompassing or expanded term[18], choreography

17 Here I draw from choreographer Nina Martin, replacing "-" with a "-" to depict the dynamic tension, and not the opposition, between improvisation and choreography.

18 The expansion of choreography unsettles its usual (conventional) causal relation to dance, one in which choreography becomes a more generic capacity or

becomes ultimately indeterminate. This expanded, indeterminate and all-encompassing conception of choreography implies that one cannot define or know *a priori* what is specific to a work. What makes a work be like *this* or *that* is dependent on how the work comes to life and, importantly, on the problems it may pose; on what is at stake within it. This is my reading of what Cvejic seems to suggest in her PhD thesis when, citing philosopher Stewart Martin, she alludes to the current condition of indeterminacy in art in general and in choreography specifically. According to Martin:

> ...while in the sixties art's indeterminacy was a critical and emancipatory move with respect to the art institution and market, entailing the dissolution of traditional delimitations of (fine) art, the arts and non-art, now it is 'normal', a consequence of an expanded commodification and subsumption of art and life under capitalism. (Cited in Cvejic 12)

From the perspective of the artist, one can debate whether the dissolution proposed by Martin has become normal. It has certainly become more widespread and as such less problematic, at least

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knowledge (Spångberg). Theorist Kai van Eikels describes it as "an application, in the sense of a word sloppily and happily opposed to that of 'creation'—of the choreographic, which is an intelligence that enables [one] to redirect the cultural, social, political, economic, psychological, pedagogical [et cetera] forces of existing patterns and habits of moving" (306). André Lepecki and Richard Allsopp in the editorial statement for *Performance Research*'s issue *On Choreography* propose that choreography as an expanded term may be, beyond the arrangement of bodily movement, a "locus for questioning the orthodoxies of contemporary art work and practice" and "invoke, recuperate and incorporate other forms of cultural practice" (4) beyond the arts.

from the perspective of the institutions that produced and disseminate art. In her thesis, Cvejic goes on to say that "if capitalism in its current neoliberal formation is the prime medium of indeterminacy, [then] the sense of art's open-endedness is entangled with the sense according to which anything might be commoditized" (12). She is quick to point out that this applies only partially to dance and choreography because, on the one hand, dance and choreography have a much lower commodity status in comparison with other works of art and, on the other, dance and choreography seem to cherish values from the neo Avant-Garde through which choreographers work in ways that attempt to resist the spectacle of theater (idem). She seems to say that the kind of dance and choreography she has in mind cannot be easily turned into a commodity for consumption by the masses, proposing instead that choreographers such as she discusses in her thesis[19] "critically and experimentally examine the effects of the socio-economic consensus of contemporary capitalism on the theatrical apparatus of representation" (14).

While I agree with Cvejic's analysis of how the works she examines indeed shed critical light on how the logic of advanced capitalism conditions theatre making, recent developments in the field, especially how dance and choreography have entered the museum, suggest that despite their lower commodity status in comparison to visual art, choreography and dance have become steadily more commodified. This is true regardless of the efforts of artists to be critical of the institution (especially whilst remaining within it),

19 Xavier Le Roy, Jonathan Burrows and Jan Ritsema, Boris Charmatz, Eszter Salamon, Mette Ingvartsen and Jefta van Dinther.

which indicates that their criticism is possible because the institution they exercise criticism on enables it in the first place.[20]

A tentative way of differently interpreting the indetermination alluded to by Cvejic is that in advanced capitalism, and its obsessive preoccupation with novelty and being in the moment, it does not really seem to matter what one does or how one names it (dance, choreography, improvisation, performance, event and so on) because— regardless of how something is made or named—advanced capitalism will ensure that a way is found to turn it (dance, choreography, performance, improvisation) into yet another commodity for circulation. As such, differences between these practices are either ironed out or made irrelevant. This tentative interpretation is not to blame advanced capitalism for all evils one can find in the art world. After all, capitalism is a human invention and so it could be re-invented. I mention it here as a call for more self-criticism on the part of artists themselves.

If we return to McKenzie and his thesis that in advanced capitalism performance has replaced discipline as the paradigmatic formation of power and knowledge (and the necessary corollary that to perform well today includes the imperative to innovate), and we conceive of improvisatory agency in its colloquial and romanticized understanding as the perfect metaphor for what is required

20 For examples of how other dance artists reflect upon the challenges and opportunities of dance taking place in the museum, one can refer to the volume edited by American artist and curator Sara Wookey *Who Cares? Dance in the Gallery and the Museum*. Siobhan Davis Dance, 2015. One can in addition refer to both the dialogue between choreographer Boris Charmatz (Musée de la Danse) and Ana Janevski (MoMA) "Improvised Collections" in the volume edited by Noémie Solomon *Danse: A Catalogue*. Les Presse du Réel, 2015, 177-187, and to the collection of essays edited by Stephanie Rosenthal *Move. Choreographing You: Art and Dance Since the 1960s*. Hayward Publishing, 2011.

for innovation to take place—flexibility, co-creation, immediacy, risk-taking, and perseverance among others—then a possible way out of the commoditization of culture and its homogenization would be to *not* be concerned with performing well. That is, to not continually be busy with producing the so-called new or to not engage with improvisatory agency, especially one that finds shelter under the cloak of the notion of spontaneity. This is because the promises improvisation and spontaneity make, as we have seen with Laver above, are very much like the ones made in advanced capitalism.

Potentially, and perhaps counter-intuitively, an alternative to thinking outside the box could entail thinking of improvisation as always containing some of what one often attributes to choreography, such as notions of conscious knowing and planning, even if only vaguely or speculatively. I propose this to be the case because, following a system theory approach (particularly autopoiesis), no novelty will occur *from without* a given dance, be it choreographed or improvised. A novelty will always occur from within the locus of its own operations, i.e., from the thinking, doing and feeling of dancers *within the dance*, about which dancers always know something, even in the most unplanned or rehearsed cases. By focusing on the already known then, even if marginally, one also persists *within this* known in *this* dance. In so doing, the 'box' within which one thinks (the dance), may indeed become larger, but one's thinking, if one thinks from *within* the dance, will always remain inside the box of the dance. This shows that while risk-taking and improvisation may still be thought of as practices that oppose convention and tradition (the known), enhancing our understanding of what is possible beyond what we already know, within the practice of improvisation itself, including how risks are taken while improvising, thinking outside the box not only is an epistemological impossibility; it very

rarely leads to novelty, at least a novelty that asks us to reconsider who we are and what we know or think we know. I thus suggest that an encounter with the new or unknown necessitate, rather, a rigorous, non-naïve and speculative mode of thinking inside the box, a thinking-feeling-bodying that insists on its own presence or condition. 'Non-naïve' here, following art critic Jan Verwoert, means that one must understand the conditions in and under which one exercises one's agency. Only then does one become able to rehearse the adjustment of these conditions according to one's own terms, in turn enabling the imagination or speculation of a logic beyond that of 'performance' (19), that is, to be efficacious and to innovate.

The appropriation and co-optation of artistic innovations by capitalism—but also the debatable failure of art to oppose it—is, of course, not new. However, these issues have rarely been dealt with in explicit connection to risk-taking. Hence, to further situate a discussion of risk-taking in dance improvisation in advanced capitalism, I turn now to art historian John Welchman's ideas regarding risk-taking in the arts, which he presents in dialogue with Peter Bürger's theses on the Avant-Garde.

0.4 Risk-Taking in the Arts

In the introduction to his book, *The Aesthetics of Risk,* Welchman writes that his discussion of risk in the arts runs parallel to the identification of a double lineage of Avant-Garde and modernist practice during the first half of the 20th century as outlined by Peter Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde*. For Bürger, there are three ground rules for the creative arbitration of provocation by the historical Avant-Garde between 1910 and 1925, namely: (1) that a work of art can no longer be judged according to its affiliation to a period style, but rather by how it tactically generates shock, where shocking the

recipient becomes the most dominant principle of artistic intent; (2) that shocking the recipient in turn causes de-familiarization with the object perceived and (3) that protest is aimed at reintegrating art into the praxis of life.

According to Welchman, Bürger claims, however, that protest cannot be indefinitely repeated and still maintain its status as protest. This is because once works of art are 'embraced' by the institution, finding for example a place in the museum, they and the artists who make them become complicitous with capitalism, and as such the provocation inherent in the protest no longer provokes. Moreover, Bürger thinks that because the protest of the historical Avant-Garde against art as institution is accepted as art, the gesture of protest by the neo Avant-Garde in the 1950s and 1960s loses strength and originality, becoming thus inauthentic, a mere recycling of forms and strategies from the first decade of the 20th century. Bürger is therefore skeptical, for example, of the radicalism attributed to Fluxus, performance art, neo-Dada and Happenings. He appears to privilege the readymade object over the less formalized (and thus also less institutionalized) physical (bodily) performances (36-37). Bürger's views were very influential in the 1970s and 1980s although also profusely criticized[21], especially for his thoughts concerning the alleged inauthenticity of vanguard art in the postwar period, much of which was performative practice based on the body.

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21 Benjamin Buchloh and Hal Foster are the two most prominent critics of Bürger. For a review of their criticism and how Bürger himself has responded to it, refer to Bürger "Avant-Garde and Neo-Avant-Garde: An Attempt to Answer Certain Critics of *Theory of the Avant Garde*." *New Literary History* 41 (2010): 695-715.

One can find one such criticism of Bürger, though indirectly, in an essay in *Performance Research*'s 1996 volume on Risk. Written by art theoretician Tracy Warr, the article begins with the relation between risk and the body of the artist, and refers to journalist and art critic François Pluchart (1937-1988) in order to legitimate the authenticity of body-based performance in general and also to shed light on how risk-taking had already been seen as an intrinsic dimension of being an artist, regardless of the kind of art. Pluchart posits that "until the 1960s and 1970s risk remained theoretical and was generally a by-product of the masochism inherent in every creative act. Only in the 1960s and 1970s did artists endanger their bodies in order to provoke thought in the recipient" (cited in Warr 1) as well as to "test the parameters of art and society" (cited in Warr 9).[22] The masochism Pluchart is referring to here involves the belief that artists, when making art, must be able to willingly endure uncertainty, as they 'wring' the work out of themselves and, at the end of this process, not knowing how the work will be received by the public gaze, feel intimately exposed. In addition, in the case of body-based art, artists face the dread of receiving an instant verdict on their work, one that could be devastating due to their direct encounters with audience and critic. This view is current, as

22 Welchman posits that already late in the 19th century the body of the artist was the locus of risk, until risk was located, in visual modernism, in the style or appearance of the work. He speaks of a shift from corporeal to representational risk (10-11). It is unclear whether the corporeal risks to which he refers were to provoke thought in the recipient or rather for pleasure or to fill time, as at that point, during a time of economic abundance, people were more able to navigate the space between need and desire. Later in the same text, referring to art historian and critic Rosalee Goldberg, he suggests that artists have consistently turned to bodily performance as a way of breaking down categories and resisting conventions of established art (27).

the editors of a recent issue of the Australian journal *About Performance*[23] propose. For them, risk is "constitutive of performance" (2).

For Welchman, furthermore, performance art and its legacies cannot be separated either from the genealogy of the historical Avant-Garde nor from the alleged disinterestedness of the modernist aesthetic, because both the performativity and the possibility for an aesthetic of engagement associated with physical performance had already been woven together with particular intensity at the Cabaret Voltaire and in the Futurist and Surrealist performances, where shortening the gap between art and life was rehearsed.[24] For this reason he suggests Adorno as an alternative to Bürger's view on aesthetic risk and its necessary association with shock and defamiliarization, as for Adorno all artworks, even those that are well received, are *a priori* polemical. For Adorno, Welchman posits, to think that an artwork is conservative is inherently absurd, because innovation at the level of form will always create an effect that shocks or surprises, effects without which aesthetic experience would not exist (37-38). What Adorno here seems to say, according to Welchman, is that when a work of art, in whatever form it

23 "High Stakes: Risk and Performance." Issue 12, 2014.

24 Bojana Cvejic contends in her PhD thesis that one cannot properly translate the history of dance in the 20th century into the art historical narrative. This is because, for her, the break with classical ballet in *Ausdruckstanz* and American Modern Dance does not share the same aims as the historical Avant-Garde, except for a very few cases where dance 'pierces through' in works considered Avant-Garde, where dance is 'appropriated' as a readymade element. An example of this is Dadaist theatrical spectacle such as found in *Parade* (1917) by Leonide Massine, Erik Satie, Jean Cocteau and Pablo Picasso. She is critical of the categorization of a work such as *The Rite of Spring* (1913) as Avant-Garde because, apparently, the scandal it provoked was due to coupling the representational theatricality of ballet with movement that was expressionistic (14).

appears, no longer surprises or shocks the recipient at least at the level of form, it should not be called a work of art, but rather a mass product brought into circulation in a culture of consumption. This raises the question of whether art in Adorno's terms is still possible or perhaps even desirable today, given that, as already suggested above, advanced capitalism thrives on its ability to not only encourage, but importantly re-absorb dissent, shock or surprise.[25]

Welchman's reading of Adorno seems to conform with theater scholar Hans Thies Lehmann who posits in the epilogue of *Postdramatic Theatre* that "in the age of rationalization, of the ideal of calculation and of generalized rationality of the market, it falls to the theater to deal with extremes of affect by means of an aesthetics of risk, extremes which always also contain the possibility of offending by breaking taboos" (187). It is through this rupture, when the audience is confronted with "abysmal fear, shame and even mounting aggression" (idem), that theater exposes its political and ethical potential.

Welchman's reading of both Bürger and Adorno concerning the Avant-Garde and Lehmann's ideas on Postdramatic Theatre are revealing but can be said to be outmoded as one could argue that the ongoing financial crisis contests the 'rationality of the market' whose arbitrariness is of such unprecedented dynamism that theorist Kai van Eikels states that it (arbitrariness) "does not lend itself to bodily enactment" (306), such as dance. Consequently, risk-taking for him is today not "as terribly interesting a topic as it used to be in

25 Philosopher Bojana Kunst is quite explicit about this. For her, "capitalism establishes itself as the sort of system that, in its final stage, becomes a system for embracing all profane behaviors: transgression, rebellion, negativity, provocation, radical consumption, et cetera" (32).

the era of pre-financial market capitalism" (idem). I agree that the market has become abstract and speculative to its very foundation, but disagree with his view that what it does to bodily enactment is irrelevant. It is precisely because of the irrationality of the market and its dissociation from or lack of concern about how it impacts the materiality of body that the body (and how a body becomes a body) remains extremely relevant.

Perhaps better attuned to today's situation is how theater scholar Nicholas Ridout approaches the event of making theater. In his book *Theatre and Ethics*, he suggests that theater making embrace uncertainty, i.e., that when making theater one accept and perhaps cherish not fully knowing a priori the outcome of one's actions. As such, there is the possibility (read: not the promise) of surprise, challenge, affront or failure, not only for the recipient, but also for the performer and maker, so that one might indeed be able to conceive of art in general (and particularly dance improvisation) as a form that may enable a kind of risk-taking that, in the collective, is affirmative rather than hindering. Affirmative not only because the body of the dancer is cherished, but also because the artist, in embracing uncertainty, is free to engage with the collective in a way that is, on the one hand, true to their inner call (risking not being understood or embraced by the group) and, on the other, a way that cannot fully prescribe, even if desired, what needs to be done in the collective, thus risking not enhancing the potency of a group.[26] The potential to not align, belong, or communicate is always

26 I here draw my ideas from two sources. First, from how some artists and scholars have made use of Hegel's differentiation between abstract and substantial freedom to shed light on the problematic position autonomy has in the arts today; second, from Jacques Rancière's proposition for substantive freedom *without substance*.

present. Hence, dance and a focus on the improvisatory within it can perhaps serve as affirmative, discerning, non-naïve and pragmatic platforms within which one may be able to, *with others*, cultivate relationships with the unknown in all its forms and guises, including the masochism alluded to by Warr above, but, most importantly, without a stultifying fear of it (the unknown).

0.5 Approaches to Improvisation

Improvisation, etymologically stemming from Latin *improvisus* in its three-partite composition— '*im*' as a form of negation (not and/or un), '*pro*' as a form entailing a time prior to or before, and '*videre*' meaning the verb 'to see'—implies a negation of seeing ahead into the future. In other words, when one improvises one does not, and cannot, fully know in advance how things will go. The future is uncertain and it is with this uncertainty that one improvises. The improviser thus must be able to attend to several things: to expect and/or be ready for the unexpected, to not only focus on but say 'yes' to the moment, to (re)act spontaneously, to deal with whatever is at hand at any given moment in time, to not only have the sensibility to find out what the moment needs, but also to have the capacity to answer those needs as soon as possible, and, last but not least, to have the trust that she will be able to do the right thing at the right time. Improvisers attended to all these things in many ways.

Dance improvisation has thus appeared under many different names. Contact Improvisation (CI) is the only form of improvisation

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See J. Ozorio de Almeida Meroz in Newspaper # 2 of The Autonomy Project. *Onomatopee* (43.1): 66-67.

that has kept its name since its appearance in the early 1970s.[27] Notwithstanding this plurality, one can think of improvisation in three ways[28]: (1) as a mode of performance, in which movement is 'spontaneously' generated at the same time that it is performed live before an audience and where making and performing coincide in the event of performance; (2) as specific dance techniques many of which are now included in the syllabi of dance schools across the globe and (3) as a tool for the 'spontaneous' generation of movement during rehearsals that is eventually set with the aims of being reproduced as a set material that maintains a 'feel' or 'look' of the indeterminate, spontaneous or unconscious qualities inherent to the moment when the movement was created.[29]

In this book, I am interested in the first and third approaches, the third characterizing *Pororoca* and a combination of the first and

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27 According to dancer and dance scholar Duncan Gilbert (aka Doran George), some commentators credit Paxton as *contributing* to and naming CI, such as Cynthia Novack, who rejects the attribution of CI's development to one single person (see Novack, *Sharing the Dance*). Others, such as choreographer Trisha Brown, see CI as Paxton's choreography. For example, a dancer of Brown's company in the early 2000s, Lionel Popkin, recalls doing an Aikido roll in rehearsal and Brown saying, "no, that's Steve's work" (Gilbert 11-12).

28 Recently, the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* has added a new entry: "The Philosophy of Dance" written by Aili Bresnahan, a lecturer in philosophy at the University of Dayton in Ohio, USA. In this entry, she includes a section on improvisation, identifying it in three distinct types, which are to an extent in line with how I distinguish improvisation in this book. Her three types are: (1) embellishments where set choreography persists, (2) improvisation as spontaneous free movement for use in set choreography, and (3) improvisation for its own sake brought to a high level of performance. See <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/dance/> Web. 14 Sep. 2015.

29 I borrow here from Bojana Cvejic, who writes about improvisation as occurring in three modalities (*Choreographing* 127), slightly expanding on how she depicts the second and third modalities.

third ones *Faust*. The first approach to improvisation— as a form of performance— finds its roots in Release Technique[30] and Contact Improvisation (CI). The third approach—as a generative tool—in German expressionism, and the second—as a dance technique—in the teachings of Margaret H'Doubler. I could employ the second approach to improvisation (as a dance technique) in the examination of *Faust* and *Pororoca* as well, as the tradition that both O'Donnell and Rodrigues follow (more O'Donnell than Rodrigues) included the pioneering ideas and teachings of Margret H'Doubler[31]. However, the highly-structured nature of the two works here examined, namely their imbrication in very particular ideas and rules regarding the dramaturgy of the work and, as such, risks that had to be both taken and averted, lead me to choose to focus on only the first and third.

We will see in Chapter 3 that the first approach—mode of performance—is present in any dance danced by a human, be it choreographed or improvised. Here I will show how this is indeed so in each piece, *Faust* and *Pororoca*. The third approach—as a gen-

30 For an overview of the development of *Release*, refer to "Release: A History." *Contact Quarterly Chapbook* 37.2 (Summer/Fall 2012): 3-4 & 8, as well as Pamela Matt's *A Kineasthetic Legacy: The Life and Works of Barbara Clark*. For statements from practitioners also refer to volumes 18 and 19 of *Performance Research Journal* (Winter/Spring and Fall/Winter 1999).
O'Donnell is one of the pioneers of *Release* and she brought it to Europe in the early 1970s, becoming internationally known for her teaching. She defined it as a "body-mind integrative technique through which engagement with imagery enhances and inspires imaginative responses and bodily movement. Images for consideration in *Release* are initially anatomical and are created from physics principles applied to dance, and later may arise from any sources, including personal history, emotions, dreams, wishes, memories, future projections, social protests, and strong reactions." For more details on how O'Donnell implemented Release later in her pedagogical work, one can refer to *Release Dance Curriculum* at <www.release.com>. Web. 27 Jul 2015.

31 Mainly through Anna Halprin, with whom O'Donnell studied in the mid-1960s.

erative tool— is widespread today and is present in both pieces here examined, but is in *Faust* more determining than in *Pororoca*, given the fact that O'Donnell in *Faust* explicitly deals with notions of narrative, expression, character, emotion and so on. In sum: these two approaches, the first (form or mode of performance) and the third (generative tool), best enable an unveiling of the imbrication of improvisation and choreography in their work.

A term relevant to this book in describing the first and third approaches to improvisation is *Open-Form composition* (OFC), which relates to the historical use of the term by composers Earl Brown and John Cage and others in the 1950s, and refers to forms designed to give sets of choices and freedoms to the performers. Here thus, OFC encompasses a vast field stretching from the 1920s *Duchampian Turn*[32] through *Projectivism*[33] (Olson) and the *Culture of Spontaneity* in the United States of America[34] all the way to the reconsideration of collaborative practices that have in the recent past informed 'conceptual choreography' and 'object-oriented choreography'. Journals such as *Maska*, *Frakcija,* and *Performance Research* have also covered the contemporary territory in the field of dance. Importantly, composer Earle Brown used the term in the

32 I borrow this term from writer and performance scholar Richard Allsopp. Here it refers to the impact that the work of Marcel Duchamp had after his seminal gesture of placing a mass-product, or ready-made, in the frame of a museum, turning it into an art object.

33 According to Allsopp, *Projectivism* relates to a way of composing poetry in which the poem is an open form, that is, "it does not describe but enact. It goes against closed form, the inherited line (...) and other imposed and restrictive forms. For American poet Charles Olson, a verse that is projective is an open verse; it is a composition by field (6).

34 Historian and American Studies scholar Daniel Belgrad's book *The Culture of Spontaneity* provides an excellent historical perspective.

early 1950s, inspired by Pollock's action paintings of the late 1940s, in which the immediacy (and directness) of contact with the materials was of great importance. Brown's conducting techniques and experiments with time notation, improvisation, and OFC as structure have all become part of contemporary compositional usage.

Other terms that are relevant here have been proposed by Kent De Spain, namely: 'Open-outcome composition', wherein the structure is previously set, but is built in such a way that it forces a different outcome each time; and 'Emergent-form Composition', which works with very open structures in which the performers discover unique forms with each iteration of the piece.[35] This tends to require an even higher level of improvisational awareness in the moment of performance, in order to facilitate the recognition and development of emergent forms. None of these ideas is, however, mutually exclusive. New or altered forms can emerge during open-form or open-outcome performances. The underlying structures of emergent-form pieces might seem like the other two. It may, after just one viewing, be impossible to tell, from the outside, where a piece falls along this conceptual framework, but these ideas can give some guidance about the kinds of freedoms and restrictions that one can build into performances that focus on improvisatory agency (*Open-form*).

Mary O'Donnell used OFC in her work but understood it in a slightly different, although related, manner than that described by de Spain. Relevant to this is the fact that O'Donnell has continually

35 This proposition is based on Dr. Edelman's concept of degeneracy, which is the ability to develop different ways to get to the same outcome. This is not unlike how I here approach improvisation. Web. 22 Oct. 2015. <http://emergentimprovisation.org/artistsinfo.html>.

perceived her work since the mid-1960s as being distinct from improvisation. In my reading of what she has written about it in these last twenty years, this is so because, for her, the notions of openness and freedom frequently present in discourses on improvisation seem to pivot around a premise which posits that in improvisation there are no pre-determined formal or thought structures that direct attention and meaning to an end. Form, if it is entirely open, can never achieve an openness of form, for it is open already. Thus, for a form to be opened, it must contain a degree of determination, closure or perhaps even necessity, however minimal. In this book, I recognize but intentionally disregard O'Donnell's insistence on differentiating OFC from improvisation. This is because for me OFC can unequivocally have a place under the umbrella of improvisation when, as proposed here, improvisation always contains choreography. In this book, I understand the notions of total openness (improvisation) and total closure (choreography) as limit notions that, in practice, are impossible to reach.

0.5.1 O'Donnell's *Responsible Anarchy*[36] *(RA)*

In the early1980s, philosopher Jean François Lyotard's paradoxical understanding of paganism[37] was a strong source of inspiration

36 In addition to RA, O'Donnell has made use of other similar paradoxes as both catapults and clarifications for her work, namely: a priest without a church, a civil servant without a government, a thief apart from materialism, and a violin player without music.

37 On can find a full account of how Lyotard understands the pagan and the just as language games in Lyotard, J. F. and Thebaud, J. L. *Just Gaming*. Lyotard drew his ideas from Wittgenstein for whom "language games do not just exist but need to be developed, a development that is impossible within a rigid structure where all sentences have been scripted and so language games presume some form of autonomy and freedom" (Virno cited in Gielen and de Bruyne, 31).

for O'Donnell. On the one hand, paganism is a way of thinking that considers *and* tries to do justice to differences that are incommensurable. On the other, it is an attempt to judge without having pre-conceived (universal) aesthetic, political or ethical criteria. O'Donnell realized that "the paradox within Lyotard's concern for absolute and total participation in a system of government, and the opposite need which allows for a greater order, representational government and delegated responsibility"(*Release* 278) could become a model for the choreographic relationship she had been earlier investigating, leading her in the early 1990s to the invention of the concept of *Responsible Anarchy* (RA).[38] As a result of this inquiry she made two pieces, *The Wisdom of Romance* and *The Thread of the Plot* (1992). O'Donnell asked dancers in *Thread of the Plot* to work with their own "personal desire [be anarchic] while they met [were responsible for] the dramaturgical demands of the choreography" (idem). They had to be pagan, to invent and reframe the piece each time it occurred in a fully participatory way while they had to meet the

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For more on O'Donnell's questions about post-modernism in the mid-1980s one can refer to Mara de Wit's PhD thesis in which she alludes to four papers written by O'Donnell, informally circulated. These are: *Seeing Post-Modern Work*, *Post-Modern Dance*, *The Discussion Continues,* and *Bits – A Post-Modern Accumulation Process*. De Wit writes: "there appears to be no clear conclusion to this somewhat playful foray into what, in hindsight, may well have been one of the dominant discourses of the late 1980s" (56). O'Donnell has written another article, hardly circulated: *Let us be pagan and let us be just*, influenced by her reading of Lyotard's book *Just Gaming*. One can find these five articles in O'Donnell's *Release: 7 Zones of Comprehension* and *The Discussion Continues* additionally in *Writing in Dance: Questions of Position* (Spring 1990): 32-37.

38 For an idea of how O'Donnell worked before RA, one can refer to Crickmay, Chris. "Fragments of Daily Life: Mary Fulkerson's World of Images & Compositional Ideas." *Contact Quarterly* 13:2 (1988): 9-18.

meaning through which the piece would communicate overall the same identity at each performance.

However, after working on this piece O'Donnell received feedback from dancers who had, for instance, feared actual physical injury due to the conflict of wills achieved through the anarchy of the piece. She wanted to continue to work with anarchy in her next piece, *Faust*, but she realized that there was a need for a "balancing factor" (*Release* 280) that is, more responsibility taken by each person involved. She set out to achieve this by means of what she called the *Holding Form* (HF).

0.5.2 O'Donnell's *Holding Form (HF)*

The *Holding Form* is what O'Donnell named her method of ensuring the dramaturgical forward movement of information within a piece; its central flow. Performers carrying a specific HF had the responsibility for the forward movement of information in the piece. All others could work anarchically under the proviso they related to the HF in a responsible manner. From this construct a chaotic, unpredictable, dynamic structure could emerge. Regarding chaos, O'Donnell specifically posits that it "occurs when the decisions of the dancer(s) responsible for the [HF] differ during each performance, unpredictably challenging not only the stability of the [HF] itself but also how the other dancers relate to it" (*Release* 254). Moreover, the [HF] must "in the end be reliable but not fixed" (302).

The combined use of HF and characters that are in a continual state of development produces a result that is repeatedly recognizable but always somewhat different. This asks dancers to concentrate and commit to the dance in a very intense way: in each scene, one is simultaneously developing one's own character and negotiating interactions with the other characters, trying to allow for the plural-

ity of meaning and potential arising therefrom to actualize. Though in a very distinct way, this also applies to *Pororoca* by Rodrigues, to which I now turn.

0.5.3 Rodrigues's *Anthropophagy*

Rodrigues was influenced by a few well-known Brazilian artists and thinkers such as Lygia Clark (1920-1988), Hélio Oiticica (1937-1980), Mário de Andrade (1983-1945), Oswald de Andrade (1890-1954), Darcy Ribeiro (1922-1997), and Guimarães Rosa (1908-1967). All shared one thing in common: they raised critical questions about the alleged purity of national or individual identity, showing how such an identity is tangled up in what is supposedly other to it. In fact, for them one must abandon the notion of pure identity altogether in favor of something else, namely, a mestizo identity, one that is not only crossbred but always changing, becoming. It is thus only by means of an identity (body) that is always-already affecting and being affected by what is other to it, i.e. in relation to other bodies and their milieu, that novel subjectivities may arise. This is without a doubt an appropriate way of describing how Rodrigues thinks of the body in *Pororoca*.

The imbrication of art and milieu has been central to the production of art in Brazil at least since Oswald de Andrade wrote the *Manifesto of Anthropophagy*[39] in 1928. In this manifesto, he proposed

39 Weinhart posits that the Manifesto of Anthropophagy argued for a strategy of demarcation to maintain our equilibrium: the cannibal devoured only the enemies he considered strong, taking from them marrow and protein to fortify and renew his natural energies. In short: the cannibalization of other cultures becomes the key to one's own production beyond cultural colonialism. The goal was to overcome the stagnation of the province, to make it clear that colonialism is a repressive space at the periphery, and to leave behind the old bourgeois canon. Written in

that one devour foreign influences, eat them up and then regurgitate them, giving rise to a Brazilian culture that is neither pure nor unitary in its identity, but rather always pregnant with difference. With anthropophagy and a less burdened relationship to history, in particular to tradition-laden Europe, "Brazil developed an alternative modernism."[40] (Hollein 7)

In the 1960s and 1970s, the notion of anthropophagy was revisited under the rubrics of *Tropicalism* and *Neo-concretism. Neo-concretism* was interested in the ingestion and digestion of high culture being imported at that time, claiming in addition that art does not produce mere objects: it produces expressiveness, subjectivity—far beyond pure geometric form. *Tropicalism* incorporated all kinds of aesthetic references, high and popular, foreign and local. Hélio Oiticica and Lygia Clark, neo-concretismo's best known artists, proposed a model in which the consciousness of the body is primary in the relation between the spectator and the art object. They developed art that was dynamic and closely connected to life, making the viewer the focus of the work, rather than the artist. For instance, Oiticica's *Parangolés* are oeuvre-concepts that become concrete only as spectators engage with them. Form, time and spatial limits are not known in advance, but are rather results of the process of

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1928, the manifesto became a useful instrument for the abolition of a conventional concept of art (19).

40 On its path to a new tropical culture, Brazil developed its own form of modernism that drew on manifold influences. Together with diverse cultures from various waves of Portuguese, Italian, Arab, Polish, East European Jewish, German and Japanese immigrants, the indigenous population and those of African origin generated a specific *brasilidade (*Weinhart 17). For accounts of *Pororoca* and how it relates to this *brasilidade,* refer to Carolina Pedalino's MA thesis. One can find this reference in the reference list at the end.

collective action. Architect and theorist Paola Berenstein posits that, contrary to the anthropophagic artists of the 1920s who were distant to the reality of the country [Brazil], the new generation of anthropophagic artists [Oiticica and Clark] not only entered reality, they participated in it. For Oiticica this literally meant moving into the favela (Lima 99-139, my translation). Rodrigues did not herself move into the favela but in 2003 she did install her company in one, an area called Maré, first in collaboration with CEASM (the acronym for *Centro de Estudos e Ações Solidárias da Maré*) and later in 2007 with REDES Association.[41] It was with and within the community in this immense area, a district north of Rio de Janeiro composed of 16 favelas with approximately 140,000 inhabitants, that Rodrigues began her radical pedagogical work. *Pororoca* was made in this context.

The title of the piece gives us an indication of her motivation and inspiration for this work. In Tupi, one of Brazil's aboriginal languages, *Pororoca* means roar or explosion. It is a natural phenomenon produced when the water of a river meets the waters of the ocean and the tumultuous collision of opposing currents creates a beautiful and violent impact, producing waves as high as four meters. In Brazil, this phenomenon takes place where the Amazon River meets the Atlantic Ocean. Rosita Boisseau, in an announcement of the work for the *Venice Biennale* 2010, describes the piece in terms of how the "magnificent violence of this roaring collision can uproot

41 Center of Solidarity Studies and Action of Maré. For more information about REDES, refer to <http://observatoriodefavelas.org.br/en>. Web. 30 July 2015. For more information on the work Rodrigues has created before she moved her company to Maré, please refer to Dani Lima's excellent book as well as Christine Greiner's essay. One can find both references in the reference list at the end.

trees and modify the riverbed, yet it is a fragile process, the result of a delicate balance of nature" (my translation). Rodrigues further explains: [*Pororoca*] is a metaphor for our work in the conglomerate of Maré. Now, a time in which walls are being built, territories resolutely defended, borders enforced and rigidly controlled, we propose to move in the opposite direction (idem).

Pororoca thus brings forth a way of being and moving together, creating a body that is in constant reconfiguration, a body that is at once singular and plural, always negotiating; a body that is always more and less than itself, too little and too much, precarious and excessive, abundantly gesticulating, longing, desiring, demanding, very much like life in a Brazilian favela, which is an ongoing construction site in which houses and bodies co-exist, often in challenging proximity. *Pororoca,* according to critic Helena Katz, is currently the apex of this kind of exchange between the body and its surroundings (*O Corpo*).

0.6 Way of working

In this study, in addition to my own practice of teaching and performing improvisation, I rely on two other relevant sources. The first are the bibliographic references available for dance improvisation and its relation to risk-taking. The second, as support for the first, are the answers and statements arising from surveys I have created and conducted with several dance practitioners in the field of contemporary dance, including the choreographers and some of the dancers involved in the works examined in this book. For me to have a fuller understanding of risk-taking in dance, and the improvisatory within it, I found it necessary to take a leap outside of the discourse of dance proper to see what theories and understandings of risk are available generally. Since I perceive the

questions I pose in this study to be questions of and about culture, socio-cultural approaches to risk seemed best suited to help me answer my main question, namely: what is the nature of risk-taking in dance beyond the assumptions concerning the difference between improvisation and choreography? These approaches are: (1) *Cultural Theory,* specifically the ideas of anthropologist Mary Douglas; (2) *Governmentality*, based on the ideas of philosopher Michel Foucault; (3) *System Theory* as theorized by sociologist Niklas Luhmann; and (4) *Edgework* as proposed by sociologist Stephen Lyng. I have in addition made use of interpretations of all these by others. I have also considered and applied ideas arising from cognitive science, philosophy, psychology, sociology, and economics. These have helped me shed further light on aspects of my reading of risk-taking in dance that otherwise would have remained obscure.

0.7 Structure

In Chapter 1 I show, by means of a study of the literature of the past thirty years, how scholars and artists alike have theorized risk-taking in dance. The literature shows that 'not knowing' or the desire to 'encounter the unknown' play a central role in how one perceives and/or pursues risk-taking in dance, as well as in how one tends to define improvisation in opposition to choreography. In addition, the literature enables me to identify a cluster of dimensions pertaining to risk-taking in dance, including fear, edge, trust, failure, listening, control, decision-making, responsibility and enabling constraint.

In Chapter 2, by means of a historical overview of the imbrication between improvisation and choreography, I outline how the tendency to think them as oppositional to one another remains. A closer look at the literature as well as the answers I received from practitioners to a survey I designed on the relation between improv-

isation and risk-taking shows that spontaneity— a notion that is central to the discourse on improvisation and consistently used to explain and legitimate it as well as set it apart from choreography— remains implicit and unchallenged. As such, spontaneity becomes the blind spot of improvisation and, if risk-taking is intrinsic to it, of risk-taking as well.

In Chapter 3 I then deconstruct the notion of spontaneity in three intimately-connected but distinct features, namely, preparedness, novelty, and knowing. This enables me to unpack the role spontaneity plays in the opposition between choreography and improvisation as well as how risk-taking, not knowing and the unknown contribute to this opposition.

In Chapter 4, to further current understandings of risk-taking in dance improvisation and to locate these understandings within their larger socio-cultural frame (advanced capitalism), I momentarily step out of the discourse of dance and introduce four socio-cultural theories of risk: *Cultural Theory*, *Systems Theory*, *Governmentality,* and *Edgework.*

In Chapter 5 I finally engage with the two choreographies, *Faust* and *Pororoca*, and show how the theories introduced in Chapter 4, as well as the insights arising from the first three chapters, enable us to understand risk-taking and dance improvisation in more nuanced terms, beyond the rhetoric of the unknown. For example, if in O'Donnell's *Faust* trust in oneself and the other was a necessary condition for one to tap into the unknown and perhaps allow for the possibility of failure in the live act of performance, including the failure of trusting, in *Pororoca* trust also becomes the condition that enables a thinking of the group in which the freedom of an individual's creative act does not have to be dissociated from a sense of individual responsibility or obligation towards another—which in

Faust was a less straightforward affair. From my analysis of these two pieces and the contexts within which these pieces came to life, in the Epilogue I reflect on the problem of being together in the world in advanced capitalism as well. I then suggest that fugitive/choreopolitical planning be a tentative answer to the question of whether the being together in *Faust* and *Pororoca* could show us how to *rehearse* a being together in the world, one that critically *rehearses* countering the current logic of the market (innovation).

Chapter 1
Dance Improvisation and Risk-Taking: A Literature Review

> What is actually interesting in an improvised performance is to not know. I don't want to know and I am continuously trying to pull the rug out from under my feet so that I can keep for myself or for the people I dance with, the spontaneity, this state of being in the unknown, of risk, of playfulness, and of surprise. (Mark Tompkins cited in Benoit 207)

In this chapter, I will lay out a (fairly) chronological literature review of dance improvisation and focus on how practitioners and theorists have discussed risk-taking these last thirty years. We will see that even though scholars and practitioners alike have often mentioned risk-taking as a key notion in defining or attempting to explain the singularity and agency of improvisation, they have, oddly enough, largely left it either implicit or bound to ideas of 'not knowing'—as the quotation above demonstrates. My goal in this chapter is to shed light on this tendency. When a discussion on risk-taking is either completely absent or remains implicit, I will extrapolate possible conclusions, adding thoughts gathered from a recent survey on the role of risk in improvisation I conducted with practitioners in the field (see appendices). The fact that the production of writings on improvisation by scholars and artists alike has substantially proliferated in the last years—and fortunately shows no sign of slowing

down—means that this review is inevitably incomplete. Besides, every book I review in this chapter accounts to much more than what I engage with. In other words, I do not review the books in general. I review how they tackle risk-taking.

1.1 Literature Review

Writer and storyteller Louise Steinman's *The Knowing Body, Elements of Contemporary Performance and Dance* (1986) offers an entire chapter, albeit short, devoted to revealing some of the 'unexpected' aspects of dance improvisation such as 'relation', 'play' and 'risk'. Though Steinman does not really elaborate on or define risk, it is clear she sees it as essential to the form of improvisation and she provides examples of performances in which the performer is 'at risk' physically. For instance, she refers to the possibility of the performer falling off a tall ladder if he is not a hundred percent focused on the task at hand, or emotionally, as in an example of her own practice, when, moving in the dark with her partner, her trust of him grew (95-97). From Steinman's brief account of risk-taking in dance improvisation, one can conclude that it intimately connects to issues around trust, fear, and control. On the one hand, the less one trusts one's own abilities and skills, the less one will be willing to take a risk; on the other hand, the more one fears, the more one will feel the need to exert control over the imminence of danger or failure. One also learns that the possibility of danger or failure might be what motivates some practitioners to engage with improvisation in the first place. The improviser deliberately creates tasks or problems that are difficult or perhaps even impossible to solve. It is in engaging with this impossibility and the effort to stick to the task at hand (i.e., being fully in the moment) that one may perhaps

come to encounter the unknown and so be surprised by something other than the already known or expected.

The Moment of Movement (2000), by the late dance scholars Lynne Anne Blom and L. Tarin Chaplin is, like most books on improvisation, a pedagogical account of dance improvisation. It provides a wide palette of tasks and exercises for teachers, dancers, and dance therapists alike. The authors define improvisation as the "dynamic daughter of dance, at times self-indulgent, at times concise and determined, but always developing and changing. She has a free spirit; she should be given free rein within wisely and flexibly set boundaries" (xi). Moreover, dance improvisation for these authors unfolds through three 'sense-making structures': 1) Consciousness (ways of perceiving and responding), for which they propose three types, namely, 'focused', 'diffuse', and 'creative'[42]; 2) 'Associations and core imagery', in the sense that an improvisation can be just about movement, but at other times the movement that arises can call forth associations in the form of ideas or images which become the core of the improvisation (11) and 3) 'Experiential body of knowledge', which they suggest is made of 'kinesthetic awareness', 'phrasing', 'forming', 'relating', and 'abstracting and abstract'.[43]

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42 Blom and Chaplin posit that "focused consciousness is rational, logical, verbal, manipulative; diffuse consciousness (awareness) is receptive, non-verbal, and accommodating and creative consciousness is intensely attentive to the matter at hand while being attuned to all possible relevant associations, no matter how far afield" (10).

43 (1) Kinesthetic awareness comprises the body's proprioceptive system and muscle memory, (2) phrasing is sometimes linear, sometimes non-linear patterns around which movements will naturally tend to collect, (3) forming is an unfolding and evolving process that supports yet also responds to the ongoing movement, (4) relating entails interactions with other improvisers, and (5) abstracting and the abstract mean that the elimination of the particulars of a movement will accomplish the abstraction (17-26).

Blom and Chaplin sporadically mention the risk involved in dance improvisation, though they very rarely elaborate on it. One point at which they do is when contending that the more able an improviser is to objectively attend to the moment, the higher the degree of expertise and control she has and, consequently, the more she will allow for a further cultivation of risk. Objectively attending to the moment entails focusing on the task at hand, with as little personal (subjective) involvement as possible. The task or problem at hand is what matters. This is consistent with what I inferred above from Steinman, as well as with other accounts from experienced improvisers, in that it implies that "performers will be influenced not only by what feels good, but by what contributes to the artistry of the event" (Blom and Chaplin 106). In this way, by choosing not to focus on what feels habitually good "improvisation extends beyond ordinary social interaction since it breaks many of the culturally determined taboos about body boundaries and personal space" (22). From these cited passages a productive question arises, namely this: Does the way dance improvisation as performance is practiced today break taboos about body boundaries and personal space? This question also engages with the radicalism of improvisation as an art form.

The responses I received from dancers and choreographers who took my survey about risk showed no consensus regarding the radicalism of improvisation in dance in terms of breaking bodily or personal boundaries. More important than breaking is knowing what these boundaries are, and this varies depending on the person, on the kind of work, on specific performances of the same work, and on the context in which the work takes place. Importantly, breaking personal boundaries may not be relevant at all in a work if others taking part in the same work do not perceive it as such.

In contrast, a personal boundary may suddenly or unexpectedly arise in the middle of an improvisation and thus probably have an impact on both the one experiencing the boundary and others involved in the event.

Artists Miranda Tufnell and Chris Crickmay, in *Body Space Image: Notes towards Improvisation and Performance* (1990), do not mention risk at all. However, as many other dancers do, they present improvisation as "a way of shifting the boundaries within which we experience the world" (n. pag.). Boundaries, when touched, trespassed upon or shifted seem to give the improviser the feeling that she discovers something new and personally satisfying. This shifting of boundaries does not, however, necessarily imply a transgression of boundaries in which there is a discontinuity with what has been. Rather, it may involve a transformation of boundaries, which in turn maintains rather than disturbs continuity with the past.

In *Sharing the Dance: Contact Improvisation and American Culture* (1990), late improviser and dance scholar Cynthia Novack makes a detailed ethnographic analysis of the practice of Contact Improvisation (CI) and elucidates how the form developed within its historical, social and cultural contexts from the time of its inception in the early 1970s, to the late 1980s. She articulates CI as a practice capable of overcoming, even if only momentarily, the socially constructed binaries in which one usually finds oneself, such as culture-nature, spirit-body, control-intuition, male-female and set-improvised. However, she does not generally elaborate on risk, beyond focusing on the physical risks and the potential of injury occasioned by the often athletic, lacking-in-control movement encounters between the dancers. My focus here is not on *Contact Improvisation* (CI), but Novack's book offers a historic context for the early work of O'Donnell.

Kent De Spain, in his doctoral thesis *Solo Movement Improvisation: Constructing Understanding Through Lived Somatic Experience* (1997), clearly articulates the scarcity of academic research in dance improvisation at the time of his writing (mid to late nineties). De Spain therefore seeks discursive authority in the interviews he conducted with a few well-known improvisation practitioners, namely: Steve Krieckhaus, Simone Forti, Lisa Nelson, and Steve Paxton.

It is important to mention that, because of the nature of De Spain's study, i.e. solo improvisation, his review of the literature then available does not include sources that engage with group forms or CI, except as they relate to the solo form. He also focused on the process of improvisation and the experience of that process, rather than pedagogy, socio-cultural implications, or historical context (idem 20). Given the socio-cultural leanings of my research, the discursive space left vacant by De Spain is a space I wish to fill here. Given how often risk is alluded to in accounts of dance improvisation, De Spain surprisingly does not mention it, neither in his thesis nor in his new book, *Landscape of the Now: A Topography of Movement Improvisation* (2014). In the book, he elaborates on interviews made with eight very prominent artists[44] about their usage and understanding of improvisation, offering rich insight into the processes and structures underlying movement improvisation. He calls these 'agendas' (as, for instance, tracking, verbal and non-verbal awareness, intentionality) and 'resources' (such as body, space, the senses, cognitive skills, and attention), and posed the same questions about these to all the artists he interviewed.

44 Anna Halprin, Simone Forti, Ruth Zaporah, Barbara Dilley, Steve Paxton, Deborah Hay, Lisa Nelson, and Nancy Stark Smith.

Even though he did not include risk-taking in his agendas and resources, there is much one can infer about it from how he organized the answers given by the artists, especially with regard to the role memory and knowing play in improvisation.

From the interviews, it becomes clear that not every artist perceives this role in the same way. Some of these artists even feel uncomfortable calling their work improvisation, as for example Lisa Nelson and Deborah Hay[45], but it is also clear that De Spain proposes an understanding of the experience of expert improvisation that distances itself from the usual Cartesian reductionist binaries, including knowing and not knowing (or the unknown). In an e-mail correspondence with me, he states that he tries to find ways to sidestep 'knowing' altogether, as he finds it a "culturally encumbered word that falls far short of explaining what seems to be happening in improvisation, particularly the limited and limiting concept of knowing as a function primarily of mind or brain." For him, one tends to conceive 'knowing' as a process by means of which one 'pins' an experience down in some way and that does not seem to be what one does in movement (dance) improvisation. He says that "even though 'not knowing' might be 'closer to the mark',

45 In her choreographic practice of setting up propositions in the form of impossible-to-be-answered 'what if' questions, Deborah Hay favors experimentation to improvisation, where the body of the dancer is the site of an experiment in which the dancer is not trying to connect the dots in a linear flow or sequence of events (which for her would be improvisation) but rather an experiment in which the dancer keeps on stretching the gap (in De Spain's *Landscape of Now* 37-38). For Hay, this practice of stretching the gap turns the dancer into a researcher of consciousness (in Bindler's *Deborah Hay*), a research in which "there is no time for intention. There is only time to notice what is happening now. now. now (70). Movement for Hay thus is neither spontaneous nor premeditated. It is not a reflection of what the dancer does, but rather of how the dancer sees (in Bindler's *Being a Pig).*

even *that* connotes more mind than, say, a somatic exploration" (idem). It is clear here that De Spain, like most dance artists, is unhappy with the traditional privileging of mind over body. Avoiding mind altogether, however, does not seem to be a solution to the 'problem' either. De Spain, like many others who research dance improvisation, mentions one journal, *Contact Quarterly.*[46] It has, however, still not published an issue specifically dedicated to risk and improvisation.[47]

Dancer Agnès Benoit edited a volume devoted to improvisation as a performance form: *On the Edge: Dialogues on Dance Improvisation in Performance* (1997). It consists of fourteen interviews with prominent dance artists from both sides of the Atlantic whose creative process derives directly from improvisation: Steve Paxton, Yvonne Rainer, Lisa Nelson, Julyen Hamilton, Felice Wolfzahn, Pauline De Groot, K.J. Holmes, Suzanne Cotto, Simone Forti, David Zambrano, Mark Tompkins, Alessandro Certini, Frans Poelstra, and Katie Duck. Each interview taps into the question of composition and focuses specifically on the choice between doing set work (choreography) or instant composition (often used as an alternative term to improvisation), between working with a structure and doing a so-called open improvisation. The book also "examines specific

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46 Other than *CQ,* two magazines have been important to the dissemination of dance forms outside of the mainstream, namely, the British *New Dance* and the Australian *Writings on Dance*.

47 *Performance Research* in 1986 published a volume called *On Risk* (volume 1, No 2) but it contains no articles specific to dance improvisation. Interest in risk-taking in the arts has grown. For example, the University of Sydney published a volume in 2014 in the *About Performance* Journal called: *High Stakes: Between Risk and Performance*, and the University of Leeds launched a call for proposals for a volume on *Risky Aesthetics: Performance, Participation and Critical Vulnerabilities* (edited by Alice O'Grady, upcoming).

details in relation to the thought process during a performance of improvisation, including the risk-taking ways to go beyond one's limits and the desire to go into unknown situations" (13). The accounts of the fourteen experts interviewed indeed provide a rich source of insider, immanent knowledge about the many ways of improvisation. At various moments in the book one gets a glimpse of what these risk-taking ways might be. However, Benoit does not include a critical analysis of these in the book, despite the direct allusion to being 'on the edge' in its title.

Dance scholar Elaine Clark-Rapley, in *Dancing Bodies: Moving beyond Marxian Views of Human Activity, Relations and Consciousness* (1999), provides a sociological articulation of dance improvisation in which improvisation emerges as a form of innovation, in that from it new relations and new realities spring, which disrupt habituated ways of acting in and becoming conscious of the world (89). Following Hannah Arendt and challenging Karl Marx, she argues that the material human activity of improvisation, unlike labor, is an expression of individual beings who, not alienated from the act of creation, are therefore able to act without losing themselves in the process. She bases this view on the premise that 'non-purposive' forms of material human activity, like dance improvisation (moving for the sake of moving), produce relations that support conditions for creative self-actualization. This is what disrupts the Marxist theory of human activity predominant in sociological thought, which, as Clark-Rapley explains, reduces the life-world to instrumental action (89-90). Later in the text she posits, moreover, that one cannot reduce dance to socio-economic relations and forms, that is, to the predicament of practical activity, because in dance improvisation the practical activity begins and ends with a unified relation between the dancer (the subject) and the dance (the object). In other

words, the dancer is both the activity *and* the dance and therefore there is no space established for reflective consciousness (93).

I agree with the sort of agency with which Rapley endows the improviser. I also agree with how she articulates habituation, that is, with how she explicitly presents habit and the acceptance thereof as a condition for both its disruption and for the potential creation of the new. However, I must be critical of her identification of dance improvisation as a 'non-purposive' activity and, because of its 'unified' relation, as a non-reflective space. Deciding not to decide or deciding not to focus on a goal outside the activity itself is already purposeful. Not having a goal or purpose may perhaps be what happens in an amateur improvisation class or jam. However, even if this is case, I would strongly doubt nothing is produced, aimed at, or reflected upon. In works that involve improvisation in highly structured ways, such as the work of O'Donnell and Rodrigues, aims, production and reflection are present in a very prominent way. As I will argue in Chapter 3, taking reflection out of the improvisatory moment seems to mean that Rapley remains caught in the dualist mode of thinking she herself attempts to escape. The rare 'courage' to seize the initiative and do the unexpected, transcending the needs of mundane existence, which she (following Arendt) assigns to the individual, is, however, worthy of attention. Is this rare ability to non-purposively 'only play' that she ascribes to improvisation the type of risk artists today need to embrace to not only cope, but intervene in the current socio-cultural-economic climate of ongoing crisis? Is dance improvisation-as-performance a locus for such risk-taking and courageous (non-purposive and playful) endeavors? I will consider an answer for these questions in the Epilogue of this book.

Dances that Describe Themselves: The Improvised Choreography of Richard Bull (2002) is a book in which Foster develops, through a well-informed analysis of the improvised choreography of the late Richard Bull, theoretical approaches to dance improvisation in the late 20th century. Foster bases these approaches on her critical readings of ideas coming from a few authors: Michel de Certeau's Tactics, Michel Foucault's Docile Body, Pierre Bourdieu's Habitus, Mikhail Bakhtin's Grotesque Body, and Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau's Radical Democracy.

As the title of the book suggests, Foster emphasizes throughout how a clear-cut dichotomizing of improvisation and choreography does not hold. Even though she does not directly elaborate on risk, how she theorizes dance improvisation may give one clues as to what risk-taking may entail and how it relates to knowing. For example, when she asks how the dancing body in improvisation could be both an instrument of the will and a generative source of play, she is suggesting that in improvisation the dancers know both what a work of improvisation aspires to as well as what the rules of the game they play in it are. In this way, the dancing body that improvises not only unconsciously reproduces cultural values and institutionalized norms (which is how she understands and criticizes Bourdieu's 'habitus'); it also has the capacity to "formulate new contestatory and critical stances towards the status quo" (224). Thus, for Foster improvisation that is worth its salt must consciously risk upsetting the status quo. Should improvisation not do this, the risk it takes becomes perhaps even bigger: that of becoming irrelevant.

Dance scholars Ann Cooper Albright and Richard Gere edited an anthology of 21 essays[48], some new and some already published elsewhere, by a range of practitioners including dancers, historians, teachers, and scholars reflecting on the development of improvisation as a compositional and performance mode in a wide spectrum of contexts. The essay written by Banes, "Spontaneous Combustion: Notes on Improvisation from the Sixties to the Nineties" (2003), is useful for my purposes here. Banes makes a direct reference to risk being both a function and a meaning in so-called postmodern dance, and in addition to risk mentions "spontaneity, self-expression, spiritual expression, freedom, accessibility, choice, community, authenticity, the natural, presence, resourcefulness, political subversion and a sense of connectedness of playfulness, child's play, leisure and sports" (77). She leaves no doubt that "although improvisation can mean all these things, different aspects, values or goals have emerged at disparate historical moments" (idem). For example, she refers to the 1960s "as a time of political and artistic upheaval and economic abundance and improvisation as a leisurely means for exploration and participation in such a culture of abundance" (81). By the early 1990s, however, she continues, "the prospect of a worldwide financial crisis made abundance and leisure seem antique, nostalgic notions from the past and improvisation had a sense of urgency" (82).

In the 1960s and 1970s risk-taking for improvisers meant "lay[ing] at all times both the process of improvisation and of group dynamics open to public scrutiny in performance" (79). In the 1990s, however, after a decade of bodily and political control under Reagan

48 *Taken by Surprise: A Dance Improvisation Reader* (2003).

in the USA and Thatcher in the UK, taking risks meant instead to "look for physical extremes and to let go, to let the body and the imagination overflow all boundaries" (84)[49]. Have the goals of and values attached to risk changed since the late 1990s, and if so, how? Could the work of Rodrigues shed light on this?

Equally productive here is how Foster, in her contribution to the same anthology, assesses as inaccurate the definition of improvisation we have inherited from history. This presents improvisation as the "process of letting go of the mind's thinking so that the body can do its moving in its own unpredictable way" (6), a definition "in which the terms mind and body often stand for the known and the unknown" (idem). For Foster, improvisation "pivots both mind and body into a new apprehension of relationalities" (7). Similarly, as I will show in Chapter 3, choreography can equally pivot mind and body, the known and the unknown, in a new apprehension of relationalities, where known and unknown are continually recalibrated in the act of dancing. This also entails that one must explain risk, when taken in improvisation, in a logic that goes beyond the Cartesian dualism of body/mind, known/unknown.

In *Tanzimprovisation: Geschichte-Theorie-Verfahren-Vermittlung* (2007) Friederike Lampert describes how the practices of dance improvisation have changed our understanding of what choreography can be. She analyzes how Trisha Brown, Steve Paxton, William Forsythe, Amanda Miller, and Jonathan Burrows employ improvisation

49 Late Dance, Art and Policy scholar Randy Martin further elucidates this. He says: "by the 1980s, dance typed experimental, to say nothing of sports labeled extreme, would be celebrated for its embrace and elaboration of risk" (36). Such dances would, for instance, court danger, relish speed, subject bodies to an edgy precarity, but also foreground surprise, violating expectation, trespassing the norm, possibly disturbing established norms (idem).

in their work. Her theoretical discourse is, to a large extent, based on the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu and supplemented by interviews of a few professional dancers who employ improvisation as an integral part of their performing activities. She concludes the book proposing her own pedagogical concept for dance improvisation, based on the Nine-Point technique.[50] In Chapter 2, writing about the process of renewal (Prozess der Erneuerung) she indirectly herself elaborates on what risk may be or entail. Indirectly, because she does not do it by unpacking the notion of risk proper, but rather by looking at the notions of 'chance' and 'indeterminacy' (Zufall), which often appear contiguously with risk. Lampert posits that 'chance' or 'indeterminacy' is what the person improvising cannot foresee and that, in this very moment of not seeing ahead, the improviser not only is 'surprised'; she becomes unsure, insecure, consequently losing control (127-137). Lampert does not, however, elaborate on how critical this may be to a performance.

Dance scholar Danielle Goldman's *I Want to Be Ready: Improvised Dance as a Practice of Freedom* (2010) is a rigorous account of the freedom of improvisation and a no less rigorous criticism on the often-celebratory weight that practitioners place on their understanding of freedom in improvisational dance. Drawing substantially on the work of Michel Foucault, especially the late interviews, Goldman elaborates on the concept of the 'tight space'[51], which she borrows

50 Lampert describes the nine-point technique as an improvisation technique based on the space-harmony teaching of Rudolf von Laban, reinterpreted by William Forsythe and Amanda Miller, in which the dancing body orients itself with all its parts to various points in space. When the dancer improvises sequentially within this structure, a multi-centric movement style emerges (192-197).

51 Baker describes tight spaces in various ways, but he summarizes his definition as "the always ambivalent cultural compromises of occupancy and vacancy, differentially affected by contexts of situation" (Baker cited in Goldman 6-7).

from American scholar Houston Baker, countering thus a discourse and an understanding of freedom devoid of constraint, being careful not to align improvisation with uncritical notions of spontaneity. She instead argues that expert improvisations, the most skilled, must always negotiate an ever-shifting landscape of constraints, such as corporeal techniques, structures, and knowledge *of* and *in* the body, with which one may be able to perform resistance. Goldman does not elaborate on risk-taking in improvisation. However, in mentioning the risks and uncertainties one feels when, for instance, producing and presenting dance improvisation in a context such as The Republic of Iran (8), one quickly understands that risk for her is a situated, dynamic matter. One cannot compare what is at stake for artists in Iran with what is at stake for artists in the West[52].

In Composing While Dancing: An Improviser's Companion (2010), dancer and writer Melinda Buckwalter presents the improvisational practice and methodological thinking of twenty-six well-known, high-end figures in the dance and movement improvisational field. Each chapter of the book considers a relevant aspect of the practice of improvisation. For example, the use of the eyes in Lisa Nelson's *Tuning Scores* practice and the understanding of and usages of time in the respective practices of Steve Paxton and Katie Duck[53], or the influence of science in the work of William Forsythe or Susan Sgorbati. The book also offers a range of improvisational tasks and

52 This may perhaps change, given the recent lifting of sanctions on Iran and its 'opening' to the West.

53 Katie Duck has been a prominent and prolific teacher and artist of improvisation for decades, not only in the Netherlands. For more on her work and writings see <http://katieduck.com>.

exercises for further research, as well as a comprehensive glossary of terms, where risk unfortunately does not figure.

As far as what concerns this book, Buckwalter's publication is a good example of what I mentioned earlier in the Introduction, namely, that the risk involved in improvisation, that is, the risk arising from not knowing in advance what will happen, appears to be such a 'given' that it is very often left unattended. She writes: "improvisation is more about the thrill that comes from not knowing what it will be in the next moment or the next time. That dare is its lure" (3). One is led to think that—in similar ways as Steinman above—risk (daring) is what seduces one into improvising; that to improvise there must be the need to think or step 'outside one's box'. What not knowing here precisely means, and what one's 'box' is remains unclear. A more revealing articulation of the 'dare' is also missing. It is hard to tell whether the daring by one dancer is recognized as such by another dancer or whether this daring affects the work or not. A possible way around this ambiguity would be to state that indeed one can never be fully sure of what will happen in the future, any future, in any activity, not only improvisation, and that *that* always contains a degree of risk. Hence, for one not to reduce risk to a generalization that says nothing specific about the practice of improvisation (any practice of improvisation), one must examine risk in much more detail. This requires that one considers what one knows, or must know, when improvising in each work.

Improvisieren: Paradoxien des Unvorhersehbaren (2010), edited by Gabriele Brandstetter, Annemarie Matzke and Hans-Friedrich Bormann, is a compendium of eleven essays on improvisation written by prominent artists and scholars working in Germany. Covering philosophy, literature, media, music and theater studies, these essays each start from the assumption that improvisation

holds a problematic status, namely: "what has always been considered an important feature of all artistic practice is said to now have become a model for flexible and creative ways of working outside mainstream employment. Research on improvisation is consequently booming."[54] The editors think that this problematic status is reason enough to scrutinize the concept of improvisation, to examine its terms and conditions. One essay has direct bearing on this discussion: Gabriele Brandstetter's "Selbst-Überraschung: Improvisation im Tanz."

Written for *Improvisation*, a conference that took place in 2007 at Albert-Ludwigs University, Freiburg, Germany, Brandstetter speaks of the *Poiesis des Imperfekten* (Poiesis of the Imperfect). She identifies the locus of risk and what she calls the 'subversive energy' of the improvisatory act. For Brandstetter, improvisatory practices rely on the fact that at every and any moment things can be or made differently because they have not been fully determined in advance; they are not 'finished'. Therein unfolds the potential for novelty, strangeness, and the incommensurable (193). Because the improviser knows that things could be different, she can choose something other than the habitual or expected.

Improvisation: Kultur und Lebenswissenschaftliche Perspektiven (2009), edited by Maximilian Gröne, Hans-Jochim Gehrke, Frank-Rutger Hausmann, Stefan Pfänder, and Bernhard Zimmermann, is a collection of lectures also presented at *Improvisation*. They position their effort in the following manner:

54 Excerpt from a review originally written in German.

> In contrast to Innovation, Creativity and Play, concepts that have become key[s] in discussions around research in disciplines such as economics, psychology, and cultural science, the human ability to improvise as a phenomenon has rarely been elevated to being a subject of scientific research. Improvising nonetheless constitutes a form of human action one cannot neglect. (11)

The book is thus both an acknowledgment of the relevance of improvisation, the need for more research on it and a contribution to the practice. Contrary to the colloquial understanding of spontaneity and romantic ideas of freedom, both of which often attached to improvisation, here the editors clearly posit that improvisation is based on the understanding of relevant existing rules and patterns, whose known (and therefore predictable) order is broken. This relies on an already-existing inventory of actions. They posit that it is crucial to any serious discussion about improvisation to consider how the context in which improvisation takes place conditions it. Improvisation for them is "a kind of reaction at high speed, which, in an ideal scenario, significantly transforms the pattern it breaks and unleashes pleasure in both the improviser and recipient alike. Importantly, it carries within it the risk of failure" (15). One can contend that if the risk of improvisation is its lure or gain, as Buckwalter seems to suggest, and risk intrinsically connects to failure, as these editors suggest, then failure could be improvisation's gain. If this is plausible, then a couple of questions arise. Do improvisers consciously 'work' on failing? What might the act of failing reveal about the neo-liberal pressure on the individual to perform efficiently? Is this where the ethico-political potential and implications of improvisation lie, namely, to *not* perform according

to the values attached to neo-liberalism, and so fail (and fail at) those values? The editors strongly insist that the utopian idea of freedom in improvisation—which they equate to having no rules—does not promote risk. Rather, the absence of rules or constraints eliminates the potential for failure, and thus for risk as well.

Edgar Landgraf's *Improvisation as Art: Conceptual Challenges, Historical Perspectives* (2011) challenges the theoretical reasoning and historical narratives that helped configure an either-or opposition between improvisation and other more traditional forms of artistic production. Following Derrida, Neo-Cybernetic thought (Luhmann) and Systems Theory (Spencer-Brown) his book links, rather than opposes, improvisation to the structural properties of text[55]. Landgraf focuses on the "continuities and connections between the aesthetics of autonomy as it emerged in the 18th century and contemporary assertions about the practice of improvisation as art" (142). One of the central problems the book attempts to solve is how one can account for the increased sense of immediacy of performed improvisation. Landgraf's proposed solution to this problem of the mediation of immediacy does not rely on the categories of authenticity, immediacy, singularity, and subjectivity—all relevant in early Romantic discourses on art, and in discourses of improvisation still enduring to this day. Instead, he draws on a neo-cybernetic vocabulary and attitude whereby improvisation is

> a computation of complex forms through a self-referentially operating process. Improvisations draw, condense, confirm,

55 As I suggested in the Introduction, 'text' is equivalent to that which has already been decided-upon, planned, written down, composed, or choreographed.

> cancel, and compensate for distinctions[56] they themselves produce and reproduce, building complexity and relating structures and the unstructured, prepared and unprepared, known and unknown elements to each other. (147)

Landgraf's understanding of improvisation is a good example of how one no longer needs to "lament the difficulties the conceptualization of improvisation poses" (idem 1). His approach rather supports the argument against dichotomous and reductive constructs of thought. This is not to say that the difficulties in conceptualizing improvisation are not real. However, rather than lamenting these difficulties I would rather take up the challenge, always risking failing to do full justice to the work or concept involved.

Landgraf does not refer to risk in this book. Nevertheless, his reading of Heinrich von Kleist in the book's last chapter, in which he suggests that social constraints invite, and often force, individuals to improvise, may serve my argument. Rather than taking the fleeting quality of improvisation as a reason not to act 'on the spur of the moment', including not writing about its fleetingness, this quality becomes, on the contrary, a motivation to act; perhaps even a demand to implicate oneself in the *making* sense of what is *there* in the very moment one acknowledges it as being *there*. This approach is in line, I believe, with how Lepecki in his more recent writings

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56 This is how literary theorist Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, following Spencer-Brown, understands form as 'operational' rather than representational. Landgraf explains: "form [for Gumbrecht] is, on the one hand, a movement whose direction we want to see continued and, on the other, the unity of a distinction" (*Improvisation Form* 191).

speaks of the devotion of the dancer in certain choreographies (see next chapter)[57].

In Improvisation als *Soziale Kunst: Überlegung zum Künstlerischen und Didaktischen Umgang mit Improvisatorischer Kreativität* (2010), musician and musicologist Reinhard Gagel describes what he considers the pre-requisites for 'good, intensive' improvisations, namely, the competence to play with the 'unforeseeable' and 'unheard'. He presents an understanding of improvisation consistent with ideas emerging from System Theory and Emergence, bringing into his articulation of improvisation concepts such as self-organization, synchrony, and complexity. According to Gagel, two of the competences one must possess to improvise are the acceptance of failure and the ability to anticipate failure, which suggests that the 'not knowing' involved in improvisation may not after all be as unconscious or unexpected as one might think (54-56). Hence, if one understands failure as a sign for the creativity involved in improvisatory agency, as Gagel explicitly does, then the exposure to failure one confronts oneself with in improvisation is not really a risk in the sense of potential loss. Instead, the failure would be to avoid the opportunity of engaging with an 'old' thing in a new manner or try something one has not tried before.

Musician and philosopher Gary Peters, in *The Philosophy of Improvisation* (2009), points to the fact that "improvisation is usually either lionized as an ecstatic experience of being in the moment

57 In *Infinite Demand*, Simon Critchley writes about two kinds of nihilism that could, perhaps, shed critical light on what the devotion (or lack thereof) of the dancer referred to by Lepecki could entail. Critchley says that, on the one hand, there is a form of nihilism through which one creates change by doing violence to oneself or others, and, on the other hand, a nihilism in which one does nothing because, no matter what one does, it will have no impact.

or disparaged as the thoughtless recycling of clichés."[58] Peters is explicitly wary of how scholars and artists alike tend to bring risk and improvisation together, creating a situation in which there is no improvisation possible without the risk-taking associated with "the transition from the unmarked to the marked" (26), from supposedly not knowing to knowing, or with "an unguided journey into the unknown where anything can happen" (36). For him risk-taking "is rarely the inspired abandonment that it appears to be or is promoted as" (82).

Musician and scholar Christopher Dell, in *Re Play City: Improvisation als Urbane Praxis* (2011), presented a further development of a previously published concept of improvisation[59]: *Improvisation in Modus 2*. He defines improvisation as a "situated trespassing of plans [that] is not the embellishment of failure, but rather the recognition of the situated and micro-political mobility (or move-ability) of the production of relational space" (14). Drawing greatly on the ideas of sociologist and philosopher Henri Lefebvre, especially how Lefebvre understands space and its production as relational, Dell proposes an understanding of the city as a transit place, "choreographed by a huge, complex variety of rhythms that we navigate in and produce ourselves at the same time."[60] He furthermore proposes an understanding of improvisation as a technology in that it involves negotiations that require practical tools. Moreover, this

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58 Synopsis of Peters book: <http://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/P/bo6485465.html>. Web. 26 Sept. 2017.

59 In *Prinzip Improvisation*, Dell arguably does not provide a principle of improvisation. Rather, he presents a range of issues surrounding improvisation in a manner meant to provoke thought.

60 Dell's website: <http://www.christopher-dell.de/ifit.htm>. Web. 19 Nov. 2014.

technology "takes into account the agreement, the actual state and the autobiographic characteristics of the individual in a group process."[61] He argues that improvisation is a practice that enables one to navigate the constraints of the urban spaces of the 21st century, spaces pregnant with change in general, but in particular change related to issues around lack of safety, uncertainty and insecurity, all characteristic of affects emerging out of a Culture of Fear, a culture which encourages risk aversion. In contrast, improvisation in *Modus 2* is for him a positive, constructive practice that triggers a situational extrapolation of the plan by using it not as a cover-up for failure but rather as an acknowledgment of how spaces take form in a micro-political fashion.[62] Planning in advance does not necessarily diminish the risk of failure but it may enable one to act on the moment more aptly. Improvisation therefore forces one to judge (169), assess, make a choice (because one knows things could turn out differently than expected), even if choosing not to choose.

The Fierce Urgency of Now: Improvisation, Rights, and the Ethics of Co-creation (2013), a book co-authored by Daniel Fischlin, Ajay Heble, and George Lipsitz, draws its title from a phrase used by Martin Luther King Jr. in his anti-war speeches delivered in 1967 and 1968 and as the title suggests the book is an expansive investigation of the ways that improvisation, particularly in music, may be able to bring new perspectives to civil rights discourse. The book does not particularly focus on dance or choreography. However, the authors present improvisation as a practice that "requires renegotiation of

61 Idem.

62 Dell here refers to how Deleuze and Guattari have written about the micro-political in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987). The micro-political concerns itself with the world of everyday experience, feelings and affects.

the social charter between individuals and groups, but also enhances the capacities of individuals" (xxxii), which is a central concern in both choreographies I examine here, namely the question of how both works ask, albeit in different ways, 'how to be together' on stage. Throughout the book the authors suggest that improvisation be a model of co-creation, an encounter. Such a model is based on, among other things, *listening*, which they define as a way of hearing the other that "changes one's own contribution to the collective narrative" (232). This implies a way of one knowing oneself—and what one does in tandem with others—that is, on the one hand, not oblivious of what one knows, but, on the other, not entirely certain of its knowing either. It is a way of knowing that acknowledges its always-partial, incomplete, contingent nature. This form of listening cultivates the potential for surprise, what improvisation so often promises, but it also cultivates (and demands) responsibility and trust, without which no positive risks can be taken: risks that enhance the potency of the work and all involved in it.

Sara Ramshaw wrote a book on law and jazz music: *Justice as Improvisation: The Law of the Extempore* (2013). She draws extensively from the work of Derrida and scholars of CSI[63] who have worked to describe improvisation in more nuanced ways, providing it with a more "complex understanding that is reducible neither to 'pattern repetition' nor to 'making it up'" (12). Put simply, for her improvisation is not simply freedom *or* constraint. It is a complex exchange between them. An important part of this complex exchange, according to CSI, is the exercising of what Ramshaw calls

63 CSI is the abbreviation for Critical Studies in Improvisation, a field in which social, political and musical genres combine.

an active listening, as well as engaging memory, communication, and collaborative creation. In addition, she thinks of the potential of novelty occasioned by improvisation as emerging as "a collective, social, and responsive act of judgment, as a model for the practice of justice in the modern world, which asks one to understand the obligation in law not just to decide but to decide well" (130-135). It is thus obvious that for Ramshaw, for one to take risks and push the edges into the unknown, a profound awareness of *what* one knows is crucial. This includes knowing one does not know as well as the ability to negotiate differences. It also requires a willingness to accept the challenges of risk (pushing the edges too far or too little) and contingency (not ever fully knowing what pushing the edges will produce).

Erin Manning in *Thought in the Act: Passages in the Ecology of Experience* (2014), a book written in collaboration with Brian Massumi, writes about what she calls the 'enabling constraints' that were set in place for and during *Dancing the Virtual*, the first part of a larger event called *Technologies of Lived Abstraction*.[64] One of the goals of *Dancing the Virtual* was "to collaboratively catalyze movement towards the emergence of the new" (92). To achieve this, one needed techniques of relation, techniques that would condition rather than frame, that is, techniques capable of setting in place propitious initial conditions for the event, modulating it as it moved through its phases (93). 'Enabling constraint' was the term adopted for the relational technique in its conditioning role. It is positive (enabling) in its dynamic effect, even though it may be limiting in

64 For more information on *Dancing the Virtual,* (Montreal), see <http://senselab.ca/wp2/events/dancing-the-virtual-2005/>.

its form/force when narrowly considered (idem). This is important here because, as an example of a constraint that enables, Manning mentions improvised dance movement. In improvised movement, the action of gravity on the body (the body's major, implacable constraint), when encountering another cause or constraint such as an image or concept, can allow for the emergence of a new movement that one cannot explain or reduce to neither gravity nor the cause encountered. This means that the kind of image or concept brought in relationship with the pull of gravity plays an important role in determining whether a constraint becomes predominantly limiting, or enabling. Perhaps even more important is Manning's unambiguous avoidance of the "voluntaristic connotations by words like improvisation, emergence and invention" (idem). For Manning, the work involved in constraints that enable has nothing to do with "letting things flow" or risk-taking. In her experience, letting things merely flow results in works that are "typically lacking in rigor, intensity, and interest for those not directly involved, and are, consequently, low on follow-on effects" (93-94) and most likely devoid of risk-taking that is enabling.

Vida Midgelow's *Nomadism and Ethics in/as Improvised Movement Practices* (2012) draws on her own and others' experience as dancers to propose nomadism *in* and *as* improvisation, hoping to reveal how nomadism affects our ways of being and knowing. For this she references the writings of feminist philosopher Rosi Braidotti, who defines the nomad as "the kind of subject who has relinquished all idea, desire, or nostalgia for fixity" (Braidotti cited in Midgelow 2). This means that what makes the identity of a nomad stable does not depend on the places the nomad passes through, but rather on "the symbolic home she carries along on the journey." Midgelow thus proposes an idea of the improviser (nomad) that is political in

nature, as the kind of subject she proposes "engages in a creative redefinition of politics from below, offering a means for rethinking our own embodied positions and our relationships to one another, and to the environment, in always provisionally located ways" (3). In other words, Midgelow suggests that improvisers, like nomads, are comfortable with transition and change, and as such, somatically-based improvisation enables an understanding of knowledge and of self that is "grounded and located in the materiality of the body and the places in which we dance" (2), but it does not need to be fixed or territorialized. In its form, the body of the improviser and her lived experience of having a body, of being, becoming, and moving with it, are, while being specifically located, never fully closed. It follows that, as Braidotti states, "one can never *be* a nomad [and, if one agrees with Midgelow, also an improviser]; one can only go on trying to *become* nomadic" (Braidotti cited in Midgelow 5). In *becoming,* the improviser opens herself to difference. As such she also risks an encounter with the unknown. For Midgelow this can only work if the improviser has an "understanding of established norms and a high level of self-consciousness, such that the dancers can resist or resituate codified languages and established ways of dancing" (6) or "challenge hierarchical practices and knowings" (7).

Even more relevant here is how Midgelow thinks of the improviser as nomad in and through group interactions, never alone. She qualifies what happens in improvisation as "belonging to both no one and everyone" (7) and as the result of an "exchange rather than the power of pre-knowledge" (8). Here she clearly problematizes knowledge as an absolute. Pretending to know it all *a priori*, on the one hand, and doing *as if* one did not know anything at all, on the other, do not promote the kind of nomadic ethics she suggests is present in improvisation.

Artist and scholar Rebecca Caines and Theater Studies scholar Ajay Heble co-edited an interdisciplinary improvisation reader called *The Improvisation Studies Reader: Spontaneous Acts* (2015), in which an entire section focuses on the issue of risk and trust in improvisation across the arts. In the essay written by musician and music scholar Ellen Waterman in the beginning of this part of the book, "Improvised Trust: Opening Statements," Waterman states that risk-taking in improvisation strongly connects to how much the improviser trusts the outcome of her risk-taking. Waterman posits: "most of us are willing to take risks in exact proportion to how much we trust in the outcome" (location 1934). Consequently, she continues, one can understand "the delicate negotiation of trust and risk in improvisation in terms of social interaction and accountability" (location 1945) and "if good improvisation depends on empathic communication, then it is clear that a failure of attentiveness constitutes a formidable barrier to success" (location 1955).

1.2 Dimensions pertaining to Risk-Taking: An Overview

Trust: That without which the ethical cultivation of risk within dance, and the improvisatory dimension within it, would not be possible.

Listening: A practice and ethical stance that enables one to better understand how an individual relates to the group (and vice versa).

Fear: The dread of failure, of being either physically or emotionally hurt, of looking ridiculous, of getting things wrong, of deciding inappropriately, of losing control, of failing to seize an opportunity.

Failure: It is always imminent and lurking in the shadows. Vanquishing the fear of failure is intrinsic to improvisation. Failing to

conform to the demand of producing the new is a challenge that dancers must rehearse.

To dare: It is synonymous to risk and entails challenging or problematizing the status quo. For many, it is a condition without which there is no improvisation.

Disruption (of habit or status quo): Under the guise of daring, it is one of the main powers of improvisation. As such, it is also one of the main demands that one projects onto improvisation, a demand that is difficult to meet. Whether improvisation today still carries this power within is questionable.

Boundaries (or edge): Boundaries are fundamental to an understanding of risk. They can be physical, structural, relational, conceptual or emotional, individual or collective, and they must either be or become clear, i.e., already known or come-to-be-known. In improvisation, one often shifts or expands them, sometimes transgressing them. Boundaries are not static or permanent.

Constraint: The necessary condition for freedom. As such it is always present in dance, improvised or not. Constraints can be enabling or limiting to the work.

Decision-making: Inevitable in any live act engendered by a human, but rendered more clearly in improvisation. Its practice by seasoned improvisers allows for choosing outside the norm. Some even say that through improvisation one becomes better at deciding.

Responsibility: An agency or attunement cultivated from trust and from a kind of active 'listening' within groups. It arises often in tandem with freedom, manifested by means of the possibility to decide otherwise.

Control (or mastery): The more knowledge of a situation one has the more control one will have of the situation and consequently the more able one will be to cultivate risk-taking. It is also an indication

of how 'knowing' conditions engaging with the unknown. The loss of control (knowing too little) can enhance the risk of physical and/or emotional injury, while its excess (knowing too much) can highjack the potential for the new in a work.

1.3 Conclusion

1. Risk-taking, especially because of its agency as 'daring', is integral to dance improvisation, even though some practitioners argue that an improvisation can be satisfying without it (De Spain) and that risk-taking is altogether a misleading notion, because it says more about a style of dancing based on being reckless than about the work of improvisation itself (Sanchis). One cannot, moreover, generalize risk-taking as being equivalent for each situation or practitioner.
2. Risk-taking and the many failures that inevitably ensue—including possible loss or excess of control of self and of one's boundaries and the physical and emotional injures that may thereby occur—are, for some, a compelling force, and a gain. For Gagel, however, if failing is a gain then it is no longer a failure. Moreover, if such failing as gain becomes a formula that can be known in advance and repeated it can become the norm, and as such it maintains rather than challenges the status quo. Challenging the status quo is a promise often attached to improvisatory agency, and it is also at times a demand made on improvisation (Kaiel and Foster).
3. If this demand for novelty is the case, as suggested above when I questioned the potential for the new

in dance improvisation, then failing to conform to the demand to produce the new is a challenge (risk) worth rehearsing. Therefore, according to Rapley, such risk-taking requires a kind of courage, namely, the courage to persist, to change things from within, micro-politically. This may be a possible answer to the question arising from Banes regarding the kind and the function of risk-taking today.

4. Moreover, one must consider the crossing or expanding of personal boundaries as suggested by Blom and Chaplin and Tuffnell and Crikmay, in relation with the work itself. Crossing or expanding one's personal boundaries is perhaps necessary but not a sufficient condition for establishing whether this activity makes a substantial difference to the work. One needs to bring the work's own problems, i.e., what it demands, allows or endures, into the equation, as well as the constraints required for achieving what the work may demand, allow or endure. Letting things just flow, apparently without constraints, is usually not an enabling condition for work that is rigorous or new (Manning).
5. Thinking of the self through the group and of what the work demands, allows or endures enables one to have a more dimensional understanding of the kind of freedom that risk-taking in improvisation may generate and, with it, the kind of responsibility involved in the process (Fischlin and Waterman).
6. Having an awareness of responsibility in turn implies two things: that one knows what the work requires;

and that one trusts that one possesses what it takes to do it. One must also trust that others involved know what the work requires and have what it takes to do it. This kind of knowing involves different kinds of consciousness, as Blom and Chaplin, and De Spain suggest. It also involves a listening that is acute not only for Fischlin and Waterman but for most seasoned dancers.

7. Such acute listening sheds light on the fact that in dance what *happens* belongs to both no one and everyone, as Midgelow so clearly posits. At the same time, this sort of listening enables one to choose differently (Brandstetter, Dell) or even to choose or know better (Ramshaw).
8. The chronology of the literature review encompassed, approximately, the time gap between the making of O'Donnell's *Faust* (1993) and Rodrigues's *Pororoca* (2009), a period during which improvisation arguably lost currency, both due to the accentuation and proliferation of connections made between improvisational agency and advanced capitalism, and because it was a time during which choreography became 'expanded' in its understanding and usage. I will shed light on this in the next chapter. This temporal gap between the making of the two works here examined also seems to capture a Western societal shift from relative economic abundance to scarcity, illuminating the kinds of risk-taking engaged with one choreographer and perhaps not, or to a lesser extent, by the other.

Chapter 2
Dance Improvisation and Its Alleged 'Other': Choreography

> *Not to Know*, not knowing...means having no idea what the next instant will present to us. It means letting oneself go to the essence of improvisation itself: a constant consciousness of the present moment, an instinctive discovery of the paths offered to the creators (Lachambre 2001).[65]

I must here make clear that any description, report or analysis of an act of dance improvisation or set choreography will always be fundamentally different from the experience the performer has herself when performing either of these in real-time. To improvise, to write about improvisation and to write about what others have written or said about improvisation are different things.[66] Acutely aware of this difference, my endeavor in this chapter is not to attempt to fulfill the quixotic task of faithfully duplicating in writing the feeling or experience of the improviser in an improvisation or set choreography, nor to doubt or belittle it. An experience *is.* However, how one describes an experience can be put under the magnifying glass and

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65 *Not to know,* a project by Canadian choreographer Benoit Lachambre, premiered on Oct. 2, 2001 at the Festival International de Nouvelle Danse (Montreal, Canada).

66 I am also referring to how young dance students understand improvisation. I compile these views in the Appendix section at the end.

made productive, especially when descriptions appear to privilege one experience at the cost of reducing or over-simplifying another.

Put simply, one can say that since modern dance rebelled against the values and norms of classic ballet early in the 20th century, improvisation in dance has held a special promise, that of spontaneous creation and new movement. This expectation emerged out of the founding ideas articulated first by modern dance pioneers such as Isadora Duncan and then revitalized by both what Daniel Belgrad has coined the '*Culture of Spontaneity*' of post-war America[67], with its various manifestations, and the neo Avant-Garde movement of the 1960s and 1970s, particularly by the *Judson Church Theater* and the *Grand Union*. These ideas included privileging the pursuit of freedom in acts of spontaneous self-expression, body-mind holism, a strong interest in nature and its processes, and, importantly for this book, the necessary accompanying risk-taking occasioned by the pursuit of the new by means of spontaneous, allegedly unconscious acts of self-expression. In addition, certainly in the case of the early modern dance, but considerably less in the neo Avant-Garde of the 1960s and 1970s, there was the primacy of the physical, sensorial, and emotional nature of movement. All these elements are today still prominent in how dance practitioners and scholars alike explain the singularity of improvisation. The quotation above is only one of many other examples.

In dance studies, however, in contrast to other areas of inquiry, these ideas of freedom and spontaneous self-expression have not

67 See Belgrad's *The Culture of Spontaneity: Improvisation and the Arts in Postwar America* (1998).

been questioned enough.[68] Ramsay Burt's *Ungoverning Dance*, Kent De Spain's *Landscape of Now: Topography of Movement Improvisation*, Cvejic's PhD thesis *Choreographing Problems, Expressive Concepts in European Contemporary Dance*[69], choreographer Marten Spångberg's blog posts on the theme, and also dancer and scholar Vida Midgelow's writings on improvisation in relation to nomadism are exceptions to this. De Spain is more interested in the personal insights provided by the eight prominent artists he interviews than Cvejic is of the artists whose work she examines. Her approach, in her chapter on improvisation, privileges the theoretical conceptualization of improvisation over the experience of the dancers.

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68 Examples of research undertaken outside of dance since 2003 are: 1) in architecture and urbanism: Dell, Christopher. *Re-play City, Improvisation als Urbane Praxis*; 2) in music: Santi, Marina. *Improvisation: Between Technique and Spontaneity* and Fischlin, Heble and Lipsitz. *The Fierce Urgency of Now: Improvisation, Rights and the Ethics of Co-creation*; 3) juxtaposing law and music: Ramshaw, Sara. *Justice as Improvisation;* 4) in theater and cognition: Drinko, Clayton. *Theatrical Improvisation, Consciousness and Cognition*; 5) compilation of approaches to improvisation in various media: Bormann, Brandstetter and Matke (Eds.). *Improvisieren, Paradoxien des Unvorhersehbaren*; 6) critical philosophical readings of improvisation: Boissière, Anne and Catherine Kintzler (Eds.). *Approche Philosophique du Geste Dansé: de la Improvisation à la Performance*, Landgraf, Edgar. *Improvisation as Art* and Peters, Gary. *Philosophy of Improvisation*; 7) socio-cultural approaches to and investigations of improvisation have been on the rise and three recent examples thereof are: Gagel, Reihard. *Improvisation als Soziale Kunst*, Göttlich, Udo and Ronald Kurt (Eds.) *Kreativität und Improvisation, Soziologische Positionen*, and Grönes Maximilian et al (Eds.). *Improvisation, Kultur und Lebenswissenschaftliche Perspektiven*; 8) organization studies: Bak, Kathrine. *Researching Improvisation, How Experts Experience Decision-making under Time Pressure*; 9) anthropology: Hallam, Elisabeth and Tim Ingold (Eds.). *Creativity and Cultural Improvisation*; 10) English studies: Esterhammer, Angela. *Romanticism and Improvisation, 1750-1850*; 11) ergonomics: Trotter, Margaret, Paul Salmon and Michael Lenné. *Improvisation: Theory, Measures and Known Influencing Factors* and 12) aesthetics: Duderstadt, Matthias. *Improvisation und Aesthetische Bildung.*

69 Especially Chapter 4, in which Cvejic challenges improvisation's ability to produce the new in self-expression.

However, both convincingly shed a critical light on a practice that is, on the one hand, plural and ubiquitous and, on the other, as a "word for something that cannot keep a name" (Paxton 126-129). Because I do not want to contribute to the 'struggle' between theory and practice (or lived experience), in what follows I make use of both approaches, at times tending more towards one than the other.

My aim in this chapter is to provide a brief and unavoidably incomplete history of dance improvisation in the West and the tension (imbrication) with choreography, its alleged other.[70] This will help situate my reading of improvisation in *Faust* and *Pororoca*, as well as shed light on their larger socio-political context.

2.1 A Brief Historical Account of Dance Improvisation and Its Imbrication with Choreography

Improvisational techniques have been employed in the arts, from the 18th century onwards, in efforts to resist or unsettle the Establishment and its high-art forms and norms of composition. Artists

70 I am aware that the 'West' amounts to a multiplicity of practices of improvisation, many of which I am not referring to in this book, such as Jazz Dance improvisation, Urban Dance and Hip-Hop. In addition, an in-depth examination of Eastern forms and understandings of improvisation is beyond the scope of this book. However, it is worth mentioning a few important differences. Improvisation in the East has a very different meaning than in the West, starting with the fact that in the East, it is a core competence of performers of dance and music. In the West, certainly after the 18th century, improvisation has most often been a sort of bastard in the shadows of composition, a manifestation of imperfection, lack, makeshift, and a means for an end. Moreover, with Kurt, in the East repetition in improvisation is the process by means of which form becomes undermined, whereas in the West improvisation often stands for an endless revolution against the old and so against repetition. Importantly, improvisation in the West is a way to freedom of self, whereas in the East it is a freedom from self (171-172).

who have used these techniques have consistently and voluntarily 'failed' to perform according to the rules and norms of the Establishment and in 'failing' to perform they have contributed to the expansion of the range of what is possible to do and think within and beyond disciplinary bounds. Music scholar Timothy McGee, whose main research area is European performance practices from 900 to 1800, states that "until the end of the eighteenth century, from the Middle Ages and through to the Renaissance, the idea of improvisation was basic to the concept of the performing arts" (McGee xi). According to McGee, in this period, with the advent of the professionalization of the performer and her claim to stardom "performance was no longer an instrument for the execution of previously conceived art but itself art of the highest caliber, equal and possibly superior to composition" (7). The performer was:

> ... in possession of a vocabulary and of a grammar of direct composition that enabled her to generate coherent text in the act of the performance itself, and therefore outside the range of control by other interested parties such as composers, playwrights, and authorities (7).[71]

What McGee describes is in line with dance scholar Gerald Sigmund's explanation of how the notion of choreography has acquired different meanings over time. Sigmund posits that it was

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71 McGee: "For the censors of the Counter Reformation improvisation was more than a strategy for the avoidance of ideological screening. This is especially evident in the case of Commedia dell 'arte. Soon after the appearance of the first companies in the early decades of the Counter Reformation, religious authority denounced Commedia because its texts, being only performance texts, could not be screened for orthodoxy and propriety before the production itself" (22).

Jean George Noverre's resistance in the 18th century to the idea of choreography as notation created independently from the live action of dance that led to choreography becoming understood as composition, that is, as the process whereby one imagines steps and sets these to music. This understanding of choreography as composition still exists in many companies, classic and contemporary alike.[72] It is in line with how Foster describes the role of the 18th century Dancing Master and the skills he had to possess, among which was to "find a persuasive and visually acute story to tell, and rendering the narrative with innovative and appropriate movement carefully matched to the music" (*Choreographing* 39).

With the advancement of the idea of choreography as composition, by the end of the 18th century the practice of improvisation in performance met resistance and started to lose popularity. Significant to the decline of improvisation was the development of what theater scholars Anthony Frost and Ralph Yarrow have identified as the "plush and decorous theater space in the eighteenth century and the rise of the director, who tended to impose and teach rather than allow for the creativity of the performer" (cited in Smith and Dean 11). Later, in the 19th and 20th centuries, improvisation importantly became "susceptible of independent development at a pace and in a direction determined chiefly by the changing aesthetic relation-

72 <https://www.goethe.de/de/kul/tut/gen/tan/20363200.html>. Web. 5 Aug. 2014. Translation is mine. Even though Foster, in *Reading Dancing: Bodies and Subjects in Contemporary American Dance*, does identify a shift from choreography as notation to choreography as composition at the same period as does Sigmund, she appears to think of choreography *always* as a composition of dance, as her historical exposition of approaches to dance composition in Chapter 3 indicates. For critical reviews of Foster's *Reading Dancing* refer for example to Philip Auslander (*TDR*, 32.4 (Winter, 1988): 7-23) and Francis Sparshott (*Dance Research Journal*, 19. 2 (Winter, 1987-1988): 42-43).

ship of performance to notation" (McGee 2). This attitude also had to do with a culture that, to quote McGee, "valued written words more than spoken ones, written texts above physical enactment, compositions above live performances, concepts above designs, and designs above the objects that embody them" (idem). As a result, according to pedagogue Keith Sawyer, since the 19th century, high art performance forms have been both scored and scripted, and improvisational performance has "generally been associated with uneducated or rural subgroups" (*Improvisation* 31-38). By the 19th century then, it seems clear that the oppositional tension between improvisation and choreography is installed; what was earlier an integrated approach to performance became an approach in which choreography as composition was privileged over improvisation. An intermission to this attitude has occurred with the emergence of Surrealism, Dada and Futurism in the early 20th century. Dada performances at the Cabaret Voltaire in Zürich during the First World War often involved improvisation, and so did Surrealism and Futurism, all of which courted concepts of chance and indeterminacy which lean on improvisatory modes (Smith and Dean 11-2).

Against the background of new theories of human development rooted in the 19th century such as those of Sigmund Freud, Charles Darwin, and John Dewey, improvisation in the early 20th century became increasingly important as an educational and therapeutic tool. Margaret H'Doubler, who pioneered dance in the university in the United States, included improvisation in her teaching. According to late dance historian Selma Jeanne Cohen, H'Doubler encouraged "self-expression through music as well as evocative images and themes. Although this use of improvisation led many to associate all improvisation with amateurism, it nonetheless provided a foundation for later developments in performance improvisa-

tion" (n.p), especially through dance maverick Anna Halprin, who studied with H'Doubler.

Halprin is without a doubt one of the people most responsible for the spread of improvisation in dance in the 20th century. According to scholar and improviser Kent De Spain, she studied with many great modern dancers of her day (Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, Hanya Holm), but was most influenced by her work with H'Doubler. Therefore, one can consider her the connecting link between the first generation of American dance educators and the experiments of the Judson Church and Grand Union. This is because several key figures of this time, such as Simone Forti, Yvonne Rainer and Trisha Brown and others, including Mary O'Donnell, studied with Halprin on the West Coast. Halprin's work has always concerned itself with group process, tasks, ritual, and interactions with nature and the environment. With her architect husband Lawrence Halprin in 1966 she developed the RSVP cycles, a system for creative collaboration (*Landscape of the Now* 16-18). For Halprin, according to a direct reading of the resources, improvisation involves going from what one has available to work with (the 'R' of the cycle) to Performance (the 'P' of the cycle) without going through a score (the 'S' of the cycle). In other words, should one work with a score (knowing what but not knowing in advance exactly how) one would no longer be improvising, but rather choreographing.[73] Valueaction, the 'V' of the cycle, is the moment of analytical reflection

73 In the recently published DVD of her work, *Anna Halprin, Dancing Life*, Halprin says in an interview that the RSVP cycle could be a substitute for choreography, clearly differentiating improvisation (that is, when one goes directly from resources to the performance without making use of scoring) from choreography by an explicit focus on compositional decisions made prior to the performance.

of the actions and decisions taken in each exploration. Through 'V', one finds the value of what one has done, and then takes action by recycling it (idem 79).

In Central Europe at about the same time, Mary Wigman and Rudolf Laban were starting their collaboration. Cohen states:

> [A]lbeit in different ways, both used improvisation extensively in the training process of dancers and in preparing material for classes and pieces. Although Wigman was adamant about the value of improvisation as a means to an end, but not as an end in itself, Laban sometimes used improvisation in performances by his movement choirs, providing loose structures that sometimes included untrained dancers. Largely analytical and abstract, their approach focuses both on the exploration of body parts in isolation as well as on space, time or effort-shape, also employing images as motivations for movement (n. pag.).

Laban, however, is best known for his notation system, *Labanotation*, whereby choreography is a form of writing. According to Sigmund, giving dance durability through forms of notation was then tantamount to giving it cultural value. This has arguably become even more important today, as projects such as *Synchronous Objects* (2009) and *Motion Bank* (2013) demonstrate[74].

In the post-World War II years in the USA (late 1940s through the end of the 1950s) there was much discussion about how to

74 <http://synchronousobjects.osu.edu>. <http://motionbank.org/en>. Web. 23 Apr. 2017.

keep spontaneity, and the feeling of freedom associated with it, inside the process leading to finished, fully composed art works or products. At that time, radical—in the sense of rare—was a dance performance that allowed for improvisation, that is, for real-time choice making in performance. Among those artists whose work included this interest and whose ideas helped define what Belgrad calls a *Culture of Spontaneity*[75] were the artists of enclaves such as Black Mountain College in North Carolina, the bohemians of North Beach, San Francisco, and of Greenwich Village in New York City. However, Belgrad posits that in the 1950s and well into the 1960s, the *Culture of Spontaneity* had already been "significantly recast as it was popularized, politicized, and rebelled against" (249). Robert Rauschenberg, for instance, "had come to suspect the emotionalism, philosophizing, and projecting of the unconscious onto canvas" (251). John Cage used a "variety of methods to circumvent any conscious or unconscious communication of his own subjectivity through music" (253).

Different artists, however, understood differently the potential of these sources. Late dancer and choreographer Erick Hawkins, for instance, in contrast to Cunningham, did not use Zen philosophy to "promp[t] him to separate dance, music, and stage design into discreet elements in a formal discontinuity" (Reynolds and McCormick 372). Rather, he found in Eastern Philosophy "an affirmation of the concept of wholeness" (idem) His goal in his dances,

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75 The title of Belgrad's book plays on the word 'culture' to suggest cultivation, entailing the paradox that spontaneity improves with practice. Improvisation for Belgrad works in opposition to mass culture, corporate liberalism and the established high art of the post WWII period and embraces body-mind holism and inter-subjectivity as non-authoritarian, democratic ways of being together. These undoubtedly contributed to the project of democratization in the arts of the 1960s.

was “inchoate subliminal consciousness” (373). Paradoxically, his work “harked back to viewpoints as old as modern dance itself, i.e., Isadora Duncan’s theories of religious exultation, Laban’s rites of cosmic integration and cultural rejuvenation, and the strident individuality that produced the prime movers of the heroic era in America” (idem).

In his article *Improvisation in Dance,* philosopher Curtis Carter says:

> [A]fter half a century of competing visions for Avant-Garde modern dance culminating in a galaxy of stars, each with a unique system of movement and performance—Isadora Duncan, Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, Merce Cunningham, Paul Taylor, and a host of others who formed their own companies to pursue their respective theories and techniques of dance—the climate was in the 60s [ripe] for more open-textured explorations of dance movement. (182)

Indeed, the turning point in the use of improvisation in performance came in the early 1960s against the background of experimentation and rebellion that permeated all the arts and other activities of the time. Emphasis on spontaneity, the overlapping of art forms (looking to theatrical and musical improvisational activity), process as an acceptable part of performance, the influence of Eastern improvisational forms, and a drug culture that provided a model of free associative thought all created an environment conducive to the development of improvisational dance. It was in this climate that the Judson Church revolution was born and with it what dance historian and critic Sally Banes called the “seedbed for post-mod-

ern dance, the first Avant-Garde movement in dance theater since the modern dance of the 1930s and 1940s" (*Democracy's Body* 99). It led to the possibility of dance performance of so-called de-codified, pedestrian, ordinary movements. O'Donnell writes that the repetition of a situational movement or game-like structure that could last either for a specific amount of time or for a time determined live during the performance until it seemed to be complete was typical of the work of choreographers associated with Judson. Steve Paxton, for instance, "walked on stage, and very slowly put on a jacket, and then left" (*Open-Form to Responsible Anarchy* 2). Banes, in the same article cited above, says that most of these artists, well acquainted with the canon of Modern Dance, rejected its confines, its "excessive psychologism, emotional dramas and social literalism" (*Democracy's Body* 106), not necessarily though by making new rules or techniques as the early modern dancers did. A prime example of this was Robert Dunn's interdisciplinary and eclectic classes, which encouraged "inventive scores, in the belief that laying out chance or other intuitive possibilities and determining materials and spatial considerations in advance were ways of generating improvisation free of old habits and premeditated solutions" (Reynolds and McCormick 397).

Steve Paxton, a former Cunningham company member who joined Dunn's composition classes and was very active in the Judson and Grand Union, is largely responsible for the evolution of the very popular and influential form called *Contact Improvisation*, which dates its official beginning to 1972. Cohen has described Contact Improvisation as primarily a "duet form that emphasizes the qualities of mutual trust and interdependence by requiring spontaneous ongoing physical contact between (at least) two participants by

means of the sharing of weight. It often has a relaxed, sustained quality and a noncompetitive nature" (n. pag.).

In the 1970s, Grand Union introduced the idiom of improvisational performance in dance as a supposedly 'totally' open process. Dancer and scholar Sophia Lycouris suggests this in her PhD thesis *Destabilizing Dance, Tensions between the Theory and Practice of Improvisational Performance.* She writes: "Resisting the methods of traditional choreographic practices that celebrate the authority of the choreographer in the decision-making process, improvisational performance in dance suggests an alternative option of 'instant composition' as a technique of exercising choice within the 'present moment' of the dance" (1). This in turn allows her to suggest that improvisation is a form of choreography (*Choreographing* 349).[76] Similarly, Foster describes a good deal of dance made in the 1960s and 1970s as events whose artists also "worked hard to kill the choreographer and empower the audience. Their dances took theatrical space as conventionally conceived and opened it up, moved it around, or brought it down" (*Dances that Describe Themselves* 127). Spångberg, in an entry on improvisation in his blog *Spangbergianism*, writes that in the 1960s, 1970s and perhaps even in the 1980s, improvisation had a job, namely, to emancipate dance from what he calls a double violence: to free the dance from the prison of technique and hierarchical decision-making and to emancipate the subject from a culture that had become homogenous, to free the human from his own chains, so to say. Improvisation performances then promised other kinds of life (entries March 20th and 21st 2013).

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76 For an account of the work of the Grand Union, refer to *The Grand Union (1970-1976): An Improvisational Performance Group*, written in 1991 by Margaret Hupp Ramsay.

One can infer that for Spångberg improvisation today is not capable of keeping this promise.

At about the same time, but in a different manner than what was happening in the USA, the late German choreographer Pina Bausch started to use improvisation extensively as a source for finding movement material, a practice that continued the tradition of Expressionist Dance in Germany (Ausdruckstanz). Bausch's method is widespread and very common nowadays among choreographers who seek the personal and self-expressive involvement of dancers.

By the 1980s in the USA but also in England, the ordinary, democratic, pedestrian body brought to light in the 1960s began to be reassessed. Foster suggests that given "the proliferation of approaches to choreography generated by so many independent choreographers in the 1970s and 1980s" (69), by the 1980s the teaching of dance composition [choreography] appeared in one of two hybrid forms: as in improvisation-composition and composition repertory (*Choreographing Empathy* 69). Foster uses the American Dance Festival as a point of reference for this[77]. She further suggests that "the fact that composition had begun to be parsed into two separate courses, improvisation and repertory, seemed to indicate that two kinds of skills were needed to create new work: ways to generate movement and work with people, and ways to generate a vision or thematics for a specific piece" (70). In writing about the work of English choreographer Miranda Tufnell, who used improvisation in her work, Lycouris says that a reconsidered version of the 1970s American sense of improvisational performance becomes

77 The American Dance Festival is context in which composition classes have been on offer since the 1930s.

available within an emphasis on the role of a highly developed and multidimensional skill of making decisions during the performance event (52).

Indeed, writing about the influence of the Judson tradition during the end of the 20th century-beginning of the 21st, Burt in his book *Judson Dance Theater: Performative Traces*[78] observes that within a younger generation of choreographers in the 1990s there was a strong interest in the 'new' dance of the 1960s and 1970s. He mentions the works of the French-based group Quattor Albrecht Knust, which included Christophe Wavelet, Jerome Bell, Boris Charmatz, Emanuelle Huyn, and Xavier Le Roy, who performed 're-readings' of Steve Paxton's *Satisfying Lover* (1967) and Yvonne Rainer's *Continuous Project Altered Daily* (1970) (*Judson Theater* 186). He also writes, quoting André Lepecki, that these dance makers have taken the ideas of the 1960s and 1970s in radical directions, namely:

> ... a distrust of representation, a suspicion of virtuosity as an end, the reduction of unessential props and scenic elements, an insistence on the dancer's presence, a deep dialogue with the visual arts and with performance art, a politics informed by a critique of visuality, and a deep dialogue with performance theory. (Lepecki cited in Burt 193-4)

78 In *Judson Dance Theater: Performative Traces* Burt offers a revisionist narrative of the influence of the Judson works and artists. He argues that German contemporary dance of the 1970s was as radical and experimental as that at Judson Dance Theater in the 1960s, and that the privileging by American critics of Clement Greenberg's ideas about pure formal art created a barrier to their seeing this link between European and American dance of the past 40 years (7). For a critical review of Burt's book, refer to Ross, Janice. *The Drama Review* 53.2 (2009): 161-164.

Similarly, in the already mentioned article about how understandings of choreography have shifted over time, Sigmund posits that in the 1990s, with the advent of so-called 'conceptual dance'[79], many choreographers moved towards an expanded concept of choreography, setting every part of the theater and its representational regime in motion, thus releasing previously unimagined potential from the body of the dancers. Sigmund does not mention improvisational agency as a possible reason for the expansion of the notion of choreography. However, given his extensive interest and research on the work of choreographer William Forsythe, including Forsythe's sophisticated use of improvisation as exemplified by the method he founded in 1999, *Improvisation Technologies: A tool for the analytical dance eye*, Sigmund might well have had improvisation in mind when writing about this unimagined potential of the body. One could therefore argue that the 1990s, which saw the proliferation of other methods of improvisation, has been the time when, paradoxically, improvisation lost some of its impact because one no longer perceived it as the 'other' or a threat to choreography. Choreography itself was now becoming expanded, indeterminate, perhaps all encompassing, and, as Foster said, "currently enjoying

79 Bojana Cvejic offers an illuminating account of the attachment of 'conceptual' to the practice of some of these artists in her text "To End with Judgment by Way of Clarification." *It Takes Place When It Doesn't: On Dance and Performance*. Eds. Hochmuth et al. Frankfurt: Revolver, 2006. In her PhD thesis Cvejic also writes that the debate ended with the conclusion that 'conceptual dance' designates no movement, poetics, style, or genre, but symptomatically evidences a problem of qualifying as choreographies those performances that contest the foundational characteristics of dance as a historical art discipline (10). For a nuanced reading of both conceptual dance and of Cvejic's diagnose see Jeroen Fabius's article "The Missing History of (not) Conceptual Dance." *Danswetenschap in Nederland* 7 (2013): 76-85.

widespread use as referent for a structuring of movement, not necessarily the movement of human beings" (*Choreographing Empathy* 2), a structuring that did not necessarily exclude improvisation. The borders separating improvisation from choreography became more blurred. One can find an indication of this in dance scholar Freya Vass-Rhee's PhD thesis on the cognitive approaches to the perceptual performativity of the work of William Forsythe and Ensemble, specifically on the audio-visual demands on the dancers. For her, "any attempt to comprehensively catalogue or analyze Forsythe's improvisational modalities would be problematized by the blurring of boundaries between choreography and improvisation that results when improvisations are based on choreographic passages" (11).

Based on Jean Georges Noverre's *Letters on the Art of Dance* (1760), performance scholar Stefan Hölscher in his PhD thesis convincingly claims that *already* in the second half of the 18th century there was the emergence of a fundamental change in how one understood choreography. A change that, according to him, brings the debates concerning the boundaries between dance and non-dance of the 1990s into a different light. Foster seems to agree with this when she writes that "unlike the eighteenth-century choreographers who seem to delight in explaining their compositional strategies" (*Reading Dancing* 165), something much of dance made in the 1990s and beyond was engaged with, at least in Europe, Expressionist choreographers such as Graham "saw the process as too personal and too inevitable to describe. They knew the movement was right because of the way it was felt when performed or when envisioned" (idem).

As theories with and against which he makes his claim for an indeterminate understanding of both choreography and dance, in which choreography and dance no "longer *are*" (37, my translation and emphasis), Hölscher shows that both Lepecki and Sigmund,

despite their interest in the room for play between activity (movement) and text, understand dance and choreography as already determined (fixed) poles of a binary, one in which dance is, on the one hand, understood as bodily activity (movement) and choreography, on the other, as writing or text. Lepecki does this by indirectly advocating for the potential of the body to fully liberate itself from *any* form of choreographic capture and Sigmund by advocating for a playful distance between moving bodies and the 'law' (47-48, 315, my translation and emphasis). While Lepecki understands choreography as a negative, Sigmund does not (58, my translation) and while for Lepecki dance is political when it slows down the movement of modernity [forward, progressive movement prescribed and dictated by choreographic forms], for Sigmund dance is political when it playfully takes distance from the choreographic, that is, from the law (70-71, my translation).

Moreover, Lepecki already sees choreography in the 16th century as a "peculiar invention of early modernity, as a technology that creates a body disciplined to move according to the commands of writing" (*Exhausting Dance* 7, cited in Hölscher 50). Hölscher convincingly sheds light on how Lepecki in this instance makes a generalization about both modernity and choreography. For Hölscher, Lepecki does not investigate thoroughly enough the context within which choreography as a notion first emerged, i.e., overgeneralizing the consequences of the dialogue between Arbeau and his student Capriol, and leaving his conclusions arguably unchanged until at least after the publication of *Exhausting Dance* in 2006 (50). More precisely, for Hölscher Lepecki does not differentiate between techniques of notation from the actual production and reception of dance (52). Hölscher's views are in line with how Foster describes, first in *Reading Dancing* and then in *Choreographing Empathy*, the

larger context within which dances were made in the 1750s and 1760s.

Lepecki sees choreography as an "apparatus of capture" (*Choreography as Apparatus* 120), making dance less potent. Foster sees it differently. One example (of many) of how she expresses this is when she writes about the influence choreographer and dancer Marie Sallé had on the developments of dance in the action ballets Hölscher refers to.[80] However, we will see below that, in his more recent writing regarding the notion of the choreopolitical, Lepecki seems to try to adjust his negative and limiting understanding of choreography into one that is more positive and potent.

Returning to Hölscher: based on the distinction made between choreography as a *form* in contrast to dance as an *activity*, Hölscher demonstrates how two ideas—the understanding that the body is a passive matter onto which certain active forms correspond, and, the distinction between the alleged inside and outside of the choreography—become porous. Through blurring of boundaries, the generative capacity of the body comes to the foreground in such a way that, on the one hand, anything can be an object of dance and,

80 Foster writes: "Freed from the relational protocols they had previously been required to perform, they [dancers] could now initiate and respond all on their own. Well in advance of the seizure of power by the "people" of France, the action ballets provided palpable images of just how the French citizen's body should behave" (*Dancing the Body Politic* 173). Later, in an interview she gave during the 2011 edition of *Springdance* Festival in Utrecht, Foster says that in *Choreographing Empathy* she moved away from her utopian idea of what choreography is, acknowledging that choreography "has a past associated with colonization, hegemonic forces and power-structures" and that she "no longer knows what choreography is." Nevertheless, she "still think[s] that we need to work out the processes through which dances get created and (...) that we could find reflected in those processes certain theories about what the world is and what it could be" (interview with Katja Čičigoj).

on the other, form no longer precedes the activity of dancing. In fact, form arises from dancing. Thus, dance is no longer the sum of rhythmic, prescribed, structured movement steps arising out of an already existing catalogue, as in the time of Thoinot Arbeau (1589) and Raoul-Auger Feuillet (1700). On this basis, Hölscher makes a critical reference to dancer and scholar Friederike Lampert, who, in *Tanzimprovisation: Geschichte-Theorie-Verfahren-Vermittlung is* quite articulate about how improvisation is not a monolithic, mono-modal practice. She distinguishes quite clearly between several degrees of improvisation and how one can employ these within choreography (184-191).

For Hölscher, Lampert's thesis proves that improvisation today is problematic because it insistently remains virtually linked to the choreographer, who selects and combines the material to be used in performance, while the dancers, always an instrument in the hands of the choreographer, can make no aesthetic assessment of the forms they themselves generate and so have no influence on the arrangement of what they produce (240, my translation). This is a common but limited view on improvisation, as it rests on the premise that in all improvisation dancers have no aesthetic and compositional agency in performance, being always the product of a previous calculation of the choreographer. Dancers therefore become living examples of precariousness and biopolitics, or what Foster called 'hired bodies' (*Dancing Bodies*).[81] This apparent lack of

81 The hired body, a "resilient or rubbery" body, emerges out of Foster's concern with how dance training and choreographic production connect. In the 1980s, after a proliferation of dance techniques throughout the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, Foster saw a "homogenization of appearance among dancers performing in different kinds of works" and she connected this homogenization to "new regimens of training" and of "new forms of patronage and pressure on choreographers to

compositional agency in performance may indeed be appropriate in some cases, as Lampert convincingly demonstrates. However, this does not mean that it speaks for all choreographers who use improvisation in their work. O'Donnell's *Faust*, for instance, arguably counters Hölscher's thesis, as I will show in Chapter 5.

In this context and with regard to this discussion about the positions and kinds of agency dancers may have in choreography, especially how dancers, trained or untrained, also 'write' and not only 'read' or interpret the choreography proposed, thus co-composing the work and its aesthetics, it is important to mention one artist: Deborah Hay. According to choreographer and professor of choreography Kirsi Monni, who in 2004 worked as a documentarist for an edition of Hay's Solo Project in Helsinki, Hay was adamant in noting how important the change in the dancer's role was in her own work. In fact, Monni suggests that Hay's method of perception practice (see footnote #45 above) and her choice of transmitting the choreography as a written script has had a huge impact on the European dance scene, as it provided dancers with a solid method to dance and write movement (choreograph) in an experimental manner, that is, beyond the canons of Modern and Contemporary Dance. Monni goes on to suggest that for untrained dancers, the ones lacking a common or established dance technique or style, this was particularly empowering in the 1970s and 1980s. For trained dancers, this offers a method to undo generic, learned movement

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produce works quickly and economically." In 2011, Foster speaks of the hired body, in the context of the global stage, as having been "morphed into three new kinds of bodies-the balletic body, the industrial body and the released body", proposing a counter example to each one of these. 'Singular' body to counter the balletic body, 'processual' body to counter the industrial body and 'volunteer' body to counter the released body (*We need to work out*).

patterns and place the dancer's individual bodily perception and her creative agency in the core of the dance.

In the context of this book, it is important to mention *Crash Landing*, which occurred parallel to the debate of dance versus non-dance of the 1990s to which Hölscher refers.[82] An interdisciplinary improvisation performance series initiated and curated by choreographer Meg Stuart in collaboration with choreographers Christine de Smedt and David Hernandez, *Crash Landing* took place in five different cities (Leuven, Vienna, Paris, Lisbon and Moscow). The project involved eighty artists from several disciplines, including dance, music, theater, scenography, writing and industrial design (Van Imschoot cited in Peeters 102). *Crash Landing* provided unprecedented exposure to the practice of improvisation in mainstream Europe because at that time, as dramaturge Myriam Van Imschoot explains:

> Improvisation had hardly played a role as a valid performance form in its own right. Within first and foremost a choreographic culture, improvisation, an old but diffuse and under-represented tradition, seemed to the curators particularly apt when exploring new modes of collaboration, composition, production and presentation. (idem)

82 This is how the project is described on Stuart's website: "De Smedt, Hernandez and Stuart each suggest a plan and open questions; the rest is discovered by the group on stage. Stuart's aim is to be out of control, to make spontaneous decisions, share responsibility and dare to fail. The improvisations alternated between installations, concerts, dance, parties and odd mutations of all these forms. <http://www.damagedgoods.be/EN/crash_landing>. Web. 14 Jan. 2016.

Even though North American practices such as Contact Improvisation had already appeared in Europe through the *Dartington Dance Festival* (1978-1987)—a festival initiated by Mary O'Donnell (Fulkerson) and partially co-organized by Steve Paxton—with *Crash Landing,* especially after its third edition in Paris at the Théâtre de la Ville, improvisation entered what Van Imschoot calls the "fortress of choreography" (idem). *Crash Landing* thus paid tribute to North American (New York City) improvisation at the same time that it "displace[d] it from its communal seabed in small venues, studios and jams onto the centre stages of the European festival circuit and into the theatrical apparatus" (idem 104).

Considering this proliferation of improvisation methods during and after the 1990s, it is important to mention a few artists who understood improvisation itself as a form of composition (rather than emphasizing spontaneous, unpremeditated acts) and developed methods of improvisation related to their specific concerns. It is worth noting some examples: choreographers Mary O'Donnell's *Open-Form Composition*, João Fiadeiro's *Real Time Composition*[83], Susan Sgorbati's *Emergent Improvisation*[84], Nina Martin's *Ensemble Thinking*[85], Richard Bull's *Choreographic Improvisation* and Ivar Hagendoorn's *Cognitive Improvisation*[86]. Many other practitioners

83 For more on João Fiadeiro see < http://joaofiadeiromenugb.blogspot.de>. Web. 8 May 2015.

84 For more on Susan Sgorbati see <http://emergentimprovisation.org/artistsinfo.html>. Web. 8 May 2015.

85 For more on Nina Martin see her PhD thesis *Emergent Choreography: Spontaneous Ensemble Dance Composition in Improvised Dance*. Texas Woman's University: 2013 and her website: <http://www.ensemblethinking.com/history/>. Web. 15 Sept. 2017.

86 For more on the work of Ivar Hagendoorn see "Cognitive Dance Improvisation:

also choose to name their practice *Spontaneous* or *Instant Composition.*[87] My task here is not to try to identify the reasons for this. However, I do not agree with Cvejic's PhD thesis speculation that "when an improvisation practice gains prominence its author profiles it by giving it another name" (126). As noted in the Introduction, Mary O'Donnell, who Cvejic cites as an example of this, has been adamant about her reasons not to call her practice improvisation, explicitly because of her resistance towards certain understandings of openness and freedom and not, as Cvejic suggests, because her practice had gained prominence. In fact, as we will see in Chapter 5, it arguably never did.

From the above discussion of how theorists such as Hölscher have problematized the alleged opposition between dance improvisation and choreography, and regarding how Hölscher's reading of Lepecki and Sigmund demonstrates how this theoretical notion of an alleged opposition persists, it becomes clear that from the 1990s onwards one cannot see improvisation and choreography in dance in a clear-cut relation of antagonism. Both agencies, in their plural manifestations, have become to a large extent intensely intertwined and co-dependent, with the aesthetic of spontaneity and the improvisatory techniques that have helped produce it an integral

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How Study of the Motor System Can Inspire Dance (and Vice Versa)." *Leonardo* 36.3 (2003): 221–227 and to Hagendoorn's website < http://www.ivarhagendoorn.com>. Web. 8 May 2015.

87 According to Banes, by the 1960s, improvisation had already appeared in different ways and names. For example, indeterminate choreography, open choreography, situation-response composition, in situ composition, and spontaneous determination (*Spontaneous Combustion* 78). Nevertheless, choreography and improvisation were still largely distinct and employed in very particular contexts, and improvisation was not as ubiquitous as it has become since the 1990s.

part of the mainstream (dance) culture. One can find an example of this in professional higher dance education where improvisation classes are in the schedule of most programs as well as in most dance companies, even those working with repertory: dancers need to possess a fair degree of improvisational competence. One could even say that to 'perform' well today in the world, as artist and as citizen, one must know how to improvise.

As I pointed out in the Introduction, the indeterminacy and blurring of definitions and ubiquitous usages of choreography and improvisation, in addition to the conflation of improvisation with the rhetoric of creativity and innovation found in advanced capitalism, might be indications of a shift already taking place away from dance improvisation as so-called spontaneous and free movement towards, arguably, a view of freedom in dance improvisation as more constrained, as involving something closer to the conventional view on the choreographic, namely planning. This does not agree with Lepecki's (rightly criticized by Hölscher) take on the choreographic in his writings during the 2000s. Rather, this shift indicates a more speculative, pragmatic, enabling understanding of choreography and planning. Lepecki himself, for instance, in a lecture he gave in Sweden for the *Weaving Politics* conference in December 2012, attempts to do this, thus also arguably attempting to undo his own previous views on choreography.

Inspired by Harney's and Moten's book *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study*, and how they differentiate policy-making from planning[88], as well as drawing from Rancière's notion of

88 In an article written after the conference in Stockholm, Lepecki states that Harney and Moten oppose plan to policy, "which they define as a corrective [....] operation from above designed to make the multitude productive to capital" (Harney &

the police (which Rancière contrasts with his notion of politics[89]), Lepecki proposes two terms: choreopolice and choreopolitical, suggesting that both terms are important for an understanding of the dynamics between movement, conformity and revolt in neoliberal times. Choreopolice, a joint term containing two negative connotations, choreography and police, is that which fully prescribes for the subject how and where to move. This conforms to how Lepecki has depicted choreography in his previous works: as the already known, planned, or prepared. The choreopolitical, on the other hand, seems to be an attempt to bring choreography into a different and more positive light by replacing police with the political (from Rancière). If the choreopolitical goes beyond the traditional (negative) understanding of choreography — by positing that choreography when joined by the political meets dance improvisation in a more nuanced manner, one that abandons the idea of fixed points in a binary relation— then I propose that the choreopolitical unsettles the colloquial understanding of dance improvisation as well. As such, dance improvisation would no longer be a practice generating movement that is *just* spontaneous and free, arisen from the unknown, unplanned and unprepared.

Indeed, in an article written a year after the conference in Stockholm Lepecki, in agreement with Goldman's thesis discussed above in Chapter 1, leads one to consider improvisation as a danced technique of freedom, proposing, moreover, that:

Moten cited in *Choreopolice and Choreopolitics: or the Task of the Dancer* 22-23).

89 Rancière clarifies: "Politics, by contrast to the police, consists in transforming this space of moving along, of circulation, into the space for the appearance of a subject." (Cited in Lepecki's *Choreopolice* 20)

> Danced techniques of freedom suggest choreography as technology for inventing movements of freedom. Choreography as a planned, dis-sensual, and non-policed disposition of motions and bodies becomes [thus] the condition of possibility for the political to emerge. (*Choreopolice* 22)

This seems to mean that for Lepecki, in his reading of Goldman, improvisation and choreography do not merely connect in dynamic and differential fashion, as in a continuum, whose relation will vary depending on the kind of work. Choreography, understood as *a* planned, dis-sensual, and non-policed disposition of motion, becomes *the* condition for improvisation and as such for the possibility for change (freedom) as well. In other words: without choreography, as a form of planning, there will be no dance improvisation, no change and no freedom. This is a very different proposition from his previously described perception of choreography or the choreographic in dance. It may even be a view that maintains (dance) improvisation as inferior and subordinate to choreography in its capacity for generating change. This is not a view I want to generally endorse or disseminate. However, given the context within which this study situates itself, namely advanced capitalism and the pressure to perform it impinges on us, I entertain Lepecki's proposition here more as a call for critical awareness addressed to improvisers than a claim as to what dance improvisation is or means. Besides, as I will later argue, if for Lepecki choreography in his more recent writings is more than just a practice of command and obedience, then the practice of dance improvisation must become more than just spontaneous and free.

Thus, it seems that the *planning* Lepecki alludes to is a planning by means of which one has, on the one hand, an eye on a different

(freer) future and, on the other, no intention or capacity to fully know in advance what will precisely happen in this (freer) future. It is a kind of planning that includes the knowledge of its situation, its 'ground' or context as well as what it takes to stand on this ground and get to a freer future. As such, it is an affirmative, persistent and non-naïve kind of planning, one that conditions, possibly enabling, but not fully determining, the future. It is a planning that engages in a discerning and pragmatic 'thinking inside the box', a thinking that focuses on and persists in its intensive, immanent inside.

At the end of this same article, Lepecki writes about the work choreographer Sarah Michelson made for the Whitney Biennial in 2012, *Devotion Study # 1. The American Dancer*, which the press has reviewed as "punishing, physically and mentally" (*Choreopolice* 24). Perhaps in a move back to his more negative view on choreography, Lepecki finds that the choreographic imperative inherent to the work is "dissolved, transformed and radically subverted thanks to the word-event of the title: devotion" (idem). Importantly, he proposes devotion not as "theological diagnosis or a martyrology, but rather, following Arendt's political philosophy, specifically her notion of the miraculous, as a political affirmation" (25). In Lepecki's view, for Arendt the "miraculous coming into the world of the improbable has very little to do with the spontaneous" (idem). Instead, it requires "planning, preparation, technique, a collective, and the affect of devotion, as long as it is a devotion not to the author of the plan or the ruler, but an impersonal devotion to the plan itself" (idem). Keeping in mind that for Arendt a free act is capable of transcending what determines it, bringing with it something new, one can infer that the dancer and her devotion, in her immanent persistence to the plan, acts freely, interrupting automatic (spontaneous) processes that would otherwise remain the same.

This brings Lepecki very close to Hölscher's analysis of Sigmund, in which the devotion of the dancer would be a playful teasing or distancing from the law (not the ruler).

One can thus consider both choreography and improvisation as taking place outside of already fully known, pre-established and prescriptive paths or norms by means of their performativity and their contrasting (but not opposing) capacities to virtually activate and/or actualize alternative plans. Lepecki's effort to free choreography from being understood exclusively as a normative practice, on the one hand, and, in my reading, improvisation as just spontaneous and free, on the other, shows that more light needs to be shed on how choreography and improvisation are not the same, but also not *in opposition* to one another. To understand how this is so, we need to critically look at the notion that keeps this opposition in place, a notion very often used and, because of its apparent self-evidence, most often left unpacked as well. The notion I am referring to is spontaneity.

In its daily usage in dance, spontaneity often marks the difference between an improvised action and a choreographed one. This marking occurs by means of three intimately related features: preparedness, novelty and conscious thinking. When acting spontaneously one *improvises*, which is to say that one has allegedly not prepared for or consciously thought about what one does, which creates the potential for the creation of the new. When one choreographs, on the other hand, one has planned and consciously thought about the act and, because of this (a repetition of the same), the generation of the new is, supposedly substantially decreased, if not disregarded outright.

This clear-cut distinction may arguably be useful in certain situations, for example when working with dance students who are

(just) their studies, but when left unpacked and un-problematized it encourages ways of thinking about dance improvisation that not only do not do justice to the complexity (also in thinking) of the form, but also sustains an ideology of freedom that today, with neo-liberalism, has become problematic. What 'worked' in the 1960s and 1970s as *resistance* to the status quo has today arguably become its fuel. It is this understanding of the role of improvisation that I see Lepecki referring to above in his suggesting that choreopolice and choreopolitical are relevant concepts for an understanding of the dynamics between movement, conformity and revolt in neoliberal times. In the Epilogue, I will rehearse an argument for how planning, fugitive (Moten and Harney) or choreopolitical (Lepecki) may be a way to counter the pressure to perform according to the logic of the market in advanced capitalism.

2.2 Conclusion

In this chapter I provided a brief outline of how improvisation and choreography have been in tension with each other historically and showed that, despite the emergence in the last fifteen or twenty years of an all-encompassing, expanded notion of choreography—one that perhaps engulfs the improvisational altogether and thus turns it arguably irrelevant[90]—the oppositional tension between choreography and improvisation persists. One could perhaps even argue that this tension has gained in strength, perhaps strengthening improvisation, bringing it to the fore, asking us to pay more

90 *Movement Research Performance Journal*, issue # 29 (Spring 2005), was an issue entirely related to this question titled: *Improvisation is dead: Long Live Improvisation*. The suggestion in the title that improvisation is dead was a provocation, alluding to the fact that improvisation was "transforming and taking on new life and vigor" (3).

attention to it and to what it entails. This is most evident in my reading of Lepecki's choreopolitical and its proximity to a certain notion of planning, which becomes a means, on the one hand, to emancipate improvisation from being just spontaneous and, on the other, to free choreography from being a system of command and obedience.

The historical outline showed, moreover, that choreography and improvisation are indeed different approaches to making dances, but their differences are best exposed when one thinks of spontaneity, the notion at the core of the difference but hardly scrutinized, in a more dimensional, situated and less determined manner. To shed more light onto this problem and to show how this clear-cut differentiation between improvisation and choreography by means of spontaneity and the unknown does not properly hold, in the next chapter I will embark upon a critical analysis of the notion of spontaneity. The analysis will help us to understand how improvisation is indeed not just spontaneous and free and consequently also to show how the not knowing— praised by Lachambre at the beginning of this chapter and associated with the spontaneous, improvised act— is in fact intimately, differentially enmeshed in the knowing usually associated with the non-spontaneous, choreographed one.

Chapter 3
Spontaneity

In this chapter, I will deconstruct the notion of spontaneity in three intimately connected and yet distinct features, namely: preparedness, novelty, and knowing. This will enable me to deconstruct the role spontaneity plays in the opposition between choreography and improvisation as well as the role that risk-taking and not knowing (unknown) play in this opposition. Thinking of spontaneity is *this* way, breaking it up into three adjectival features, does not aim to fully explain spontaneity, or to present the three adjectives as independent from one another. I came to these features through an analysis of how my students answered my questions about improvisation and risk-taking (see Appendices). Their answers in many ways match the findings arising from the preceding literature review and are important because there are not that many available sources concerning understandings of improvisation coming from young practitioners themselves. Moreover, in this chapter I will engage with philosophical and neuroscientific readings of improvisation, mind and thinking, and with existing definitions of spontaneity, namely of Jacob Levy Moreno. Let me start with the etymology of spontaneity.

3.1 The Etymology of Spontaneity

Perusing a couple of online dictionaries[91], one learns that etymologically (1650s, origin unknown), spontaneity derives from Late Latin *spontaneous* (*sua sponte*)[92], which means of one's own free will, of one's own accord. A spontaneous act is thus self-generated, happening without any apparent external cause, done by free choice; it is an act that proceeds from natural feeling or native tendency without external constraint, arising from a momentary impulse and controlled and directed from within; it is not 'manipulated' or contrived; it is [thus, one could infer] natural and true; it is immediate, direct, and comes without warning, [one cannot prepare for it, one is 'surprised']. Moreover, it is impulsive, instinctive, automatic, mechanical, and activated without deliberation.

All these confirm a reductionist understanding of living that separates mind from body, reason from emotion, stillness from movement, inside from outside, artificial from natural, contrived from true, authentic from in-authentic and so on. As a result, when spontaneity becomes the primary means through which to describe

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91 See <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=spontaneous>, <http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/spontaneous>, and <http://www.merriam-Web. ster.com/dictionary/spontaneous>. Web. 2 Apr. 2013. Brackets are mine.

92 Philosopher Gabriele Tomasi suggests that this use of the term (as unconstrained, free action) echoes the Latin *spontaneitas*, spontaneous, or *sponte*. An agent acts *sua sponte*, when he or she voluntarily performs an action not forced by others or external cause. Even though there was a differentiation made between *spontaneum* and *voluntarium* (*spontaneum* generally defining actions performed without previous reflection or premeditation), the concept of spontaneity nevertheless maintained an essential function in defining the concept of freedom. Spontaneity was a condition for imputing actions to a given person, that is, for the attribution of responsibility (Santi 91-92).

what happens when improvising, it can also reinforce, rather than abridge or challenge, the choreography/improvisation divide.

There are, however, certain views on spontaneity that might better expose the complexities inherent to the practice of dance improvisation. One is Jacob Levy Moreno's psychodramatic concept of spontaneity, first published in German in 1923.[93] Psychodramatist David Kipper remarks that Moreno's various statements about and definitions of spontaneity contain inner contradictions that have been left unattended (34). A possible reason for this, according to Kipper, is that "spontaneity as an intuitively familiar experience was thought to be existentially valid and as such it did not require further scrutiny. It did not require proof beyond its face value" (34). Kipper goes on to say that the reliance on face value cannot "serve as a basis for a theory as complex as psychodrama" (34), and, I would add, neither is it valid as a basis for a distinction between improvisation and choreography (and, by extension, also between not knowing and knowing), nor for an explanation of risk-taking in dance.

Despite the shortcomings of Moreno's theory of spontaneity, it can still be productive in unveiling what goes on in dance improvisation.

3. 2 Moreno's Theory of Spontaneity

According to Kipper—and not unlike what experienced practitioners of dance improvisation say—Moreno depicts spontaneity as that which contains energy that, on the one hand, is spent 'on the

93 The first English translation of Moreno's *Das Stegreiftheater* (published in Berlin in 1923) appeared in 1941 in a series of articles in the journal *Sociometry*.

spur of the moment', in an all-or-nothing fashion, and, on the other, as what one can, at the same time, observe and develop through training and discipline. For Moreno, according to Kipper, the opposite of spontaneity anxiety and a repetitive, dull form of living (34). This spontaneous expenditure of energy happens every time one makes a decision, consciously or unconsciously. Moreover, the making of a decision, any decision, consciously or not, obviously implies that all other possible options available at the time one decides have not been taken. This is also to say that the moment one makes a decision live in performance, consciously or not, one cannot take it back. Through training and performance practice one develops a more acute awareness of 'the moment' and the context one finds oneself in. For Moreno, spontaneity operates in the here and now, whose "novelty demands a past that does not contain this particular novelty" (*Theory of Spontaneity* 108). Spontaneity is, moreover, hypothesized by Moreno as that which manifests itself in the warming-up process of a creative act, which he defines as the operational manifestation of spontaneity, saying it is a general condition existing prior to and during a creative act. Spontaneity is, therefore, generated in action whenever an organism finds itself in the process of warming-up (111-116).

Additionally, for Moreno spontaneity includes variable degrees of adequate response to a situation that can be more-or-less new. How new a behavior by itself may be is not the measure of spontaneity, because one can only qualify novelty against its adequacy in situ. Adequacy of behavior by itself is also not the measure of spontaneity, because one can only qualify adequacy against its novelty (108). Spontaneity arises thus when a response is novel, adequate and immediate. In other words, it must arise through the mutual

relation and imbrication between the actor, her action and context, and is thus in no way absolute or certain.

According to Belgrad in his analysis of the *Culture of Spontaneity*, the late 1940s and early 1950s (also the era of Moreno's articulation of spontaneity as a 'philosophy of the moment' and the beginning of improvisation as we know it today), was a time when there was a strong need on the part of individuals at large, not only artists, to reconnect with a sense of vitality and autonomy that was clearly differentiated from the impotence and incredulity caused by the atrocities of the recent past of World War II. Their ideas about spontaneity were a timely challenge to the corporate liberalism of the time, which was highly bureaucratic and routinized. One can also say that, in opposition and as an alternative to corporate liberalism, spontaneity and its culture provided a frame of mind within which one could move away from the products of high culture, the Establishment, and the norms of composition (the *good* form and behavior associated with it). Their (Belgrad and Moreno's) discourse around spontaneity, especially Belgrad's, here becomes synonymous with how one usually describes improvisatory practices, as we have seen at the beginning of Chapter 2. Improvisation, under the guise and the rhetoric of spontaneity, becomes the Trojan Horse at the gates of choreography, understood as *good* form and representing the establishment. Improvisation becomes choreography's antithesis, its other.[94]

94 The artists whose practices Belgrad writes about in his book were clearly not the first or only ones to involve improvisation in their practice. The socio-cultural-political relevance of the works of the artists he mentions, due to their methods of improvisation, is, however, unprecedented.

Moreno makes a revealing differentiation between spontaneity and creativity: creativity for him is the 'act' itself and spontaneity relates to the 'readiness' of the act (Theory of Spontaneity 109). He differentiates between a cultural conserve, which one could understand as a product, and the spontaneous creative matrix of this product, that is, the entire context within which it springs into existence (108).[95] Does Moreno's approach to spontaneity as the readiness to act—as preparation *and* embeddedness—and its differentiation from creativity (product) hold true in improvisation, especially the methods that are as highly structured as *Faust* and *Pororoca?* Morenos's theory does hold up well when accounting for the relational, situated, contingent nature of spontaneity. When, however, is an organism no longer present in the 'here and now' or 'warming up' phase? More specifically, when is a dancer, improvising or executing a set movement, no longer warming up (preparing) and so, by extension, no longer spontaneous?[96]

Drawing on my previous research[97], in what follows I will show that this differentiation is problematic not because there is no difference between a readiness to act and the act itself. Being ready or prepared to act does not equal the decision or the act itself, be it consciously made or not. The difficulty arises because, in improvi-

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95 This is how Sawyer differentiates creativity from improvisation. For him improvisation is performance creativity whereas what Moreno calls 'cultural conserve' he calls 'product creativity' (Sawyer cited in Bak 26-27).

96 This is how Moreno explains warming up, for him a process of liberation: "Since the spontaneously creative state is so important to Moreno, the question arises: How can it be obtained? Moreno answers: "It is not created by the conscious will, which frequently acts as an inhibitory bar, but by a liberation, which is, [in] fact, the free uprising of spontaneity" (Moreno cited in Scheiffele 168).

97 My Master studies (2010). See bibliography at the end.

sation, the product is synchronous with its very springing into existence, its emergence, even when it has been previously rehearsed. This is in fact what one practices in improvisation: the capacity or the readiness to act and respond in real time to the situation one finds oneself in. The warming up, the movement of springing into existence, is, in improvisation, precisely contiguous with its emergence. This, however, as we will now see, could be the case in any movement, danced or not, improvised or choreographed, executed live by a human. One thing, however, is certain: Improvisation does not necessarily lead to the originality and novelty required from creativity.[98] Improvisation without creativity might be boring and still be defined as improvisation (Jordan cited in Bak 24).

3.3 Preparedness

> Rather than placing improvisation and composition in opposition, Lacey argues for placing both on a continuum defined by the kind and amount of time spent in preparing the exact specifications of the performance. (300)

98 In this context, it is worth mentioning two definitions of creativity: Keith Sawyer's and Rob Pope's. According to the former, creativity is an activity that creates a novel product or process that attains some level of recognition in its domain of activity (*Explaining Creativity* 27). Pope defines creativity as the capacity to make, do or become something fresh and valuable with respect to others as well as oneself (Creativity: Theory, History, Practice xvi). Pope's definition is more encompassing and forgiving than Sawyer's. For Pope a capacity implies potential, not a guarantee. Moreover, 'fresh' for him is more than new. It simply means to make the strange familiar as well as the familiar strange. Finally, he understands 'valuable' as in the context of an exchange (idem).

> In 15 seconds, the difference between composition and improvisation is that in composition, you have all the time you want to decide what you say in 15 seconds, while in improvisation you have 15 seconds. (300)

I take both quotations above from Susan Foster's book dedicated to improvisation *Dances That Describe Themselves: The Improvised Choreography of Richard Bull*. The first quotation is by Foster herself and the second by musician Steve Lacey. These quotations explicitly mention the amount of preparation time prior to a performance as a crucial factor in differentiating improvisation from set choreography[99]. They posit that the less preparation time for a performance one has the more improvisatory the performance will be. This indeed seems to conform to the colloquial understanding of improvisation. It follows then that when one stretches time to think, deliberate or prepare, one's performance and understanding of improvisation becomes more compositional and as such less spontaneous. Allegedly, the more time one takes to rationally ponder the more one will know and so the more prepared one will be.

The first quotation does not present improvisation and choreography as oppositional terms. The image of the 'continuum' recognizes, following Foster, that "the performance of any action, regardless of how predetermined it is in the minds of those who perform it and those who witness it, contains an element of improvisation" (cited in Peters 115). However, the reverse could be possible as well, that is, that the performance of any action, regardless of how undetermined

99 Or composition. See footnote #1 above.

it is in the minds of those who perform it and those who witness it, contains an element of choreography.

The second quotation, however, seems to miss or obliterate an important point. Having '*all*' the time to prepare assumes that there are no time constraints involved in a preparation. This seems to be far from how most performances come to existence nowadays, where production time has steadily become shorter. This shorter production time does not, however, necessarily mean that the performances emerging from it are to be seen as improvisations, unless one equals the shorter preparation time usually associated with improvisation to a kind of performance whose shorter preparation induces it to be assessed as being less valuable than choreography, or, alternatively, if to improvise is connected to a mode of production in which one does not have at hand all the ingredients one needs in order to achieve what one wants. In other words, if to improvise is directly related to or conflated with lack.

The quality of a performance, improvised or choreographed, is not necessarily dependent on how much time its preparation took. Artists who make improvised performances may indeed use none or shorter amounts of rehearsal time prior to the performance, and this may be, for example, due to budget constraints, availability of the performers and other logistical reasons. However, it may also well be that this is exactly what the artist wants, that is, to reduce time to investigate what happens when she implements such a constraint. Either way, the artist has decided to share the work with an audience, who will not necessarily need to know about the process leading to the performance. Therefore, the alleged shorter preparation time of improvisation should be no excuse for the possible lack of completion or preparedness of a performance. Good improv-

isation depends, in fact, on prepared minds.[100] Preparation is what enables the dancer, also when improvising, to act, make choices, and not simply react or be a slave at the mercy of a given situation. Though one often attributes acting live in improvisation to a kind of decision-making that is spontaneous or intuitive, these intuitions, in the case of experienced improvisers, are the result of enculturated, situated, conscious routines these improvisers have rehearsed and refined over a long amount of time. The more routine, the more enhanced will be the state of flow, that is, an effortless, yet highly focused, state of consciousness experienced by the improviser.

However, regardless of how much time one has spent preparing, or how much time one has to perform any action in real-time, one still needs to actualize the action, and in so doing it, there is no guarantee that the action will unfold exactly according to how one has planned it. A margin for error, surprise, difference, or deviation is necessarily involved. One cannot 100% foresee the future, however short-term it is. Thus, any decision deals with uncertainty. The human body is not a machine that immaculately performs following the ignition of a start button. Its psychophysical predispositions and moods continually change. Moreover, the body of the dancer is affected by the context in which it is located and therefore it needs to constantly negotiate the givens it brings with it with what is

100 A recent account of how this takes place in dance improvisation is De Spain's *Landscape of the Now* in which Anna Halprin, Simone Forti, Ruth Zaporah, Barbara Dilley, Steve Paxton, Deborah Hay, Lisa Nelson and Nancy Stark Smith answer questions posed by De Spain concerning, among others, the cognitive skills engendered when improvising. Another recent publication dealing with similar issues, but focusing on the improvisational work and ideas of Viola Spolin, Keith Johnstone and Del Close is Clayton D. Drinko's *Theatrical Improvisation: Improvisation, Consciousness and Cognition*. See also Freya Vass-Rhee's PhD thesis on Forsythe and Ensemble.

there at hand at any one time. The givens the body of the dancer brings with it are, for example, the experience and awareness of its material and instrument, the body, in movement or in stillness, involving all that it knows or remembers, such as the "parameters of the work's structure, the idiom with which it engages, and the idiom's history" (Peters 82). This takes place both in improvisation and choreography. What may indeed differ is the degree of error, surprise, difference, and deviation the work can invite, allow or endure. In the fifteen, thirty or however many seconds one has to act, to make the possible actual, 'yes' and 'no' decisions (conscious or not) engendered, be it in a moment called improvised or choreographed, and the quality and timing of these decisions, *together with the intentions* of the artist[101], rather than the amount of time they take, is what defines the moment of their performance as right, playful, powerful, persuasive, convincing or not.

Spontaneity thus, if understood solely as a non-planned, unprepared and punctual (isolated) temporal trait of dance's agency, cannot be a sufficient criterion to differentiate improvisation from choreography. When engaging with the predetermined, by means of the 'yes' and 'no' decisions prior to the 'now' about to begin, as the argumentative nature of the brain demonstrates[102], there is always

101 Even though I here focus on human consciousness, I acknowledge that other life forms may engage with and produce consciousness as well. This is also to say that deliberate intentions from the part of the artist are only a part, however important they may be, of what constitutes the dance as event.

102 This refers to how journalist Jonah Lehrer in his disputed book *How We Decide* explains how the brain makes decisions. He says that "the brain is an argument" (196) and "like an editorial board, the mind is an extended argument. It is arguing with itself and even the most mundane choices emerge from a vigorous cortical debate" (199). He also says that this argument inside the brain occurs most of the time at the emotional, unconscious rather than the logical level. For a similar

a moment of reflection and hesitation, however short, consciously perceived or not, and, in this very moment, all memory of what is given is concentrated. Not, however, to go beyond the known, as one often hears in milieus of improvisation[103], but rather to enter it. In so doing, one gets to know (or un-know) something anew.

If spontaneity is not absolute, it cannot be the distinguishing feature between pure improvisation or pure choreography (composition) either. These limits are impossible to attain in live per-

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account see philosopher Dan Dennett's theory of consciousness 'Multiple Drafts' in *Consciousness Explained* where he posits that stimuli compete for attention in a non-chronological, non-unified manner. Consciousness is thus distributed across the brain, with the result that no one moment can be taken as the precise moment at which a conscious act happens.
See also psychologist Daniel Kahneman's *Thinking Fast and Slow* where he describes two systems of problem solving: System 1, which operates automatically and quickly, with little or no effort and no sense of voluntary control; System 2, which allocates attention to the effortful mental activities that demand it, including complex computations. The operations of System 2 are often associated with the subjective experience of agency, choice and concentration (20-21). In summary, most of what one thinks and does originates in System 1, but System 2 takes over when things get difficult, and it normally has the last word.

103 This refers to how, for instance, Gary Peters, and Smith and Dean (as cited in Landgraf), criticize the discourse on improvisation as promulgated by a great number of improvisers. Peters explicitly writes that the philosophy of improvisation he proposes situates itself on the border between the absence and the presence of the work. He wants to bring into view not the 'present moment' of the work, but its prehistory. He thinks about this as the entwinement and entanglement of the old and the new, [the known and unknown] which is often obscured by the desires and claims of improvisers themselves, heirs to a modernist aesthetic (or ideology) of innovation and novelty that is often at odds with the real predicament of the artist at work (1, brackets mine). Similarly, Smith and Dean say that "the improviser makes a succession of choices in performance that cannot be erased so that everything she does within the performance must be incorporated into the whole. This involves an attentiveness to the present moment, so that nativity is a response to the here and now, *though* the choices made by the improviser are inevitably influenced by past experiences of improvising." (cited in Landgraf 146. Italics are mine)

formance because as late multi-talent Jeff Pressing contends "no improviser can avoid previously learnt material, and no re-creative performer can avoid variations specific to each occasion."[104] This is inherent to the nature of the human body. The dancer, in each occasion, negotiates in real-time the given, pre-defined parameters of the work, which not only explicitly include the individual's history in relation to it, but also ask her, in the moment of negotiation, to carve a singular, individuated and dynamic space into and within the pre-defined form. The pre-defined form will therefore necessarily always undergo variations, however minimal or minimally perceived. One can thus think of spontaneity in dance improvisation as *both* the state of readiness (preparation) for real-time live decision-making, its condition, *and* the actual decision, all of which involve, to different degrees, cognitive skills such as prediction and anticipation. In *Landscape of Now* De Spain understands very well why so many improvisers choose not to focus on cognition but also acknowledges "that the moment an improviser wants to know about what is going on in the moment, the more [he] needs [his] cognitive skills to help [him] understand what [he] does and then apply that understanding to the map of the future" (141), which takes place during the performance.

3.4 Conscious Thinking

> Artistic authenticity asks of the artist something he cannot give. Besides, the 'conscious' effort to express oneself

104 As cited in De Spain's PhD thesis *Solo Movement Improvisation (*69).

> spontaneously is a contradiction in itself. (Wenninger 34, my translation)

The dichotomizing of the body and mind, of doing and thinking, has strong, long-standing roots, and it persists to this day, despite the rigorous attempts to overcome binary ways of thinking in dance and dance training in the 20th and 21st centuries.[105] It is also useful here to point out that the unknown often referred to in discourses on art, and especially of dance improvisation, rests on dichotomous and reductive understandings of what the notions of mind and thinking mean. In second-generation Cognitive Science or Embedded Embodied Cognition, for instance, any form of knowing and not knowing is always relational and therefore always partial and incomplete, regardless of the context in which it takes place. Moreover, binary relations are seldom even (50-50). This is to say that within these relations there is a push and pull, one pole of the binary taking precedence over the other for one period, and at another time not. This is well illustrated by the process pragmatist philosophical perspective of philosopher Warren Frisina in *Unity of Knowledge and Action*. For Frisina, following the philosophy of John Dewey, Alfred Whitehead and Wang Yang-Ming, knowledge is not the apprehension or representation of an aspect of the world within the mind's eye, a world assumed to be objective, separate from the knowing subject, and fixed in some way making it capable of being known. Rather, to say one knows something is to make a

105 The proliferation of a 'workshop culture' in the last fifteen to twenty years for various practices of improvisation, often conducted by prominent practitioners for short amounts of time, arguably adds, unwillingly perhaps, to this dichotomizing (body and mind) and to a lack of contextual and historical critique.

statement about how one interacts with it (5). Knowledge for the pragmatists is always hypothetical and speculative rather than *a priori* (8). Cognition always takes place in the flow of things (10).

One can say that the project of process and pragmatist philosophy in Frisina's reading has been to a certain extent to privilege experience and free it from the reigns of conscious knowing, that is, from a stance in which 'first we think and then we do'. Dewey, for example, argues that consciousness is an "outcome rather than a cause of experience" (cited in Frisina 54). For him "things are objects to be treated, acted upon and with, enjoyed and endured *even more than* things to be known" (26, italics are mine). Experience, moreover, is "not a medium for carrying information between a fully external objective world and a fully internal subjective self. It is rather the activity that produces objects and subjects" (33). Most improvisers would agree with this, also with the privileging of experience over conscious thinking, of intuition over reason.

What many seem to forget or ignore, however, is Dewey's *more than* in the quotation above. 'More than' entails that there is an unprivileged part in the thinking-doing relation, a part which the approach to improvisation that I hold to in this book importantly requires. I am here referring to the thinking 'side' of the relation. This is to say that depending on the situation, on what the dance requires dancers to do at specific moments in a performance of the dance, one side of the relationship (thinking or doing) will inevitably take prominence. Knowing therefore cannot be absolute and one cannot objectify it as a thing either. Knowing is rather dynamic. To say that in dance improvisation experience rules over cognition not only does not do justice to certain approaches to improvisation. It also appears to contradict the dynamism intrinsic to processes in general.

What could the reason(s) for this be? In dance, it is possible that some practitioners, seduced by the allure of certain 'catch' expressions such as *'don't think'*, started employing these words so that an original well-meant interest in abridging the gap between mind and body, reason and emotion, became, instead, a reinforcement of it. *'Don't think'* may well mean that what one desires when saying it is in fact an invitation for the recipient to allow the 'body's intelligence' to take over, to allow sensation to eloquently 'speak its language' through the body, to avoid 'rational' censorship, to be 'released' from unwanted, disabling, unnecessary constraints. If this is so, why say it in the negative form? Can a healthy person not think?[106] What about perceiving improvisation as a very particular form of thinking? Cvejic's thoughts on improvisation as articulated in her PhD thesis might provide an answer to the tendency many dancers show to use 'thinking' in the negative form (*don't think*). She says:

> If improvisation is rooted in bodily experience, then the knowledge of it must be empirical, born out of experiment and practice; secondly, the mistrust of verbal language among improvisers further hinders debate by regarding improvisers' statements and definitions as documents with truth-value, while these formulations may involve a considerable degree of mystification. (125)

Spontaneity is often conflated with an immediacy that seems to exclude conscious thought. Consciousness, and how it is loosely asso-

106 Lehrer, following Antonio Damasio, presents the incapacity to think as pathology (15).

ciated with rational thinking, seems to, especially in improvisation, corrupt the unencumbered 'naturalness' provided by spontaneous action, making it look unauthentic, fake or mannered. Consequently, dancers, especially improvisers, travel incredible distances to try not to think, so that they can look authentic, real or natural. Art historian Regina Wenninger's quotation at the beginning of this section suggests that for an artist to be authentic she must act spontaneously, and, that the conscious effort to act spontaneously is an impossibility, for spontaneity as a notion seems to demand the absence of conscious thought or reflection on the part of the artist.

Wenninger embarks upon a lengthy analysis and criticism of how philosopher and art critic Arthur Danto differentiates *style* from *manner*. To summarize: for Danto, according to Wenninger, an artist's style expresses the artist's way of seeing the world spontaneously and immediately, and one cannot learn it. An artist is also, in some sense, blind to his style, and therefore unconscious of it. Manner, by contrast, is external to the artist; the artist attains it by means of technique and hence the artist must be consciously aware of it. Style can transform into manner as far as becoming conscious of one's style destroys the immediate, spontaneous relation to it. The artist stands in a non-reflexive relation to his style. Manner, on the other hand, presupposes reflection (59-80, my translation).

If we conflate Danto's style with the colloquial language of dance improvisation and his manner with that of choreography we arrive at revealing similarities:

1. improvisation is often a practice motivated by a need for self, real or authentic expression, and that for expression to be of the self, real and authentic, one must be able to 'inhabit the moment' without

concern for how the self has become the self, that is, its history and preparation, including the acquisition of technique. One acts spontaneously, of *one's own accord*. The self is in this way essentially free, or, to put it differently, this kind of freedom is essential for the spontaneous, unhindered, unconscious, immediate and unmediated expression of the self;

2. choreography, on the other hand, is often a practice not primarily motivated by a drive towards self-expression, as the artist, if concerned with expressing something, rather expresses a pre-determined set of goals or intentions, usually someone else's (the choreographer's), and in this way the dancer is more a medium who, through his technical and cognitive abilities, learnt and remembered, expresses the identity of the work, not himself; and
3. in improvisation, the dance artist is also often creative and active, whereas in choreography as re-creative and passive, and because of being re-creative and passive, less capable of spontaneous acts of thought or imagination.

As already mentioned, experienced improvisers consistently attest to the contrary.[107] For an improviser to be good (qualified as such

107 Even though three of the prominent practitioners interviewed by De Spain, when asked to describe their reasons for improvising and the skills necessary to do so, show a strong bias against any form of rational thinking or deliberation, and consequently also against rational, conscious knowing, it is possible to claim that they

by the recognition the community she is a member of grants him) he needs reflection and practice, not only prior to the act, but doing the act itself; the act does not exclude reflection or thinking. In a *Landscape of Now* De Spain convincingly proposes that there are three necessary cognitive skills being involved in the improvisatory act: planning, analyzing and predictive understanding (135). One could also say that the notion of consciousness, by means of language, is itself the product of the meanings we learn and reproduce. What happens in improvisation, as De Spain suggests in his doctoral dissertation, is fast and articulate thinking (*Solo Movement* 75). The improviser needs to understand what matters at any given moment in time in the frame of the improvisation, and commit to his decisions, even if one decides not to decide; this will importantly change from improvisation to improvisation. This commitment is, moreover, not a commitment to the dancer herself, but rather to the improvisation, to the project at hand.

The complexity in choreography of doing particularly *this* at *a particular* time, under a set of *particular* conditions also asks the dancer to think and make fast and articulate decisions, as these conditions conjure up the known. However, this gives no guarantee that the known or pre-conditioned will happen exactly as planned. Dancers of choreographed pieces are aware that no movement will ever be fully the same. A large part of the work of such a dancer is to find ways to, through rehearsal, get as close as possible to what the movement is supposed to be. One goes after exactitude in choreography as one goes after the unknown in improvisation, that

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do not exclude it from their practice. They are all extremely aware of it. These three practitioners are Anna Halprin, Ruth Zaporah and Steve Paxton.

is, with the knowledge that one cannot fully grasp the exact or the unknown. What one does is calibrate one's psychophysical actions on a scale of approximation. The difference, therefore, is not that in improvisation one does not think and that in choreography one does. In both one always thinks, but differently so, depending on the constraints of the work at hand and the kind of freedom the work asks for, allows or facilitates. This is paramount when attempting to identify the difference between dance improvisation and choreography and to locate the differences between one improvisation and another, as well as between one choreography and another.

Wenninger posits that Danto's distinction between *style* and *manner* (and here, in my terms, improvisation and choreography) does not hold, because it bases itself on a static, reductive, either-or cognitive relation. She proposes a more dynamic, inclusive relation, in which *style* and *manner* (and here, improvisation and choreography) are profoundly enmeshed. One can therefore say that, inferring from Wenninger and conflating her terms (style and manner) with mine (improvisation and choreography), dance improvisation and choreography are known through one another and are therefore inseparable.

3.5 Novelty

> Improvisation, in the celebratory sense, conceives of itself as transcending these outmoded structures and threadbare pathways through acts of spontaneity that inhabit the moment, the instant, the pure futurity of the 'now', without history's 'spirit of gravity' (Nietzsche) weighing upon the shoulders of the creative artist. (Foster cited in Peters 17)

When asking several young practitioners of improvisation[108] about their view on what improvisation is and what it can generate their responses show that through the practice of improvisation practitioners can more easily become or feel free. Free from a sense of aesthetic responsibility towards the 'look' of what they do and from a sense of duty towards tradition. This lack of concern with what a movement form looks like means that (in improvisation) one does not have to correctly follow or execute a technique. However, before one can break tradition or habit one must first recognize these *as such*. Attaining a heightened awareness of one's habits and the traditions one belongs to (willingly or not) takes a considerable amount of time, a time of practice and critical reflection. Without these the new cannot be new, for one would not know in relation to what one feels and thinks of it as new.

Inhabiting the moment 'spontaneously' in dance improvisation must therefore contain within it the knowledge or memory of what *has been*, a knowledge the experienced improviser can afford to forget or momentarily put aside. This is what Steve Paxton means when he proposes improvisation to be a means to help one understand one's own past, how one's habits have become habits, and *that* as being crucial for improvisation, not a spontaneous oblivion to the past (*Improvisation is*...125-129). Words like 'awareness' and 'attention' come often into play as well, as Barbara Dilley, for instance, recognizes. For Dilley, in improvisation forms, "we connect

108 3rd and 4th year dancer maker students of the ArtEZ School of Dance in Arnhem, The Netherlands. I asked them to answer, prior to the beginning of my teaching period with them, the question '*what is improvisation?*' I have read their answers to be congruent with how spontaneity tends to be used and/or instrumentalized as a key notion in differentiating dance improvisation from composition/choreography. One can find the questions in the Appendix section at the end of this book.

very clearly to the constant shifting that exists in our perceptions" (40). This awareness becomes the ground for spontaneous dance improvisations, or, following Moreno's definition of spontaneity as readiness to act, without awareness, that is, a form of knowing, there is no readiness for dance improvisation. Without knowing, in improvisation one would not be flexible, responsive, present, awake, clear, generous, discerning, non-judgmental, and so on. Actor and theater scholar Clayton Drinko posits that the improviser, and the external focus on the 'other' it demands, is that which allows the "intuitive centers of the brain to flourish, whilst drastically inhibiting the self-censoring regions that are also involved with working memory" (96)[109].

This awareness, as a form of knowing, is thus the main trait of 'expert' improvisers and to become an 'expert' is a process that indeed takes time. Once one has developed 'expertise' one can perhaps stop consciously thinking about all that which one has learnt. One could therefore say that what one has learnt has become habitual, a second skin. One does not have to think about what one needs to do because the action one has, through practice, become automatized, like the riding of a bicycle. More precisely, following philosopher Alva Noë, "insofar we are skillful and expert, we are not deliberate in what we do. Our skill enables us to respond appropriately to the world in an automatic way. If we were to deliberate, we would interrupt the flow and undermine the conditions of our own expertise" (127). This alleged 'thoughtlessness' or momentary

109 The ability to focus on other people, the environment, and the task at hand allows one to become less self-conscious and more likely to reach 'flow' states, that is, states where level of challenge and competence to meet the challenge match.

'forgetfulness' seems to be crucial to the colloquial understanding of spontaneity and to the idea of not knowing associated to it.

Thinking too much about what one already knows will certainly not help a dancer perform a technically difficult, well-rehearsed, composed movement sequence, neither will an improviser be able to enter a space where he needs to make complex decisions, as in cases of more demanding, risk-taking, threatening kinds of improvisation, where, for instance, the risk of physical injury to oneself and others is high. Habits are thus not necessarily bad. Because the rational, censoring mind can relax, habits can allow psychophysical space for the feeling of newness, providing one has a positive and confident relationship with how habits have become habits. One could perhaps infer from this that a technically skilled dancer who has had 'bad' teachers and suffered the 'tyranny' of mindless form will most likely not want to think of habit, or the dance culture she is or has been a part of, as positive and therefore she will do everything possible to escape it. Improvisation, however, must be more than an escape *from*. If this is so, why then the insistence on freeing oneself from habits if habits appear to be a crucial element in the logic of spontaneity experienced improvisers seem to claim? How can the new so often claimed for in improvisation arise as new if not by also a reasonable degree of habituation? How can one create difference in improvisation if not by engendering it through habit and repetition?

In an essay written in 2013 about habit's tendency towards continuity and the relationship between habit and its overcoming, dancer and philosopher Philipa Rothfield rehearses an answer to this question. She draws from movement techniques that adopt a critical stance toward habit, such as Alexander Technique and Ideokinesis, to promote difference *in* the body and to open the space for something different or new to occur. Rothfield aligns this ca-

pacity with Spinozian Ethics, as it gives an ethical inflexion to the question of changing corporeal capacity.

For Spinoza, according to Rothfield, a body that becomes more capable in action becomes better in an ethical sense and so, in this framework, a movement technique which aims to enhance corporeal capacity through fostering difference in the body, beyond habit, constitutes an ethical project (100-101). In asking what it means to create the space for something different to occur in the body, she embarks on an illuminating journey, with among others, Felix Ravaisson, Henri Bergson, and Merleau Ponty. From this journey, one comes to understand that the unconscious performance of habit is a skill, a form of bodily intelligence integrated within the self, ready to go. Habit does not lack thought, but rather represents a kind of thinking in action (104).

Further, with Gilles Deleuze, she explains in detail what 'inhibition' and 'not doing' mean in Alexander Technique, suggesting one could see this 'not doing' as an effort to displace traditional notions of the thinker (as knowing subject) towards a transitional, dynamic image of thought in the body (106). She refers to postmodern dance (Yvonne Rainer's *Trio A* and Trisha Brown's *Accumulation with Taking Plus Water Motor*)[110] as examples of this, because a dancer, in executing the movement demands of these pieces, must go against the force of habit and so go beyond her sensibilities and dispositions: open the body up to the unknown. This is difficult for highly trained dancers and, according to Rothfield, it has less to do with the dancer consciously knowing what to do and more with her attempting to

110 For more information on Rainer's *Trio A* refer to the following link: http://www.vdb.org/titles/trio>. As for *Accumulation with Talking plus Water Motor:* <http://www.danceheritage.org/brown.html>. Web. 6 May 2015.

either stop or slow down the formation of spontaneous ease which arises from habit (107).

In other words, the challenge for the dancer in such works is to remain open to the new despite the pull of old habits and of expertise (108). For Rothfield, in giving up her knowing subjectivity, in losing herself, the dancer allows the work itself to become visible. Whether this is possible, that is, whether one can overcome or give up one's subjectivity is open to debate. What seems to be clear for Rothfield, and for me, is that were it not for habit none of the good work ascribed to somatic techniques such as *Alexander* and *Ideokinesis* would hold. Consequently, one would never achieve the new (or fulfill its promise) either. The practice of slowing down the formation of spontaneous ease (that is, to inhibit the habitual) indeed involves temporarily distracting the conscious mind within detailed complex physical activity, as Rothfield suggests (109). However, it is important to note here that the conscious mind does not vanish, it is rather temporarily 'distracted'.

Another tentative answer may be that one comes to terms with the past and looks at habit as a reservoir of information, not primarily as something to reject. Past and habit are something to robustly encounter and interact with. Besides, not every rejection leads to something new and not everything new is necessarily better. According to Peters, by sharpening one's own listening to the calling within what is there, one might discover differences within the same. Moreover, one needs to repeatedly call upon, produce, tune, and rehearse this listening. Indeed, this production takes place spontaneously, in improvisation and in composition (choreography), under the proviso that the 'instantaneity' of spontaneity include all of spontaneity's relations, material and immaterial, past and future, not only an isolated slice of time. Consequently, the differ-

ence between improvisation and choreography is not that the former is spontaneous and the latter is not. One can think of both as either always spontaneous or never spontaneous. This is because in dances that present the body live on stage, both choreography and improvisation are 'produced' real-time, and a production, like the language used to communicate it, is not personal or individual, because it itself carries with it the knowledge, meanings and values of the culture it exists in, even if with the purpose to reject or resist it. Meaning is therefore not 'ours' alone to command. One must bring the *of one's own accord* of spontaneity in relation to when, where, and with whom *one's own accord* takes place. It is there that one may find in a more detailed and satisfying manner how dance improvisation and choreography differ, as well as about the kinds of knowing and thinking involved in each.

Improvisation could thus be less celebrated and more fully affirmed. In a more rigorous and affirmative understanding of improvisation, one finds and feels the new in the ability to recall, inhabit, revise and renew the old, which, when called upon, is always there in the present tense, transformed. Borrowing again from Peters, the new of improvisation is not the embodiment of freedom, but rather a search for it in the here-and-now of the becoming of the work, a search that requires a psychophysical effort and discipline-technique paramount to any freedom wishing to be capable of willing the future, a future always past, because the future always finds anchor in the past, dynamically (72, 167). Indeed, for one to forget something, one must first remember it. This is not exclusive to improvisation. It is an essential part of choreography as well. It is, in fact, an important characteristic of any dancer who can embody freedom positively, that is, to consider freedom as a *freedom to (*141-142).

Here, in addition to Peters, I draw insights from how philosophers Isaiah Berlin and Hannah Arendt have disagreed as to what constitutes freedom. Berlin proposed two kinds, negative and positive freedom, the former assuming a lack of external interference or constraint, which means one has choices, and the latter as self-mastery. He favored negative freedom because, firstly, feeling free (self-mastery) for him is not as empowering as being free (from external interference) and, secondly, because negative freedom does not impose a preconceived idea of what balance or harmony should be. It is not a corrective. Arendt, on the contrary, thinks that freedom is more than the lack of interference from without or the capacity for choice making. For her, a person is free when she exercises an opportunity for political participation in the public realm. For Arendt, a person is free not when she can choose, but when she chooses to be political (Hiruta 854-868). For me in this book both views are implied: Berlin's negative freedom in how dancers can choose within a performance, and Arendt's view in how the way dancers operate within the pieces might reveal possible ways to rehearse a freedom that is political, namely, in the public sphere and with others. I will elucidate this further in Chapter 5.

Hence, any future outcome, including those aiming to communicate specific meanings, will always be different than the foreseen, even if ever slightly, precisely because the future finds anchor in the past, irrevocably. To put it differently: if art is to nourish thinking, habits must be both encouraged and critically questioned.

3.6 Conclusion

Even though some dance artists and scholars claim that one can divorce choreography in its expanded mode from the practice of dance, including dance improvisation, in this book dance, improv-

isation and choreography are profoundly intertwined, while they are neither the same nor in opposition to each other. I here thus propose dance improvisation and choreography to be in a differential, dynamic relation of contrast. So much so that we cannot speak in terms of *either* improvisation *or* choreography, un-prepared *or* prepared action, consciously thought action *or* not. Every action will consist of both improvisational *and* choreographic agency[111]. What varies, depending on what a work demands, allows or endures, is the degree of one and the other. From this it follows that the so-called spontaneous act is no guarantee for the creation of novelty. The new itself emerges only in relation to what is already known, even if only partially. As such, knowing or not knowing is neither a guarantee for the creation of the new nor for its qualitative superiority to the old.

Moreover, the critical analysis of spontaneity embarked upon above, especially in consideration of Frisina's non-representational reading of Dewey regarding how conscious thinking operates, enables me to posit that fully knowing itself, given its limits, is unachievable and therefore it can only be an ideal notion. The known, at its extreme modulation, suggests, first, an (over)confidence and specious certainty of one already fully knowing something prior to its future actualization; and second, that one will never be able to know anything at all about the unknown. On the one hand, there is no space for surprises, good or bad. On the other, overwhelmed, one is left at the mercy of pure chance or fate. The dynamic imbrication of the improvised in the choreographed, of the so-called unknown in the known indicates that there is much more to knowing than

111 I here do not consider bodies that are hybrid (cyborgs) nor the extent to which machines improvise.

its two (unachievable) ideal limits. Knowing and not knowing are equally dynamic tendencies (that is, they are no absolute or fixed modes). Depending on what the work at hand demands, allows or endure, one tendency may become stronger than the other.

In addition, if we agree that knowing and not knowing are tendencies of a dynamic relation, we need to critically rethink the causal explanation usually ascribed to the relation between risk-taking and not knowing in dance improvisation. Continually trying to pull the rug out from under one's feet, as Tompkins suggests in the quote at the beginning of Chapter 1[112] might indeed be playful and enhance the chances for encountering the unknown and generating surprise for the improviser. However, it does not yet necessarily entail a risk to the work, which is my primary concern in this book. This is because, as we will see later, a risk taken by any one individual during a performance involving many dancers might go unnoticed by both the other dancers and the audience, and as such not produce a relevant difference to the unravelling of the piece. Besides, as seasoned improvisers attest, for example De Spain and choreographer João Fiadeiro, the unknown is very hard if not impossible to find.

If one is to understand spontaneity and the openness commonly attached to the practice of dance improvisation as facilitating not only freedom but *more* freedom, the spontaneous act in dance needs to be considerably more than a slip of the tongue, supposedly arising *ex nihilo*, unprepared and unconsciously thought. One needs to cul-

112 "What is actually interesting in an improvised performance is to not know. I don't want to know and I am continuously trying to pull the rug out from under my feet so that I can keep for myself or for the people I dance with the spontaneity, this state of being in the unknown, of risk, of playfulness, and of surprise" (Mark Tompkins cited in Benoit 207).

tivate as well as consciously (knowingly) affirm it. As such, knowing and not knowing become dynamic processes in which the doing of improvisation goes hand in hand with the thinking *of* and *in* improvisation. In both dance improvisation and set choreography alike—as well as in all works that explicitly combine elements of both—one can find different kinds of (not) knowing and, as such, also different degrees of preparedness, novelty, and conscious awareness or attention. How much of each one of these is present, and to what degree the improvising skills I mentioned in the Introduction are called-upon depends on the project at hand and its circumstances.

Chapter 4
Theories and Understandings of Risk Outside of Dance

In this chapter I will briefly venture outside the discourse of dance and engage with risk through four socio-cultural theories of risk, namely: *Cultural Theory* (Douglas), *Edgework* (Lyng), *Governmentality* (Foucault) and *Systems Theory* (Luhmann). At the end of each of these four theories I will present my rationale as to how each theory is productive for the analysis of *Faust* and *Pororoca*. First, however, a very concise presentation of how risk as a notion has historically arisen.

4.1 Early Usages of Risk and Risk from the Mid-20th Century Onwards

The modern conception of risk has its roots in the Hindu-Arabic numbering system that reached the West seven to eight hundred years ago, a time, according to historian Peter Bernstein, "of religious turmoil, nascent capitalism and a vigorous approach to science and the future" (3). For criminologist and sociologist David Denney, risk at first had a spatial connotation and was "referred to sailing in uncharted waters" (9). Later, risk became more closely associated with time through issues related to its use by business and commerce (Giddens cited in Denney 9). Thus, the notion of risk appears amidst the development of mercantile capitalism and the rise of scientific rationality. Together, these strengthen the belief

that one could calculate risk and as such control it[113]. In other words, the notion of risk brings time and uncertainty into a quantifiable relation. However, this belief in quantification by means of probability has weakened. According to sociologist Gerda Reith, "the rise of modern bureaucratic states, secularization, industrialization, and political unrest made Western societies increasingly complex, leading to a growing awareness that the world [is] not deterministic as had been previously thought" (64). As one example of this complexity, Reith continues by saying that technologies such as the Internet "transform relations between individuals, overcoming separation in space and time" (idem). Such speed distorts relations of causation and temporality, "giving us the triumph of effect over cause, of instantaneity over time" (idem). These technologies "not only collapse the future into the present" (idem). By creating complex systems, "they also make the prediction of the future virtually impossible" (idem).[114] In addition, she posits that today "institutions that used

113 Blaise Pascal called this area of study the geometry of hazard, based on a radical reorientation of the future. Then (in pre-industrial societies), one saw events in the present as signs of providential meaning. In classic industrial society, and its desire to make profits, demanded the accurate prediction of future events. In this way, following Jacob Bernoulli's law of large numbers, attention shifted from the short to the long term and from the individual case to the rule (See Reith 62 and Bernstein 116-134).

114 However, one could argue that today, over a decade after Reith wrote her analysis of risk, and more than 20 years after the main theories of risk appeared, the amount of data one can gather has become unimaginably big, steadily increasing, so much so that one speaks of 'big data'. Moreover, the technologies for quantitative analysis of such large amounts of data have become more sophisticated and accurate, thus enabling one to better predict the future than ever before, at least in terms of quantity and probability. While big data may provide a sense of probabilistic certainty about the future concerning quantities, those in possession and control of it often instrumentalize it to control and capture the imagination and movement of individuals, arguably becoming a form of *Governmentality*.

to provide security, such as family, work, and religion have become much less stable" (67). Individuals are often left without footing and, to survive, are pushed towards becoming more malleable and open to transformation.[115] Notions such as "truth and objective knowledge have thus been replaced with relativism, pluralism, and constantly shifting values, and the idea of certainty has been replaced by an ongoing exercise in probability calculation" (idem).

Given this climate of indeterminacy and uncertainty and the fact that the notion of risk (and its calculation) were originally based on the assumption that the future could be predicted, even if only partially, one might think that the notion of risk would now have become obsolete. Reith clearly states that this is not the case. She writes: "rather than aiming for certainty, around mid 20th century the calculation of risk began to reflect the uncertainties of an indeterminate world instead" (idem). In such a climate, the notion of risk "may provide a framework for acting under uncertainty. Weighing up of relevant factors, expected outcomes, and knowledge of past events can provide a sense of security in an uncertain world" (69). This, however, does not provide the whole picture. Reith explains:

115 This is synonymous with the rhetoric around the notion of flexibility, which advanced capitalism extensively draws upon, arguably turning it into a demand. One of the problems with flexibility, in this context, is its underlying assumption that once 'flexed' an individual or practice can simply return to its original state, form or place. For a criticism on flexibility and the proposition for an alternative to it, namely 'plasticity', refer to Malabou, Catherine. *What Should We Do with Our Brain.* In addition, one can also refer to Karen Barad's ideas about agential realism, which she defines as an "entangled ethico-onto-epistemology, one in which agential realism does not start with a set of given or fixed differences (like Cartesianism does), but rather makes inquiries into how differences are made and remade, stabilized and destabilized, as well as their materializing effects and constitutive exclusions." *Mousse* 34 (2012) : 77.

> On one level, we do govern risk by rational calculation, prediction, and planning ... but on a subjective level, we hold a range of assumptions and beliefs that are not conventionally rational, and are not bound to this discourse. This is not a problem of individual reasoning . . . it is a problem with probability, on which the notion of risk is based . . . The disjuncture between the so-called objective calculation and the subjective perception of uncertainty reflects the inability of probability to provide a subjectively satisfying account of risks themselves at the level of the individual. (71-72)

In short: the calculation of a risk very often does not correspond with its perception.[116] "Generally individuals tend to underestimate risks they feel they can control by downplaying the chance of a bad outcome in a familiar situation, while also underestimating the risks of events they do not expect to happen" (73).[117] This means that the extremes of risk are ignored, both common, everyday dangers as well as rare, low probability ones. This is a pre-requisite for risk-taking in the arts, especially today, in the sense that most artists, to sustain an artistic practice, must be able to engage in a good amount of constructive self-deceit. This is akin to how Luhmann

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116 For a detailed account of risk perception, see Paul Slovic's *The Feeling of Risk: New Perspectives on Risk Perception*, Earthscan. See also Glynis Breakwell's *The Psychology of Risk*, Cambridge University Press.

117 Dan Kahneman and Amos Tversky's extensive studies of heuristics and biases—common sense explanations and rules of thumb—conclude that most people are not probabilistically rational utility maximizers.

below differentiates risk from danger, in that when marking one, the other is put out of sight, *as if* it was not there.

This brief history of the notion of risk makes clear that ever since its adoption it has become steadily more complex to calculate as well as more relegated to individual responsibility. As we will see below, this process gained in speed. Before we get there, it is important to briefly lay out three differentiations with regard the concept of risk in general, differentiations one often ignores.

4.1.1 Uncertainty and Risk

Risk and uncertainty occupy different places on the subjective-objective scale. Whereas uncertainty seems to belong to the subjective (personal, affective) realm, risk has a strong objective (technical) component. The relationship between the two seems to be in part analogous to that between truth and belief.[118] Risk in correlation to truth and uncertainty to belief. According to sociologist Deborah Lupton, risk in its "purely technical meaning, came to rely upon conditions in which the probability estimates of an event are able to be known or knowable. Uncertainty, on the other hand, was used as an alternative term when these probabilities are inestimable or unknown" (*Risk* 7).

Although this distinction between risk and uncertainty can be useful in theoretical investigations concerning decision-making, only rarely can one know probabilities with certainty. It follows that one makes almost all decisions under uncertainty.[119] Lupton thus posits that in everyday language, one tends to treat risk and uncertainty

118 <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/risk/>. Web. 17 Feb. 2015.

119 <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/risk/>. Web. 19 May 2012.

as conceptually the same thing, even though risk "tends to be used to refer almost exclusively to a threat, hazard, danger or harm" (9). However, there is an exception to this. In Edgework, a theory of voluntary risk-taking founded by Stephen Lyng and about which we will get to know more towards the end of this chapter, risk indeed presupposes a specific range of outcomes, such as succeeding (or not) to climb a high mountain. However, what Edgework emphasizes is not the outcome as such, but rather the experience arising from the uncertainty connected to being at or approaching the edge of a risky activity. It is precisely in this sense that I see risk-taking here, namely, as presupposing outcomes that are to a large extent specific at an overall formal level, but not on the level of how one gets there and the experience arising therefrom.

4.1.2 Danger and Risk

One finds this differentiation between risk and danger explicitly in Luhmann, for whom uncertainty exists in relation to future loss. One can thus regard loss as the consequence of a decision taken by an individual, which for Luhmann entails a risk, or as the consequence attributed to a decision made by the environment (thus, not to a decision taken by an individual), in which case he rather speaks of danger (*Risk* 21). For Luhmann, this distinction between risk and danger allows for a marking of both sides—either of the one taking the decision or the larger context (or system) within which one takes the risk—but not simultaneously. "Marking risks then allows dangers to be forgotten, whereas marking dangers allows [one to forget] the profits that could have been earned if risky decisions are made" (24).

Sociologist Paulo Vaz explains that danger designates a contingent harm, attributed to a person, thing, or event, as if it was

an intrinsic characteristic of these. Risk, on the other hand, refers to the possibility of damage occasioned by the exposure to danger, which is not intrinsic to the person. Moreover, a danger becomes a risk when one can measure the probability of occurrence of an adverse event and evaluate the magnitude of its effects. In short: risks do not exist without us knowing of them (*Michel Foucault* 113-114).

4.1.3 Prediction, Anticipation, and Expectation

Choreographer and researcher Ivar Hagendoorn proposes that prediction, anticipation and expectation are "heterogeneous concepts and that not all predictive capacities are equal. One can base predictions and expectations on experience, knowledge of fact and the extrapolation of a sequence of events. They can be the result of conscious deliberation and the outcome of automatic brain process" (138). Prediction entails a "general orientation towards the future. One uses expectation to refer to a representation of what is predicted to occur in the future and anticipation to refer to the state of anticipation and the process that produces this state" (Bubic cited in Hagendoorn 138).

These differences are important here because they refer to different modes of engaging with the future: conscious, automatic, representational, and affective. An examination of this strengthens my argument for a dynamic, differential, non-dichotomous understanding of risk-taking and (not) knowing in dance and the improvisatory therein. My 'hunch' is that in such works a dancer engages with the future in all these modes, often at the same time, which makes deciding in such works particularly taxing on the dancers, especially in the work of O'Donnell. I will come back to this below. Let us now engage with the four socio-cultural epistemologies of risk: *Cultural Theory*, *Governmentality*, *System Theory*, and *Edgework*.

At the end of each description, I expose how specifically they are productive to this book.

4.2 Realist versus Constructivist Epistemologies of Risk

Science pedagogue Brian Campbell writes that 'constructivism' has often been used in arguments against the ability of human beings to unambiguously know reality. He also says that constructivism has appeared under different forms such as developmental constructivism, feminist constructivism, radical constructivism, and social constructivism. Realism, on the contrary, has been put to use in the opposite argument, that is, that humans are able to unambiguously know reality. Realism has also appeared under different forms, such as critical realism, modest realism, naive realism, objective realism, strong realism, and weak realism.[120]

One can only apprehend the lack of ambiguity assigned above to realism and the ambiguity assigned to constructivism as *ideal.* This is because, within the context of this book, knowledge of something as well as its lack will never be complete. This is in line with the argument that I put forward in the first chapter: that the known and the unknown cannot but be *ideal,* because the one always contains some extent of the other. Therefore, we can never fully know reality while we cannot say we do not know *anything* about it either. Reality can thus amount to 'something' that is, on the one hand, independent of us *and*, simultaneously, 'something' we construct, on the other. Reality, like improvisation and choreography as well as the author of this book and his ideas, is a dynamic process. This

120 <http://ejse.southwestern.edu/article/view/7597/5364>. Web. 17 Feb. 2015.

undermines any attempt to satisfactorily locate how we know reality according to clear-cut, binary categories, including the reality of a risk because, as we have seen with Reith above, risk is a future event projected into the present, an anticipated possibility that may or may not actualize. The reality of risk thus, following this logic, must necessarily be contingent and hybrid, that is: real *and* imagined, objective *and* subjective, felt *and* thought, and so on.

4.2.1 *Cultural Theory*

In her influential book *Risk*, Lupton suggests that sociocultural perspectives on risk emphasize the very aspects that cognitive science and other techno-scientific approaches have been criticized for neglecting: the social and cultural contexts in which risk is understood and negotiated (25). This approach to risk, strongly influenced by British anthropologist Mary Douglas, primarily seeks to identify the ways in which underlying cultural structures, hierarchies and categories serve to define risk, knowledge and practices. Moreover, this approach scrutinizes how one identifies social order and the *status quo* as well as how one can deal with deviance from these. Lupton posits that for Douglas risk is thus a contemporary western strategy for dealing with danger and otherness and she argues that risk intimately relates to notions of politics, particularly in relation to accountability, responsibility and blame (38-39). Moreover, "because margins mark and straddle boundaries, they are liminal and therefore dangerous, requiring high levels of policing and control" (idem 42). Hence, for Douglas taking a risk may be "the crossing of a boundary" (idem 46) and one should see risk as a joint product of knowledge about the future as well as consent regarding the most desired prospects (Douglas and Wildavsky 5). In other words, Douglas and Wildavsky reject an understanding of risk perception that is

based upon some people having personality traits that predispose them to look for risks. Instead, for them "between private subjective perception and public, physical science there lies culture, a middle area of shared beliefs and values" (194). Moreover, sociologist Pat Caplan adds, these shared beliefs "lead to common fears, thus the choice of risks and the choice of how to live are linked and each form of life has its own typical risk portfolio" (16).

Douglas has suggested that one can also see risk in terms of what she calls 'grid' and 'group' indices. Grid describes a situation "in which there is strong agreement on the meaning and scope of risk" (Douglas cited in Denney 23). It is the set of rules that govern individuals in their personal interactions. Group, on the other hand, "refers to the amount of control over risk an individual can exert within a system" (idem).[121] Thus, grid and group represent a taxonomy of cultures[122] that help "understanding how an individual's experience can impact on the way in which risk is perceived" (idem).

Douglas' notion of risk as a dynamic, situated, shifting entity existing within cultures can be made productive for this book. Risk for her means and 'does' different things to different people in different contexts at different times, meaning that risk is not a fixed or permanent state. This is very much in line with how risk-taking in improvisation has emerged from within the Chapter 1 literature

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121 In a somewhat different phrasing, geography scholar Virginie Mamadouh posits that 'grid' runs from a private system of classification to a system of shared classification and 'group' stands for the relation between ego and others. She identifies 'grid' and 'group' as two basic dimensions of sociality that one can apply to all cultures. This assumes that everything humans do or want is culturally biased (396).

122 One can also call these cultures ways of life or rationalities. Grid and group indices can identify and assess viable combinations of these.

review, where the notion of boundary appeared in many ways, including physical, structural, conceptual or emotional. This shows that, if we agree with Douglas, an analysis of how boundaries are established, met, stretched and perhaps even transgressed in a dance could reflect what is at stake in that dance and the role improvisation plays in it. What Douglas can additionally offer us here is how she presents the grid-group relation, specifically the tension between agreed rules in groups and individual control over risk within a group. This provides a fruitful lens through which to read the methodologies involved in the group work of O'Donnell and Rodrigues, including the exertion of control or the lack thereof. It can also be helpful in investigating whether boundaries in their work have been transgressed or not and, if risks were taken, whether they affected the work or not, and if so how.

4.2.2 *Systems Theory*

To understand Niklas Luhmann's *Systems Theory* and how he theorizes risk, it is useful to have an insight into the theory of autopoiesis (self-production), a theory originally developed by two Chilean biologists, Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela. In their investigations of living systems, they defined autopoiesis as the capacity of such systems to reproduce themselves from within themselves, which does not mean that autopoiesis implies a closed-system model. It rather indicates that at the level of the operations of a system no operation can either leave or enter it. It remains contained within it, which means that systems, at their operative level, are unable to transcend their own boundaries. On the level of its operations an autopoietic system does not receive any inputs from the environment in which it finds itself, but only perturbations (or irritations), which then might trigger internal system operations. Another important

element of the theory of autopoiesis is the concept of *structural coupling*, which refers to the relation between systems and their environments. A system is 'structurally coupled' to its environment (or other systems in its environment) if its structures are in some way adjusted to the structures of the environment (or systems in the environment), that is, if the structures of the system allow for reactions to important environmental events. As such, not every perturbation emerging from the environment will register or cause an impact on the system (Seidl in Seidl and Becker 21-26).

Luhmann radicalizes the temporal aspect of autopoiesis. While Maturana and Varela originally conceptualized the elements of their biological systems as relatively stable chemical molecules, which must be replaced from time to time, Luhmann conceptualizes the elements as momentary events without any duration. Events vanish as soon as they come into being; they "immediately pass away" (*Social Systems* 287). Because the elements of the system have no duration, the system is urged into constant production of new elements. If the autopoiesis stops, the system disappears immediately. It dies. Luhmann also de-ontologizes the concept of elements in a system. For Luhmann, elements are defined as elements merely by means of their integration into a system. Outside (independently) of the system they have no status as elements (Seidl in Seidl and Becker 22).

Seidl also posits that Luhmann crucially did not choose persons or action as the basic elements of his system theoretical approach to society. Instead, he chose communication. His concept of communication differs considerably from how one usually understands communication, namely as an asymmetrical process of transferring meaning or information from a sender to a receiver. Building on the speech theories of psychologist and linguist Karl Bühler, Luhmann

conceives of communication as a combination of three components: information, utterance and understanding, each of which Luhmann conceptualized as a selection, namely: 1) information as a selection from a repertoire of possibilities in that every communication selects what is being communicated from everything that could have been communicated; 2) utterance referring to the form of and reason for a communication—how and why something is being said; and 3) understanding is conceptualized as the distinction between information and utterance—what is being communicated must be distinguished from how and why it is communicated (Seidl in Seidl and Becker 28). Importantly, for Luhmann, "it is not the speaker but the listener who decides on the meaning of a message, since it is the latter whose understanding of the set of possibilities constrains the possible meaning of the message, no matter what the speaker may have had in mind" (Becker cited in Seidl 29).

The relation between social system and human being is a very controversial aspect of

Luhmann's theory. Luhmann does not conceptualize the human being as a systemic unity. Instead, he understands it as a conglomerate of organic and psychic systems. The former consists of biochemical elements, the latter of thoughts. These systems are, as already seen, operatively closed but structurally coupled, that is, their respective structures are adjusted to each other in such a way as to allow mutual irritations. Although the human being does not constitute a systemic unity, the social system treats it as such: it constructs it as a person. In other words, persons do not exist—they are not systems—but they are a construct of the social system. Within the social system, persons refer to the conglomerate of organic and psychic systems (Seidl in Seidl and Becker 31-33).

In his work specifically on risk, Luhmann posits that because society's future has increasingly become more dependent on decision-making, the fear that things could go wrong has also increased. Fear has therefore been rapidly growing and with it the risk apportioned to decision-making (*Risk* xxxii). According to this logic this means that the more one needs to make decisions the more one fears making decisions because of the prospect of deciding inappropriately and the ensuing consequences. Luhmann contends that if risk is a fundamental aspect of decision-making, one can define the concept of risk as the "result of an attribution process" (*Modern Society* 5), and fear can, consequently, be a means through which one makes sense of the world. Therefore, with the increase of both decision-making and fear one can speak of the emergence of what Furedi, among others, has called a *Culture of Fear*, about which I have briefly written in the Introduction of this book and will now expand.

For Furedi, even though different cultures have a different story of what is to be feared, fear in a *Culture of Fear* is diffuse and can thus be attached to an indeterminate number of things. It exists as a 'free floater' that, in persisting in its diffuseness, can eventually become a perspective on or a way of making sense of the world. One cannot calculate the effects of fear in such a culture. Therefore, due to lack of reliable probability there is a tendency to engage in preventative and precautionary measures (as the popular saying 'better safe than sorry' well demonstrates). In this culture, where fear reigns, the absence of evidence is indeed not an evidence of absence[123] and one defines a person not by how strong or capable

123 This is a reference to Rumsfeld's famous statement while serving as George W.

she is, but rather by her vulnerability. Fear then fuels misanthropy: we become scared of ourselves, seeing only the negative side of an impact. Finally, instead of binding together, fear distances, thus becoming a powerful tool for ideologies that stress the conflict between us and them.[124]

But back to Luhmann who, in his thinking about risk indeed emphasizes the negative impacts of risk. For him, risk "accommodates a plurality of distinctions within it and one can speak of risk only if one can identify a decision without which the loss [attached to it] could not have occurred" (*Risk* 16). So, "if one is to attribute risk to risk a decision, certain conditions must be satisfied, among which the requirement that the alternatives be clearly distinguishable in respect of the possibility of loss occurring" (23). In other words, one must know what one aspires to and one must also be able to discern, *within* a system, between losses that matter and make a substantial difference to the system, and those that do not. For Luhmann, moreover, there is no risk-free behavior because decisions, even deciding not to decide, are inevitable.

I do not think that the clear-cut differentiations made by System Theory as put forward by Luhmann such as risk and danger, system and environment, one system and another system (notwithstanding the notion of structural coupling he proposes to explain how his

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Bush's secretary of defense:
"As we know, there are *known knowns*— there are things we know we know. We also know there are *known unknowns*, which is to say that we know there are things we do not know. But there are also *unknown unknowns*—the ones we don't know we don't know as well as the *unknown knowns*—things we know but are unaware of."

124 These are notes made from viewing a lecture given by Furedi during the Tallinn Summer School of 2011, available at: <http://vimeo.com/36331748>. Web. 12 Dec. 2014.

theory of systems is not be understood as closed), can be satisfactorily aligned with the propositions made in this book towards differential, dynamic, relational and situational understandings of what happens in improvisation with regard to its relation to choreography, knowing and risk. This is because in advanced capitalism the financial system, for example, does much more than just 'irritate' the arts system. It plays a crucial role in how the arts system performs its own autopoiesis, because as art historian Matthew Rampley suggests "it has managed to re-code itself in terms of the system in question [the art system]" (7). Clearly, in Luhmann's theory the arts system can only transform from efforts emerging from within its own operations and I think he is right. However, when systems are to such a degree intertwined one can say that the financial system does much more than irritate the arts system; it fundamentally changes it. This is, however, not to say that artists should stop trying to counter, from within their own practice and on their own terms, the 'irritations' of advanced capitalism. Choosing the best way to counter it is what is at stake.

Despite Luhmann's difficult theories, how he has thought about decision-making in relation to risk—namely, decision-making's absolute centrality to risk in the sense that one will never be able to achieve enough knowledge to prevent loss from happening, however minimal— is useful in terms of allowing us to further understand the temporal quality of decision-making during *Faust* and *Pororoca*. More precisely, it can help one understand how risks (decisions) taken by an individual make a difference (matter) or not to the work. Luhmann's proposition, that there is no risk-free behavior (because one is constantly making decisions, consciously or not), despite his clear focus on not knowing and the enhanced awareness of risk ensuing from it, suits the dynamism I assign to the other key

notions in this book, that is, improvisation, choreography, knowing, not knowing, and novelty. Therefore, in what follows I will shed further light on Luhmann's understanding of decision-making to see whether it can add to what we have already learnt in Chapter 1, and if so how.

4.2.2.1 Decision-Making

In *Modern Society Shocked by Its Risks* Luhmann posits that the classical definition of decision, as a good or bad choice, does not consider the timeframe of the decision. From the position of the observer, the past and the future are always present. The present becomes a-topon[125], a term Luhmann uses to describe "a position without a place in the world, and as such the present becomes more important than ever, because it becomes the blind spot of the observer, allowing him to sever the world according to the two sides of a distinction" (9). Luhmann asks: "how does then a decision distinguish, and in fact severs, its own past and future?" (11). His answer is that "seen as part of a process, the past determines the present. As the result of a chain of past events, the present is as it is. One must accept it as it is because one cannot undo the past. The future, on the other hand, is open, uncertain and unpredictable to the extent that it is not simply a prolongation of past" (idem). Decisions taken *in* the present, however, complicate this apparent linearity, because, in deciding, as "in trying to find alternatives *in* the present, it is as if the past had not simply produced states, but also contingencies and therefore possibilities of choice" (idem,

125 Elsewhere, in *Modernization and the Crisis of Memory*, philosopher Phillip Wolf refers to Luhmann's usage of the term as "a non-place or impossibility" (37).

my emphasis). Moreover, decisions give a structure to the future. They cannot determine the future state of the world, but "they can project a difference into its open horizon" (11). This is because "the future retreats as one tries to approach it" (13). Decisions can, moreover, drawing from Hagendoorn (above), project a difference into the horizon of the future by means of prediction, anticipation and expectations, each conditioning the future in a distinct way, but again, not determining it fully.

Seidl argues that for Luhmann, in a decision-making situation all given alternatives must be equally valid, otherwise these would be no real alternatives because knowing already beforehand that deciding *this* or *that* way would produce *this* or *that* result turns deciding into a mere calculation based on facts that are already fully known. If deciding involves more than mere calculation, then at the heart of every decision there is the paradox of undecideability in the sense that only those questions that are in principle undecidable—because all alternatives are equally valid—are open for us to decide upon. Hence, to "prevent paralysis in an infinite regress, this paradox needs to be 'desparadoxized' by means of its deferral to another place where it is not noticed. In this way, this paradox becomes invisible; it remains unmarked, out of sight" (45-46).

Zinn sheds light on this issue of invisibility by differentiating first and second order observation, a key distinction in Luhmann's System Theory. Following Klaus Japp and Isabel Kuche (political scientist and sociologist specialized in System Theory) he writes that first-order observation is a mode of observation that:

> identifies facts or objects as given. Every observation uses a distinction and marks (names) one side of this distinction. For example, something is observed as a danger. That

> implies that there is some other state from which danger is distinguished, typically safety. But in this moment of observation, the distinction on which it is based remains invisible; only the side of danger is marked. It needs a second-order distinction in order to recognize the distinction behind an identified [marked] entity or state . . . Second-order observation [thus] undermines all assumptions about an objectively given reality. (*Social Theories* 214, 220)

Luhmann's proposition that decisions made in the present integrate their past and their future without presupposing this integration as either given by nature or creation will be made productive in the analysis of my case studies. Both the past (in how we access it) and the future (in how we conceive it and decide, *in* the present, on its behalf) are contingent, which is to say that the past does not fully determine the present—because memory itself oscillates—and the future does not fully colonize or take it over. Besides, decisions made by humans are every time new, because of our ever-transforming, never-the-same psychophysical fabric. Therefore, one decision (and risk) will never be exactly like another.

Because both pieces I examine in this book are fairly closed and determined in their final, overall form, though not equally determined in their methodologies towards achieving closure, for the dancers the future (the performance) is fairly known, even if always to a certain extent contingent. One can say that the way dancers decide in these pieces is rather limiting and so one can think that the 'closure' of the future, in turn, colonizes the present, in how dancers make decisions *in the present*. It is precisely this tension between what is contingently *known* from the past and what is contingently *known* of the future by each one individual dancer, in the

overall closure of the two pieces, that will allow me to shed light on how, within the context of the pieces, one can attribute risk to how dancers decide. It can also elucidate whether dancers in these pieces are able to make better decisions— as Brandstetter, Dell, and Ramshaw suggest in the literature review of Chapter 1— or not.

4.2.3 *Governmentality*

As a perspective on risk Governmentality is based on the writings of Foucault and employed by those who are interested in the ways risk operates in late modernity, especially in relation to neoliberalism[126]. It sheds light on the ways in which discourses, strategies, practices and institutions around risk bring risk into being. Lupton suggests that "it is only through these discourses, strategies, practices and institutions that one comes to know risk (*Risk and Socio-cultural Theory* 86) and this means that within the framework of Governmentality "risk is not a thing in itself. It is a calculative rationality" (87). Furthermore, she suggests that—contrary to Beck and Giddens who emphasize the role of expert knowledge as integral to the reflexive techniques and practices of subjectification of late modernity—expert knowledge for Foucault is not a means to engage in reflexivity. Rather it is pivotal to Governmentality, providing the guidelines and advice by means of which populations are 1) surveyed, 2) compared against existing norms, 3) trained to conform

126 Foucault described Governmentality as an approach to social regulation and control that began to emerge in the 16th century in Europe, associated with such social changes as the breakdown in the feudal system and the development of administrative states. By the 18th century, the early modern European states began to think of their citizens in terms of populations or societies, a social body requiring intervention, management and protection to maximize wealth, welfare and productivity (*Governmentality*).

to these norms and finally 4) rendered productive. Central to these techniques is the normalization (disciplining) of the individual by means of a network of instruments and techniques of power, such as mass surveillance, monitoring, observation and measurement. As such, one can understand risk as a governmental strategy of regulatory power by which populations and individuals are both monitored and managed through the goals of neoliberalism (88). However, a crucial aspect of Governmentality, as it is 'expressed' in neoliberal states, is that the state directs its regulation and disciplining of citizens at the autonomous, self-regulated individual. In other words, these autonomous and self-regulating individuals, rather than being policed by agents of the state, police themselves; they exercise power upon themselves as normalized subjects who are in pursuit of their own best interests and freedom. These individuals are interested in self-improvement, seeking happiness and healthiness (89).

Indeed, according to Foucault, Governmentality can be understood by two related technologies, namely, 'technologies of power' "which determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination, an objectifying of the subject" so to say, and 'technologies of the self' "which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and the way of being, so as to transform themselves" (*Technologies of the Self* 18). Foucault, moreover, emphasizes that an individual's practices of self are "nevertheless not something that the individual invents by himself. They are already existing patterns that he finds in his culture and which are proposed, suggested and imposed on him by his culture, his society and his social group" (*The Ethic of Care* 122). All these structures "determine the conduct of individuals"

(*Technologies of the Self* 17). At the same time, one cannot say that an individual is only a passive result of existing power relations who merely follows the models set by these structures. The subject can choose how to act and what choices to make among the models available in her environment. Hence, according to philosopher Colin Gordon, who draws on Foucault's technologies of the self, the individual becomes the "entrepreneur of himself or herself in terms of attempting to maximize her or his human capital" (cited in Burchell, Gordon and Miller 44).

Quoting sociologist Monica Greco, Lupton contends that, paradoxically, in late modern societies, *not* to engage in risk-avoiding behavior is "a failure of the self to take care of itself—a form of irrationality, or simply a lack of skillfulness" (*Risk* 92). Risk-avoiding behavior, therefore, is a "moral enterprise relating to issues of self-control, self-knowledge and self-improvement" (93). As a result, "the concept of risk has become more privatized and linked ever more closely to the concept of an entrepreneurial subject, calling into question the very notion of social rights" (101). Moreover, "the acceptance of personal responsibility emerges as a practice of freedom, relief from state intervention, and an opportunity for the entrepreneurial subject to make choices about the conduct of her or his life" (102).

Lupton suggests that one can criticize Foucault himself and those adhering to his perspectives on the regulation of subjects by means of the discourses of Governmentality for "devoting too much attention to these discourses and strategies of normalization and not enough to how [individuals] actually respond to them as part of their everyday lives" (*Risk and Socio-cultural Theory* 104-105).

I suggest that Foucault did not develop a theory of the self (or subject) because for him setting an *a priori* theory of the subject

implies an idea of a universal and timeless subject which attaches people to specific and fixed identities, a view of the subject which Foucault opposes in his writing. As sociologist Pat O'Malley proposes, Foucault emphasizes the contingent nature of the present rather than its existence as the effect of some teleology or unfolding topic, and exercises a resistance to explanation, especially in terms of interests or causation, and to grand theory (Pat O'Malley cited in Zinn 68, 215). This does not necessarily mean that Foucault does not recognize differences between people of different gender, ethnicity and so on. By suspending *a priori* judgment, he instead does two intimately related things: he challenges one's certainty regarding gender, ethnicity and so on and thereby asks one to think about how one comes to know or be certain of these. Doing this may not be easy, but it opens the door for unsettling established and taken-for granted ways of thinking not only of gender and ethnicity, but also, I would say, of dance improvisation.

Thus, following the logic of contingency inherent to Governmentality, perhaps not fully developed by Foucault, particularly in how he related to neoliberalism[127], if risk is not a fixed and stable 'thing', but rather a calculative rationality as suggested above, and if risk in dance improvisation is largely assigned to that which one does not know, then not knowing and the possible surprise arising from it can also be considered a calculative rationality. As such, methods used and problems invented *in* and *for* a piece are ways of thinking that are calculative as well, given that most pieces do have an agenda, implicit or explicit.

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127 For instance, as put forward by Jan Rehmann (see bibliography).

4.2.4 *Edgework*

So far, this chapter has showed risk predominantly as something negative, something one should avoid. Against this there is a more positive, embracing approach to risk-taking, one that takes the experience of risk-taking and the feeling of uncertainty aroused in the ones involved in it into account: Edgework.

Edgework as already mentioned was conceived by Stephen Lyng, who borrowed the term from gonzo journalist Hunter S. Thompson.[128] For Lyng, Edgework is best understood as an approach to the edge [limit or boundary], where one voluntarily tests the limits of [one's] body and mind (*A Social Psychological Analysis* 858). Even though the threat of serious injury and even death is present in many Edgework activities, such as certain circus acts, base jumping and mountain climbing, one can define edge as a concept in Edgework in different ways. For example, as the edge between consciousness and unconsciousness, sanity and insanity, rest and exhaustion, order and disorder, form and formlessness, self and environment and so on (857).

For Lyng, unlike rational choice theory, Edgework does not view actors [movers] as calculators of risks and rewards, but rather as symbolic beings transacting with the material relations of their

128 Thompson became known with his publications in 1967 about the lifestyle of the motorcycle gang *Hell's Angels*, with whom he spent a whole year, living and riding, experiencing their lifestyle and hearing their stories first-hand. Reporters in Gonzo journalism involve themselves in the action they report on to such a degree that they become central figures of their stories. One can find a few models of thrill seeking before the conception of *Edgework* in Psychology, including Jung (1924), Freud (1925), Kretchner (1936), Fenichel (1939), Balint (1959), Klausner (1968), Zucherman (1964), and Bernard (1968). For more details on these, refer to Lyng, Stephen. "A Social Psychological Analysis of Voluntary Risk Taking." *American Journal of Sociology* 95-4 (1990): 851-886.

physical and social environments (cited in Zinn 112-115). This means that one must include and/or reveal the broader socio-historical factors that compel and shape risk-taking behavior by an analysis of the work done in an Edgework activity. As such, and as theorized by Lyng, the Edgework model is based on the Marxian distinction between free and alienated labor and the pragmatist idea, following George Herbert Mead, of encouraging a "greater attention to the self and body as well as a way to connect these to mind and society" (idem 118). Both the Marxian and the Meadian perspectives share a common foundation in the dialectics between spontaneity and constraint. Edgework can thus be considered a synthesis of both (864-867), Marx emphasizing the realm of productive activity and constraint and Mead focusing on the interactional dimension (Miller and Lyng 1535), between what he calls the 'I' and the 'me'.[129]

Hence, for Lyng the total self is constituted by both a spontaneous and a constrained self, the character of each reflecting the type of life activity that produces it. So-called free and spontaneous action emerges only within a context of constraining structures (*A Social Psychological Analysis* 868). Moreover, Lyng suggests that Edgework practitioners seek a sense of self-determination in what one can call "the mystical, sublime or ineffable space of the edge, where one's individual skills, powers of concentration, capacities

129 Lyng further explains: The 'me' is a constrained dimension of the self (how others predispose the individual act in a prescribed manner). The 'me' is the voice of society that the individual carries within at all times. It is rooted in expectations acquired in past interactions between self and other and so the 'me' can never fully anticipate the novelty of the present moment. The 'I', on the other hand, exists only in the immediacy of the present moment. The 'I" has conscious awareness, but only in retrospect, after it has been integrated into the 'me' (*A Social Psychological Analysis* 867).

for control, and will to survive are the most [critical] determinants of one's continued existence" (cited in Zinn 124). Because one of the main purposes of the ones engaging with Edgework activities is to be able to repeat and indulge in the activity, over and over (to feel the thrill again), one prepares well and takes precautions. In other words: edgeworkers are willing "to lose themselves in disorder only in order to test whether there is an identity and security to which [they] can return" (Lingis in Skrimshire 35). Moreover, Lupton proposes that Edgework therefore involves "skillful practice combined with emotional intensity, but such intensity is more complex than simply inciting these emotions. Emotions such as fear, excitement and anxiety are all central but so is their control" (*Edgework,* unpaginated).

Indeed, in the volume Lyng edited in 2005, *The Sociology of Risk-Taking,* he outlines two ways in which Edgework can shed light on risk-taking in advanced capitalism, namely: as a radical form of escape from institutional constraints and routines; and, as a means of developing the skills to better function and integrate oneself into the very institutions that constrain us. This means that one can perceive risk in this perspective as going far beyond those arising from unanticipated consequences of technological advancement imposed on people by institutional structures they cannot control. It involves the risks that one voluntarily takes to come to terms with the institutional constraints that shape one's life. This is the increase in self-surveillance that Governmentality so clearly describes.

I do not claim that dance pieces such as the ones presented in this book constitute a typical example of an Edgework activity. Dance improvisation certainly does not count as an example of the high stakes involved in typical Edgework activities such as mountain climbing or base jumping, where, should things go wrong, the risk

of death or debilitating injury is much higher than in a highly-structured dance improvisation. However, how Edgework conceptualizes risk-taking as a form of voluntary boundary negotiation focusing on the skills necessary for the edge to be met, poked and even stretched are very productive for this book. Such thinking helps one be clear about what the edges in a piece are and about what one may need to know or do to poke or stretch *but not* transgress those edges. Moreover, in the case of transgression, Edgework can shed light on how a transgression may matter not only to an individual dancer but the whole work as well. Doing this allows one to come to a more differentiated idea of what may constitute risk-taking in dance improvisation, beyond the lingo associated with not knowing before-hand how one will decide. This sharpens the dimensions that emerged at the end of Chapter 1, especially constraint and control. In Chapters 1 and 2, constraint emerged as a necessary condition for freedom, which is in line with both the Governmentality and Edgework perspectives on risk. Control in turn emerged as a clear indication that knowing (having the skills) is what the most conditions engaging with the edge (the unknown), in the sense that in order to go after and meet the unknown, knowing what is needed in order to do so is crucial. How Edgework sheds light on this can thus help one better assess whether the constraints (conditions) in my case studies have been, with Manning, enabling or not, and whether one has exercised control in excess or lack.[130]

130 There are models within the adventure paradigm (Martin and Priest 1986), to which *Edgework* belongs, that one can use to assess the extent to which, in a risk-taking activity, challenge and competence (skill) come together. In this model, risk ends in 'disaster' when the stakes are very high while the one taking the risk has very little skill to engage in the given activity. Risk will end in a mere 'exploration' when the stakes are very low and the one taking the risk has all the skills

Applicable to this book is Lyng's proposition that Edgework is a paradoxical form of work, in which the work done is both a form of escape from institutional constraints and routines and a highly skilled way to better function and integrate oneself into the very institutions that constrain us—capacities often 'creatively' instrumentalized in advanced capitalism. If, as I suggest here, highly structured dance improvisation is a kind of Edgework activity, then dance improvisation as a form can simultaneously escape and conform to the norm. Borrowing from sociologist Riley Olstead, in and by means of improvisation one "resists imperatives of rationality, calculation, and reason" while in and with improvisation one "practices and improves the skills needed to negotiate the increasingly specialized and risk-conscious institutional environment of post-industrial society, where one possesses the skills to navigate the risks of everyday life whilst controlling the self" (88). This is a similar diagnosis to that just described at the end of the section on Governmentality, but what Edgework makes even more explicit than Governmentality is that if improvisation is an Edgework activity then it appears more as a 'lifestyle', even as a therapeutic form, than a form of artistic production. Clearly, a process of change must start somewhere. But is this the (sole) role of art today, to heal and survive being inside the box, inside the institutions of life? Is there no way out of the *Culture of Fear* (and of risk)?

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needed. When the risk is higher than the amount of skills, there is misadventure or failure. When the amount of skill is higher than the risk, there is adventure. Only when risk and skill match one can speak of a peak adventure. Peak adventure moments are very rare. The study of peak experience began in the 1950s with the work of psychologists Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow. Other terms for peak adventure are: optimal arousal (Ellis, 1973), state of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975), or razor's edge (Zuckerman, 1979).

4.3 Conclusion

1. Most authors discussed in this chapter perceive risk-taking as a negative force, that is, as a threat, hazard, or harm to the future.
2. One can conceptualize risk-taking in terms of three core ideas. First: in terms of rational decision theory, which favors so-called objective data and a formal process of analysis, from problem identification through to solution. Second: in terms of probability, measuring the likelihood that an event, positive or negative, will occur in the future. Third: as a worldview. Given the fact that in this book I consider knowing and not knowing, the known and the unknown as *not* absolute, *not* complete, and *not* perfect, any epistemology of or approach to risk, at its most radical, can only be seen as *ideal*. This approach to knowing suggests risk be a dynamic, highly individual, multifaceted process whereby one understands and experiences the world. This is consistent with what we have learnt above from Douglas, Luhmann, Foucault and Lyng, but Luhmann, Foucault and Lyng in addition accentuate the fact that risk is not only dynamic, but also omnipresent.
3. There are always several 'things' one knows, consciously or not, in the many ways one comes to know things, be it affectively, physically or emotionally, but also rationally. One of the things that this chapter has showed is that risk-taking itself is a form of knowing based on uncertainty (and in fact, what form of knowing is not?).

4. In advanced capitalism and its fast tempo, risk-taking has shifted from being a means to an end to being an end in itself. Instead of taking a specific risk, because there is something specific one can gain, risk-taking becomes general, diffuse; what one gains by taking a risk is the pressure to take more risk, risk leading to risk. One perceives the future itself as a risk and time as undermining the capacity for the future to be a reserve of hope. One becomes a 'patient' before one's time. Moreover, our capacity to shape our future, by means of the ability to choose, becomes in fact a limitation to one's freedom, because, in taking preventive measures concerning a future that may not even occur, one ends up not living in the *here and now*. One can thus say that, on the one hand, one is always out of time, lost in the never-ending circle produced by hedonism and, on the other hand, wanting to be and feel safe.
5. Risk-taking is a process, not a thing, like improvisation itself, choreography, knowing and not knowing. In the next chapter I will show how this is so in *Faust* (1993) and *Pororoca* (2009).

Chapter 5
The Question of How to be Together on Stage

In this chapter I will show how the theories introduced in the previous chapter, as well as the dimensions of risk identified in Chapter 1 (edge, enabling constraint, responsibility, decision-making, control, listening, trust, fear, and failure), enable us to understand risk-taking in dance improvisation in nuanced terms, moving beyond the rhetoric of the unknown. I will examine two pieces: O'Donnell's *Faust* (1993) and Rodrigues's *Pororoca* (2009).[131]

I will first present what I take to be a shared concern in *Faust* and *Pororoca*, namely the question of how to be together on stage (and in the world). I will then outline their respective ways of working, the contexts within which O'Donnell and Rodrigues created the pieces, and the questions O'Donnell and Rodrigues posed to the dancers (which strongly conditioned how they worked). Following that, I will make an analysis of what risk-taking entails in the two pieces, making use, as already mentioned, of the theories of risk introduced in Chapter 4 and the dimensions of risk identified in Chapter 1. Given how enmeshed these dimensions of risk are, I will approach them in clusters, one dimension spilling over to the next.

131 See Appendix section for their bios and list of works.

5.1 *How to be Together:* A Shared Concern

Beginning with the Introduction of this book, when I briefly presented choreographers Mary O'Donnell and Lia Rodrigues and their works, *Faust* and *Pororoca,* I have posited that both share the question of 'how to be together' on stage (and in the world), despite the obvious differences in their frames of reference and the gap in time between the making of these works. O'Donnell made *Faust* in the early 1990s, referring to an existing work of European literature written in another historical time, referencing also the philosophy of Jean François Lyotard, particularly his ideas about paganism, asking dancers to be simultaneously 'pagan' and to play themselves as characters performing in a *Responsible Anarchy.* Rodrigues made *Pororoca* in a Brazilian favela of today, referencing Brazilian culture in general and particularly anthropophagy. In *Pororoca*, moreover, she alludes to a natural phenomenon, asking the dancers to become 'other' by exhausting their bodies in a series of tightly woven, choreographed encounters.

For Rodrigues, how to be together in *Pororoca,* a dance for eleven dancers who share the space at all times and co-create a way of moving that is also shared by all, is a concern arising in part from the spatial situatedness of the work, namely, the being together of her company in the literal space of Maré. This brings up the question of how two different socio-cultural universes can come to co-exist: the high-art, bourgeois background of Rodrigues and some of the dancers with the precarious, disadvantaged context of the favela. The way of being in Maré installs itself as a way of living together that finds ground in the architecture of the place. However, it does not end there. In *Pororoca*, one can find this intense proximity between making the work and the quotidian life in the favela — by means of which inside and outside, private and public blur— in the

form of risks dancers must take for the overall form of the piece to hold. But this concern with the favela is only *indirectly* present in the piece. *Pororoca* for Rodrigues is primarily a research on and with the body of the dancers, its potential in their situatedness. Rodrigues herself explicitly says that her artwork includes the favela, but it is not *about* the favela (*On Pindorama* 10-11).

From the experience of both watching the work and having been to Maré, I can say that *Pororoca* poetically aestheticizes the 'look and feel' of the favela and its modes of being together while the concrete, conscious action of installing the company in it explicitly denounces the reigning exclusion and points to problems that are commonly overshadowed by the government and Brazilian society at large, especially by the well-off. Thus, even if these are not primary motives in her work, through her work with dance and its focus on the body and what it can do, Rodrigues is able to raise the awareness and intensify the implication of individuals, both those artists she collaborates with and the audiences who attend her performances, enabling these to rehearse their citizenship in ways they would normally not do. One can therefore say that Rodrigues not only creates dance but also the conditions for it. She herself says that the strength of art for her is "not so much to make something new and extraordinary but [rather to] engage in very ordinary things to create together conditions to exist" (*Scores* 23). Thus, the question of how to be together on stage (and in the world) for Rodrigues registers, in *Pororoca*, as the question of how to, in an almost entirely meticulously written choreography, maintain the original freshness and vulnerability occasioned not only by the psychophysically close encounters between dancers during the creation process, but also by their experience of making the work in the context of a Brazilian favela.

For O'Donnell, how to be together has been a concern for a very long time, and became intensified with her position as co-director at the EDDC (European Dance Development Center in Arnhem), which gave her the opportunity to work with large numbers of dancers. Eight years after O'Donnell made *Faust*, she was very aware of the problems of being together in *Faust* and was quite explicit about how she saw the role of the individual in the sort of group work she was interested in. She wrote:

> The main thrust of the enquiry has been to see if it is possible to transform our desire to be important, individual, and unique into a desire to be important, individual, and unique within a group. To do this means not compromise, but awareness (...) [but] we are still at work on this problem (...). Is it possible to work as a group with truly individual responsibility and without rules that tell you what to do? (*Release* 271-72)

At the heart of O'Donnell's work has always been the tension between the individual and the group. She has pursued this inexhaustibly, not in the sense of alleviating the tension or solving the problem of being together, but rather in bringing it to the fore. These concerns and the difficulty in solving the problem of the individual within the group 'without compromise' are dealt with in *Faust* through the dancers' engagement with 'Responsible Anarchy' (RA) and 'Holding-Forms' (HF). Let us therefore recall what O'Donnell meant by these terms and how they operated in the work beyond what I have already mentioned in the introduction of this book above.

O'Donnell's speculations on deterministic chaos (future events are fully determined by their initial conditions), J. F. Lyotard's thoughts on paganism (being pagan and just and their irreconcilability) as well as how Paul Feyerabend proposed anarchy in *Against Method*, namely as a genuine and viable form of organization, led O'Donnell to realize that "paradox [of anarchy and order] could provide [her] with a cloud of thinking which would interfere with the through-line of information in a [set] choreography" (*Release* 254). As a system operating between people, this cloud of thinking would provide a sort of "net of irresponsibility [anarchy] that could support, affect, or hold and contain form [responsibility]" (idem). Thus, the HF came about through the need to create a linear structure that traversed a journey through both open and closed forms, through improvisation and set choreography. RA became for her "a dual-stream subject within Open-Form Composition, wherein the Holding Form achieved responsibility and served to transport a consistent meaning of a piece of work, and anarchy provided individual significance and a field of experience that situated the work differently each time it was performed" (*History of Ideas* 11).

O'Donnell structured *Faust* in five parts danced by thirteen dancers who are all on stage most of the time. Fernando Pessoa's dramatic poem *Faust*, edited and translated into English by Jonathan Griffin (1982) inspired the piece. According to writer Richard Zenith, Pessoa's *Faust* is a "long and unfinished fragmentary play" on which Pessoa "worked throughout his adult life" (49). In the press release for the piece O'Donnell writes that Griffin's translation provided her with "the framework for the performance, which involves a city of thirteen individuals who create a field of experience based on the personas developed from the life and time of Pessoa [early twentieth century]" (n. pag.). The narrative line of the text serves

to frame life within this city inhabited by Faust, the Modernist, the Futurist, the Humanist, four Ophelias, Goethe, Christ, the Boy Dreamer and Maria.[132]

The combined use of HF and characters that, due to their engagement with RA are in a continual state of development, produces a result that is always recognizable, but also always somewhat different. This asks intense concentration and commitment of the dancers: in each scene and its HF one is simultaneously developing one's own character and negotiating interactions with the other characters, trying to allow the plurality of meaning and the potential arising therefrom to actualize. I will discuss this further below.

5.2. Risk-taking in Relation to the Spatiotemporal Context of the Works

To a large extent, O'Donnell could take artistic risks because she made *Faust* within an environment that allowed her great license—a big part of her work at that point involved students in an educational setup that encouraged educating outside the mainstream, and without pressure to provide the market with any particular 'dance objects' on demand. At that time in the Netherlands, risk-taking in the arts was still possible and to an extent even encouraged. Moreover, given the Dutch social contract, O'Donnell made *Faust* in a culture of overall economic plenty, even more than the 1960s in the USA as described by Banes.

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132 Faust's descent into Hell in O'Donnell's version begins with *The Mystery of the World*, a world of dreams and obscurity, proceeding to the *Horror of Knowing* where he meets both Goethe and Christ, arriving at the *Bankruptcy of Pleasure and Love*. The *Dread of Death* follows to culminate with two dialogues: the first with the *Old Man*, involving a magic remedy for life, and the second with Maria who represents perfect love.

Seen in this light, O'Donnell indeed took risks, but the stakes for her were perhaps not very high. There have been voices in the field that have argued that it is precisely because she was making work without financial distress that her work did not earn recognition within the so-called established, professional field, at least not at that stage in her career. She was certainly well known and enjoyed great recognition, but this came more from her outstanding educational endeavors over a long span of time than from her choreographic work proper. One could furthermore argue that by having had the good fortune of working within a risk-friendly environment she paradoxically ended up risking something that was perhaps more valuable, namely her recognition as choreographer.

Either way, this has not prevented her from making work nor from using the opportunity to experiment and push boundaries. Within EDDC's educational set up she could investigate RA, which to a large extent involved surrendering her authority and responsibility as choreographer. She believed in the potential for cohesiveness of the work— 'we are making this dance together'—but the work showed that such cohesiveness was difficult because it depended almost exclusively on what each dancer would be willing to contribute to the performance, rather than on a shared project. In other words, not all dancers perceived equally what the stakes of the work were. Partially this was because the choreographer consciously abstained from providing a rationale, or series of enabling constraints with and within which dancers could work, and this in turn was because figuring out what the work needed was precisely the problem that RA posed to each individual dancer.

The early 1990s, however, when O'Donnell worked on *Faust*, were beginning to show the negative signs of neoliberalism: market demands began to dictate the kind of work more clearly made and,

consequently, the kind of artist that institutions should produce or educate. In the case of the Dutch higher educational system, the context within which O'Donnell made her work, one can find this shift reflected in the report written by the Accreditation Committee for EDDC's first audit in 1990.[133] No surprise then that at around that time several European dance artists were critical of the structures that had secured the creation and maintenance of dance during the boom of contemporary dance in the 1980s. Their criticisms included the institutionalization of dance and its more proximal relation with the private sector, the standardization of contemporary dance education, the homogenization of the trained body and the development of a choreographic culture that was based on artistic signatures that, as such, were easily recognizable and consumable. Their criticism went beyond the dance companies themselves to include the whole politico-economic system attached to the spectacle industry.[134]

The context within which O'Donnell made *Faust* can thus be said to have been one of a double abundance: an economic one, because of not having to rely on selling the work or applying for grants in order to survive or make new work, and an aesthetic-political one, because neoliberal educational policies in the Netherlands had not yet been installed at that time, which enabled her to work

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133 For more information refer to *Report of the Visitation Committee Professional Dance Education in the Netherlands* 1991 and to *Eindrapport van de Evaluatiecommissie Dansopleidingen* from 1994.

134 Artists involved in this criticism included, among others, Boris Charmatz, Jérôme Bel, La Ribot, Christoph Wavelet. For more information on this, refer to the work of Isabelle Ginot and Marcelle Michel, *La Danse au XXe Siècle*, which Brazilian choreographer and scholar Dani Lima has referred to in relation to the work of Lia Rodrigues.

unencumbered.[135] In other words, for O'Donnell, in making *Faust*, risk-taking was not a constraint from without, a pressure to perform or conform to prescribed norms or rules, but rather the result of her own curiosity and fire for experimentation, which she kept burning on her own terms. *Pororoca*, in contrast, was made at the end of the first decade of the 2000s in Brazil, at a time when all of the features criticized above by artists in the early 1990s had not only already become established but also arguably exhausted, or better put, instrumentalized to perfection by a politics of precarity and the ensuing economic scarcity that became emblematic of advanced capitalism, especially in the performing arts. Even though Brazil had been a country whose economy, social and cultural policies were improving fast, at least until the parliamentary coup that ousted president Dilma Rousseff early in 2016, Brazil is now a country of overall economic scarcity, corruption and acute social inequalities, a country, moreover, where contemporary art does not play a crucial role in society at large. The fact that Rodrigues received structural funding[136] at the time she made *Pororoca* and that she continues to take extended amounts of time to create new work are very felicitous exceptions to the rule. One could thus argue that, beyond the fact that being financially supported in Brazil has never been a given, the most unusual aspect of Rodrigues' work when it comes to issues of risk-taking is the fact that she has decided to install her company in a favela. Many consider this dangerous, especially in

135 This occurred only in the 2000s with a climax arguably reached in 2012.

136 While making *Pororoca* Lia Rodrigues received funding from Petrobrás Cultural, through the Rouanet law.

a city like Rio de Janeiro, a city that is marked by extreme social and economic contrasts.[137]

This unusual proximity to the favela has without a doubt added to her already existing international recognition as an artist. This in turn has enabled her to continue her work in the favela. In other words: Rodrigues had a vision and took a risk, making a bet from the beginning on installing her company in Maré, and it paid off, for all involved. For Rodrigues, in making *Pororoca*, risk-taking was to a certain extent a constraint from without, but in a similar way to O'Donnell it was not a pressure to perform or conform to prescribed norms or rules, but rather the result of her own persistence on the concretization of her artistic vision, which crucially includes knowledge formation and dissemination. Even though O'Donnell made *Faust* within an educational context, the role an educational agenda has had on her work is different than that for Rodrigues and so I would like to note it here. While Rodrigues by means of her artistic work has been able to create conditions for dance education in the favela, O'Donnell has been able to enjoy the infrastructure of an existing educational situation to develop her art work. What was a given to O'Donnell was (and still is) something Rodrigues must work very hard for.

Hence, while Rodrigues made *Pororoca* in a context of relative economic scarcity, contrary to O'Donnell who mostly had the financial means to make the work in the way that she wanted it, this does not mean that the risks Rodrigues took were bigger risks than

137 Towards the World Cup in 2014 and the Olympic Games in the summer of 2016, the police and the military forces of Rio de Janeiro had been systematically 'pacifying' the favelas of Rio, including Maré. The methods used as well as who benefits from these are controversial to say the least.

O'Donnell's. This is because both deliberately chose to work within these contexts, school and favela, aware of their opportunities, challenges and traps. Money here is important, but it plays only a secondary role, for having more money does not automatically entail more safety nor more allowance for risk-taking. A more primary question is that of how each dealt with the question of being together in the making and performing of *Pororoca* and *Faust*. Therefore, my next approach to these works is through the dimension of boundary as understood by Douglas, who thought of risk as the crossing of a boundary between self and other, stability and instability, safety and danger, control and lack of control and so on. Because for Douglas boundaries are liminal, they can be dangerous, and so they must be 'policed.'

5.3 Risk-taking in Relation to Boundaries

At a macrocosmic level, since Rodrigues moved her company to Maré in 2003 and particularly with the making of *Pororoca*, boundaries between the 'periphery'—the favela and its culture—and the 'center'—the so-called context of contemporary art to which Rodrigues belongs—have not ceased to exist, but they have continually shifted. This has occurred through the work of art itself, which had its rehearsals mostly in the favela in Rio (where the Brazilian premiere of the work also occurred) as well as the pedagogical work done there, where aspiring dancers living in the favela started to have access to possibilities usually not ascribed to them, such as studying in a federal university. In addition, the large shed in which the company rehearses and where dance classes and seminars take place is much bigger than most other spaces in the favela. This extra space is not only physical, but also mental. The shed becomes

a space to think through and beyond the constant murmur and jammed proximity of the favela.[138]

Microcosmically, as a performance created via the meticulous writing of the choreographer, *Pororoca* demonstrates how one must strive to keep the integrity of the structural and formal boundaries of the piece and, from the perspective of the audience, for the potential or sense of risk to register. What intrigued me most watching the piece was that it was very hard to tell whether dancers were repeating known forms or whether they were improvising. As a result, due to the spatial intricacy and high speed of what looked like truncated and disconnected movements, I was at times left hanging, wondering what would happen next, or even when an accident would occur. In the performance I attended, no accidents happened, but the expectation on my part was high. One could say that risk was in the air. This is a perception shared by many to whom I spoke.

From the dancers' perspective[139], what is exciting in *Pororoca* is, on the one hand, the labor of keeping alive the memory of the challenging process of making the piece, that is, the intense exposure to one another and ongoing stretching of personal boundaries, and, on the other, the labor towards meeting the demand for control that the choreography requires, that is, stretching but not transgressing its structural and formal boundaries. Together, dancers must find the right flow, a way of performing that shows the work at its fragile but precise critical threshold. That is, neither below it, generating

138 For an image of the shed: <http://mapadecultura.rj.gov.br/headline/lia-rodrigues-dance-company#prettyPhoto[pp_gal]/2/>. Web. 18 Sept. 2017.

139 I attended rehearsals of *Pororoca* in Rio de Janeiro in 2013. Then I could speak to the dancers, some from the original cast and some new. I have in addition exchanged e-mails with some of them.

a performance that is too lame, lazy, automatic or domesticated; nor above it, generating a performance that, on the contrary, is too hectic, uncontrolled or mannered.

Because *Pororoca* has been performed over 200 times by casts that kept changing, maintaining the precarious balance required by the choreography steadily became a challenge. One example of this is the grimace on the face of the dancers accompanying the dancing. At the early stages, with the original cast, the grimace on the faces of the dancers was ambiguous, difficult to discern[140]. Through the process of performance and change of cast, the ambiguity of the grimace became a sort of mannerism that, when uncritically repeated, became predictable— not something Rodrigues wanted. What at first was only contingently present became a fixed and recognizable gesture. Thus, to stay on the balancing line without falling onto either side, doing too much or too little, was difficult. The risks in *Pororoca* had to be 'managed' well by the dancers. A condition for this to occur was that the dancers know of these risks: what they are, where and when they could happen. Not, however, to control them at the level of form, fixing them into specific meanings or shapes, but precisely the opposite: to make sure the forms would remain contingent, open, and vulnerable.

O'Donnell also wanted forms to remain open, but compared to *Pororoca Faust* provides a significantly different challenge regarding such openness. At a macrocosmic level, *Faust* did not directly intervene in its larger context because the choreography itself circulated primarily within a very particular educational setup and theater

140 Gathered from a discussion with Silvia Soter, an artist and scholar working since 2002 as Rodrigues' dramaturge, on the 7th and 8th of February 2013 via Skype.

scene, where most people involved shared the same values, in a context in which people shared a high tolerance for ambiguity and failure, especially the failure to perform according to expectations regarding conventions. Microcosmically, however, in terms of which boundaries are involved, it provides very interesting insights. One of the main problems (or questions) for *Faust* was precisely the lack of boundaries set in advance by the choreographer. O'Donnell deliberately intervened only marginally in the work, leaving the question concerning establishing boundaries almost entirely to the discretion of the dancers. The only known boundaries were some spatial and music cues that functioned as 'scheduled encounters'[141] as well as the Holding Forms (HF), which, as we saw in the Introduction, is how O'Donnell named her strategy for ensuring the dramaturgical forward movement of information within a piece. The dancers were in any case supposed to question these HFs every time anew, so much so that even when working within them accidents or surprises almost continually occurred.

The challenge in *Faust,* given the lack of a more elaborate framework provided in advance or calibrated along the way by the choreographer, is that it seemed impossible to assess whether the work was successful or not, because different dancers had very different experiences of it, depending on the performance, and this included the choreographer, as she herself performed in the work. Her insights were never from outside. If we compare this to *Pororoca*, the lack of clear boundaries in *Faust* meant there was no line against which the performers could push, or balance upon. Hence,

141 I borrow this term from Freya Vass-Rhee, who uses it to describe facets of how Forsythe has worked (23).

it was difficult for any one individual to assess whether the work was below or above its critical threshold point; whether it was lame, hectic or mannered.

Moreover, Rodrigues allowed her dancers a much longer period (over a year) to test their personal boundaries within the work. At the end of the rehearsal process, by the time Rodrigues made the decision to meticulously choreograph the piece, dancers had become aware of their own boundaries and those of others, having had the time to venture into several explorations of self and other, in proximity, losing thus the fear of exposure of self to others.[142] It was out of this extensive and intensive collective research process that rules and the way of being together particular to *Pororoca* emerged. These rules eventually enabled dancers performing *Pororoca* to tacitly know (or perceive) when something outside of what they had previously rehearsed occurred, and therefore to be more in control of the situation as well. This means acknowledging changes within the dance, however minimal, and smoothly moving on, returning to the 'pulse'[143] of the work, established by one of the dancers who, while dancing, softly and discreetly counts aloud the different movement phrases, helping to stabilize the larger sections of the piece. The audience does not notice this, but one can imagine that such

142 Rodrigues found inspiration in the work of Elias Canetti, particularly *Crowds and Power* (1962) and in the work of visual artist Arnout Mik, particularly *Communitas* (Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam 2010). Another Brazilian choreographer, Marcelo Evelin, in *Suddenly Everywhere Is Black with People* also refers to Canetti and his proposition that individualities dissolve under the potency of the crowd. Like Rodrigues, Evelin's work suggests that when bodies press against one another they learn how not to be afraid. One could argue, however, that rehearsing such proximity can become a problem when casts change.

143 The 'pulse' is one of the devices employed by Rodrigues to help create temporal cohesion in the group as well as overall unity at the structural and spatial levels.

a measure was necessary to ensure a minimum of safety for the dancers in the piece as well as for maintaining stability in terms of the duration of the piece, which oscillated greatly before Rodrigues— unwilling to leave things open and improvised— finally set it. This was because dancers, despite the long process of rehearsal, were still pushing the edges of their material.

Thus, known and agreed-upon rules in *Pororoca* finally enabled individual dancers to feel in control of the situation. The pulse and the attention paid to it by the dancers created a collective body, with a way of moving that was specific to *Pororoca* and shared by all. The pulse was much more than a mere counting from 1 to 8 or 1 to 18 or whatever other number. It was a pulse in gerund form, a pulsing; a rhythm one had to feel for the aspired cohesion within the group to arise. It was impossible to precisely repeat or represent it, which in turn kept the work in a state of open form, always recognizable with regard its handwriting and yet never the same.

Unlike Rodrigues, O'Donnell made *Faust* in only three weeks, saying from the first day of rehearsal that every rehearsal was already a performance. This reduced the more relaxed mode of a common rehearsal process, during which dancers usually exchange problems, pose questions, voice frustrations, needs and so on. Unlike *Pororoca*, O'Donnell did not structure *Faust* upon a shared rhythm, but through a non-linear and fragmented narrative. The thirteen characters in the piece did share a common space (the stage), and an overall duration (the music), but not a way of moving. Within these structural parameters each followed a distinct and idiosyncratic line of inquiry. Because the thirteen dancers/characters were always present and the stage had often a few different scenes played at the same time, the stage held many rhythms. It was fragmented.

Video still from the 'Mystery of the World' theme

As the dancers in *Faust* were very different in their temperament and skills, and in how they understood and related to their own boundaries and those of others, one can say that boundaries 'popped up' on stage. In the first public performance of *Faust*, the dancers were still finding and testing their own boundaries, and that of others. Depending on the dancer, boundaries were experienced and manifested in different ways: physically, conceptually or emotionally. For instance, in a scene in which some of the dancers were naked, moving across the space in abstract and geometric formations to a polyphonic but steady beat, for one of the dancers who played the role of Maria and was not naked and was moving via gestures that were rather referential and symbolic, it felt very risky to be in the presence of naked bodies on stage. This was due to her shy, reserved nature and cultural background. So much so that in rehearsal, when she first saw the naked bodies, she reflexively turned her head away, involuntarily. This quickly became part of her 'figure' in the scene and contributed to how she developed it further.

Video still from the 'Dread of Death' theme

Another dancer, playing the character of Christ, felt unhappily limited in the kind and range of improvisational play and movement she could engage with. One can infer from this creative discomfort that the three weeks allocated for the making of the piece did not allow enough time for experimentation. More rehearsal time would have had to be allocated for the piece to attain ongoing, reliable qualitative recognition, for its signature (threshold) qua work to establish itself. The positive side of this is that dancers had to ask what the *situation* at hand was, and not what they *individually* needed, every time anew. The negative side of this, as attested by some of the dancers with whom I corresponded, was that at times the complexity of action on stage was such that dancers were seldom able to get an overview of the whole situation. To an extent, dancers

ended up relying on personal feeling, which did not always enable the piece to move forward as the choreographer had intended; that is, with uncompromising awareness of the work, each individual dancer finding her importance within it.

O'Donnell probably put a demand on the dancers that was impossible to fulfill, given the arguable irreconcilability of the two terms constituting RA. Yet, while dancers failed to perform according to this demand—to be at the same time anarchic and responsible, to assess a situation without having a set of overarching criteria—the work itself did not, because this was precisely what the work required, that is, to show the conflict and the arguable impossibility of its appeasement. It is hard to imagine what would have happened had the dancers of *Faust* had more time to test their boundaries prior to sharing the work with the public. Would the work move more towards the choreographic, like in *Pororoca*, or would it lead even more towards the improvisational? Would dancers accomplish O'Donnell's vision of a RA?

Both pieces required dancers to engage with the known and the unknown, the choreographed and the improvised, but what each one of these terms points to is ultimately different for each piece. In *Faust*, dancers embraced the task to respect *and* challenge the HFs, while attempting to reproduce the overall structure of the work as proposed by O'Donnell without knowing exactly how. In *Pororoca*, by means of carefully composed movement sequences leaning on a pulse, Rodrigues asked the dancers to keep the work fresh, which entailed a revisiting of the known material every time, anew and from within; that is, without changing it at the structural level, keeping its overall form closed. The dancers thus exposed and stretched as well as strove to maintain the boundaries of what they did, which was very different in the two pieces.

Hence, to return to the question as to whether the goals and function of risk-taking have changed since the 1990s (in reference to Banes in Chapter 1) one can say that in *Faust* and *Pororoca* the dancers were looking for the extreme of body—by looking into what it can do in the collective and the kind of physicality it entails—as well as of imagination—by investigating how far one can go with giving 'wings' to one's images amidst the collective and how much one can allow these images to be actualized, embodied in concrete terms.

Taken together, the pieces can be illustrative of how risk-taking today, in advanced capitalism, appears to be, at the same time, a high demand and something one must avert. Each piece does this differently. While improvisation in *Faust* was a means to challenge authorial control in actual performance, from within, in *Pororoca* improvisation was a means to arrive at modes of control that enhance the potency of the group, also from within.

5.4 Risk-taking in Relation to Self-control and Responsibility

Mary Douglas identified two basic dimensions of sociality, grid and group, arguing that one could classify all cultures according to these two dimensions. Instead of opposing individualism and collectivism as two poles of the same dimension she conceives of two: one of individuation and one of social incorporation. Douglas theorized 'grid' as the set of agreed-upon rules that govern individuals in their interaction and 'group' as the amount of control over risk an individual can exert within a group. The grid-group relation can thus help one better understand how an individual's experience of risk impacts the way that risk is perceived overall within the group.

As we have already seen, O'Donnell believed that one could exist and work within a group without having to make compromises, to be one's full self and at the same time make others and the work look good. But what does she mean? Is she suggesting that in order not to conform to external norms one must critically rethink what individual freedom means, perhaps even surrender it, and tune in with the norms arising from within?

One example from within the piece, where a motionless *Faust* has the role of an HF, points in this direction. In this scene, Faust was closely surrounded by four other dancers[144], who, responding to the stringent sounds of metal and percussion, were often on the verge of losing control because of their frantic gesticulation while handling objects (a long wooden stick and a hat), and nearly hitting him. These four dancers could also verbally assault and insult. The psychophysical proximity between Faust, the HF, and the ones holding the form was often precarious, and for the dancer playing Faust it was physically dangerous, requiring a degree of discipline and control on the part of the dancers that was not always easy to attain.

For O'Donnell, it was crucial that Faust remained immobile, to communicate to the audience a degree of both human vulnerability and despair[145]. All other dancers involved in this scene could act anarchically—understood here as doing as they pleased— if they engaged with the HF in a just and responsible manner. In other words: dancers should both support and challenge the HF, to know what it dramaturgically required, but check and test it every time anew.

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144 The Boy Dreamer, the Humanist, the Futurist and the Modernist.

145 This is because O'Donnell conceived Faust as a "fully conscious figure of our times, aware of his suffering but unable to surmount it." (*Program notes*)

Arguably, by losing control and hitting Faust for real, in this scene dancers certainly challenged the HF, accentuating, for the audience, the image of vulnerability and helplessness envisaged by O'Donnell. However, hitting an immobile Faust also eliminated the tension between vulnerability as weakness and vulnerability as strength, as well as the potential for harm: *Will Faust be hit?* When hit without responding to the hitting, Faust indeed appears vulnerable, but not necessarily from a position of strength, because the potential for harm has actualized. Hence, as a calculative rationality and dramaturgical device, RA has aimed at the creation and exposure of certain patterns of sociality at their limits. Dancers should expose and poke at boundaries, but not transgress them. As such, one can theorize RA in a similar way to Governmentality, as a specific way to create and manage uncertainty as well as govern (read control) groups. RA allocates specific responsibilities to dancers that not only must be willing, but also creative, prudent and responsible for their own actions as well as that of others. In other words, RA, on the one hand, puts pressure on dancers to push boundaries, but, on the other, to voluntarily engage in self-regulation and control, especially when these pertain to the very same boundaries dancers must push.

In the absence of norms or codes of behavior shared by all, dancers must become autonomous in their own self-discipline and responsibility for self. This can entail a position of vulnerability or strength. If one thinks through the framework of Governmentality, this self-discipline and responsibility for self would be a strength. The example of this HF, especially when it fails to hold (when dancers transgress it by hitting Faust for real), indeed accentuates Faust's helplessness. What would have happened had Faust

Video still from the 'Horror of Knowing' theme

chosen to act differently, say, by either exiting from the circle of light, leaving the stage altogether, or by hitting back?

Faust's choice to remain immobile was not a mere obedience to the plan or calculation of the choreographer. It was a risk that he consciously chose to take. This risk can be affirmative of the group because, in embracing uncertainty (*Will I be hit or not?)* he is also free to engage with the group in a way that is both true to his own assessment of the situation while knowing that his way of being true cannot dictate to others what needs to be done in the collective. His way is only *his* way. This also applies to all other dancers and their characters. Without intervention from without, in the form of do's and don'ts, or an autonomous change of heart by the dancers involved, including Faust himself, being hit for real remained a possibility.

When actualized, it might well read as aesthetically interesting to the audience, causing a shock and asking one to think, but it

might also compromise the trust amongst the dancers, a trust that is fundamental for positive risk-taking in the group. Sharing the responsibility for the scene on equal footing without any intervention from without was difficult and perhaps even impossible in this scene, but it is precisely this impossibility that O'Donnell wanted dancers to rehearse. Without the rehearsal, one would too quickly legitimate what could fall under nihilism, either in the form of perpetuating the helplessness of Faust—*there is nothing he can do to change the situation*—or, on the contrary, legitimating the destructive potential of the other dancers—*I will change the situation no matter what*. *Faust* does not provide a solution to this problem, typical of a Governmentality type of rationality. The piece, however, clearly evidences the problem of such a rationality.

One can find another example of this in 'The Barber's Shop' scene between the Futurist and the Modernist. The HF for this scene was the square of light within which the dancers had to remain. How the two dancers were to use all other elements involved in the scene, including various objects such as shaving foam, handkerchiefs and other shaving devices, was not a decision made in advance. The dancer playing the Modernist, at a certain point in the run of the piece, wanted to try out firing a toy gun. He asked for permission and O'Donnell agreed. In a performance in Hannover he fired the gun three times, which not only 'scared' the dancer playing the Futurist, who did not expect it to happen, but also permanently damaged his hearing in one of his ears. After the performance, in a rare moment of intervention on her part, O'Donnell concluded that the scene no longer needed the use of the toy gun.

In retrospect, Carsten Wiedemann, the dancer that played the Futurist, says that firing the gun was a

> Lack of concentration and of listening, and that he would rather have had them concentrate on listening to each other than on only giving it [the scene] an intellectual frame or kick [by means of the rupture caused by the firing of the gun]. Firing the gun [got them] to thinking [in a way that] hinders more than allows for the cultivation of an awareness of the whole.

Like the scene in which Faust is immobile and sometimes hit, shooting the toy gun without properly listening to what was happening in the scene and to what it might ask of one did more than 'add spice' for the audience or for the one that fired the gun. It challenged the trust amongst the dancers, necessary for experimentation, and went arguably beyond challenging the HF. It overthrew it.

'Not knowing' or working within unknown territories was indeed an important issue in O'Donnell's work in general, not just in *Faust*. Performers felt often encouraged to do something that they had never done on stage before, that is, to enter the unknown, their own unknown. However, in *Faust* not only did each dancer enter their own personal unknown, each did it in a very distinctive way, and no one dancer had a full overview of this. This is to say that pushing a personal boundary may not be relevant at all in a work if not perceived as such by others taking part in the same work. In contrast to that, a personal boundary may suddenly or unexpectedly arise in the middle of a scene and thus most probably have a negative impact on the one experiencing the boundary and others involved in it. *Faust* shows how crucial communication between all involved, and consent, are for boundaries to be poked and, if appropriate, transgressed.

Crossing or stretching personal boundaries in working with an RA may indeed have been a necessary condition for RA as a concept to materialize on stage and consequently to instigate critical reflection, including for O'Donnell. But because these boundaries were not known in advance, it is difficult to assess how these individual boundary crossings affected the work. Besides, while these two scenes took place, other scenes at the periphery of the stage occurred, asking the audience to continually choose what to see. This again was an example of O'Donnell's reluctance to dictate or push fixed meanings, which was at the same time a belief she had in the audience's ability to assume responsibility for what it might see.

In both examples one can say, in accordance with Douglas, that the grid was weak because the dancers shared no overall agreed-upon rules or guidelines in their interaction, the dancers having to both invent and assess these, every time anew. The group was also

Video still from the Barbershop scene

weak, given the fact that individuals could not fully control how a particular risk might influence the group, due to the lack of knowledge regarding formal and personal boundaries of others, coupled with an inability to listen carefully, on the other hand. In both cases the group's cohesion and trust were compromised.

In attempting to get to the unknown in and with the group, it is perhaps more important to know what and where the boundaries are than to transgress them. Despite her intentions, O'Donnell did not manage to create the conditions for the dancers to co-exist on stage with uncompromising awareness. She rather raised the very question of such possibility, and this is the strength of the work.

Pororoca tells a different tale altogether. Boundaries and guidelines in and for the work are very clear, as are the skills necessary to maintain them. Like an Edgework activity, choreography in *Pororoca* functions both as an enabling constraint for improvisation and a framework for self-control, clearly informing the dancer where the edges are and what she needs to do in order not to transgress them. The intense process of rehearsal and of getting to know each other enhanced awareness and the ability to choose, even if ever so minimally.

The dancers in *Pororoca* could, by means of minute variations, find individual freedom in the tight cracks left open in the choreography, engaging in apparently improvised, complex and intricate fast movement sequences, often executed in the center of the stage in a relatively small area. The dancers sporadically appear as individuals, but they are very quickly swallowed back into the pull of the group. The compositional strategy of having dancers always seen as part of the group means that there are no frames or sharply delimited scenes as in *Faust*. The movement material ranges from small peripheral gestures such as pulling another dancer's hair or

Image of a performance of *Pororoca* by Sammi Landweer

playfully biting another's ankle to full-body ones, such as body lifts or turns.

According to Ana Paula Kamokasi, one of the dancers, during the rehearsal process (which involved extensive improvisational games and strategies, such as one dancer 'becoming' another dancer or an animal), dancers often injured themselves, as they needed time to get to know one another as persons as well as dancers and, most importantly, to figure out how to move together in often energetically fast, intense movements, and in proximity with others. The precise pulse given by the designated dancer is arguably not the most important factor in the overall durational and structural integrity of the piece, nor for the safety of the dancers. One can find these rather in the fact that the dancers had enough time together to improvise and, through this, allowed themselves to psychophysically affect as well as be affected by others. As dancer Lidia Lar-

anjeira explains, “It is essential that one makes oneself available to get and stay in physical touch.” This is to say that through a long and sustained process of improvisation and consent, including the consent to disagree, they have cultivated more fully dimensional ideas of self and other, and so it was easier for them to exercise self-control, including the surrendering of it, and to adjust to previously agreed-upon rules.

Thus, in *Pororoca* grid was strong because the dancers intimately shared a sense of agreed-upon rules and guidelines in their interactions, having extensively probed these in the rehearsal process. Group was also strong, given the fact that individuals were able, to a large extent, to control how a risk could influence the group, given the knowledge of formal and personal boundaries and therefore also the ability to carefully listen both to one another and to what the moment required. In *Pororoca,* the group’s cohesion and trust grew, which is to say that the conditions were more propitious for dancers to co-exist on stage with uncompromising awareness.

If large-group dances that employ highly structured improvisation are a kind of edgework activity, an idea that I here tentatively probe, then dance improvisation as a form can be simultaneously escape from and conform to the norm. How much escape or conforming is encouraged or endured depends on what the work requires, but it also depends on the dancers’ ability to discern what the work needs and encourages, as well as how to exercise self-control within the work. In *Faust,* judging by the examples above, some dancers failed at this kind of self-control, while in *Pororoca* they arguably mastered it. While the occasional lack of self-control in *Faust* suggests the need for borders and possibly more detailed guidelines, including the need for more care for the other, the ‘being in control’ in *Pororoca* suggests that when one understands the borders and

sticks to the guidelines (care for the other), one can bring down psychophysical borders, if ever so fleetingly. Either way, meeting the other is a challenging adventure in both pieces, but arguably more difficult in *Faust* since the 'group' was weak, while every individual was, nevertheless, called upon to take responsibility for the whole. An impossible demand.

5.5 Risk-taking in Relation to Failure, Listening and Trust

Philosopher of mind Marc Slors in a 2013 TEDx talk[146] suggests that when we trust we are not consciously thinking about what could go wrong and that what we gain by not consciously thinking about what could go wrong is that we are provided with a kind of flow, one which leaves space for thought about the things that are relevant to that moment in time. This is the kind of state edgeworkers practice to achieve when preparing to climb a high mountain or perform in a complex group dance such as *Pororoca*. Moreover, in agreement with what we have learnt in Chapter 1, Slors suggests that conscious thinking takes a lot of energy (neuronal computation) and so we should be selective about what we want or need to consciously think about. For him, trust is that which allows one to be economical with how one uses the brain, with how one chooses. Moreover, in activities that are complex, such as *Faust* and *Pororoca*, trust becomes an enabling condition in that it reduces the uncertainty inherent to the complexity in the work, simplifying it. Therefore, we need to cultivate trust rather than just be vigilant and exercise control of

146 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=53cIQTvJlxE>. Web. 11 Aug. 2015. The text here is the synthesis of a transcription from the lecture on video.

self and others— even though when we trust we also make ourselves vulnerable to deception, betrayal or disappointment, failing to see how 'things are'. As such, trust is also a risk.

We know that in performances by humans, live on stage, risk generally refers to the idea that something will not unfold as expected, an accident. This can have a negative impact when it leads to an exposure to dangers that can hurt the dancer or compromise the work in an irrevocable way. Here, however, I am probing risk for its more positive character. In the context of a closely written piece such as *Pororoca,* or any other choreography that is so minutely woven and intricate, this is to be found in the fact that, despite its being meticulously written and rehearsed, every movement is enacted every time anew, always depending on the skills, character and personality of each dancer. This in turn requires that there is an acutely alert connection between the dancers at each moment. Because what was previously written can change, even if minimally, movements need to be constantly recalibrated in such a way that it includes, but moves beyond, the individual dancer. This is because the dance as a totality operates across *all* bodies involved. It is precisely *this* that is the gain of risk-taking. The relations that emerge during the dance always exceed what any individual dancer can do, even in the problematic examples from *Faust* described above, when certain actions might have unexpectedly steered the attention given to a scene too strongly in one direction.

Besides, this listening to oneself, in relation to a specific action within the group (and the audience) also implies that something new, a new connection perhaps, however minute, might make itself present. This is for most dancers very exciting and the chance one could 'miss' it is much higher if one is too self-confident and so thinks that just because one has been 'drilled' into what the piece

requires things will unfold exactly as planned. Not noticing changes might lead to injury and in extreme cases also spoil the form. This applies to any piece of choreography that is complex in its writing, not only *Pororoca*.

Many dancers attest that risk-taking is not so much manifested as an action but rather as the mode or attitude one aims for in performance, where the artist finds herself absorbed by the work, throwing herself into something she cannot fully control, regardless of how well prepared. This requires trust in oneself and others, which one must back up with rigorous technical know-how. It is this balance between social, emotional and technical knowledge, between what one knows and what one cannot fully foresee, that performers look for, whether in a fully set choreography or in a structured improvisation. How one can achieve this balance between trust and technical skill (control) is what matters, and this depends on the particularities of the work: what it proposes, demands, allows.

During the rehearsals and performances of *Faust* the dancers made various attempts to create and sustain relations of co-presence through which dialogue between all involved would build dynamic conceptions of self and other. However, one could argue that O'Donnell's insightful artistic experiment to ensure that the cohesion of the work would emerge from within, rather than forced into existence from without, laid too strong a focus on only one side of the equation, namely anarchy. O'Donnell's theoretically sound refusal to accept full authorial responsibility as choreographer for the piece, coupled with her insistence on maintaining the guidelines she herself proposed, indicate potential for problems. The dancers were left alone in defining their own 'appropriate guidelines' by means of which their individual actions would be prioritized.

O'Donnell, not wanting to interfere, also did not assume the role of the referee or mediator, the one being both inside and outside the play. This position, or rather the lack of it, was crucial. Therefore, RA as a concept has arguably failed in its practice (in *this* one piece).

However, if one understands failure as a sign of the creativity involved in improvisation, as expressed by Gagel (as cited in Chapter 1) when he posits that two of the competences one must possess to improvise are acceptance of failure and the ability to anticipate it (54-56), then the exposure to failure one is confronted with in improvisation is not really a risk in the sense risk is commonly understood, that is, as implying a loss, but rather as a gain. Does this mean that the dancers and O'Donnell herself in *Faust* have consciously 'worked' on failing?

O'Donnell never explicitly asked dancers in *Faust* to fail to perform, but the difficulty of the demand put on them—to be simultaneously responsible and anarchic, just and pagan—was such that one could say that some of the dancers were too consciously aware of their actual failing to perform. Going back to Slors' perspective, one could say that this excess of self-consciousness prevented dancers from trusting their ability to perform the task. The dancer struggling to play the role of Christ is one example; other examples are the use of the toy gun in the Barber's scene and scene in which Faust is hit, although this likely occurred due to overconfidence on the part of the dancers performing the task of flailing around him.

O'Donnell did not pretend to fully know in advance what the improvisatory agency built in RA would generate. However, she knew that were she to take a step forward in her own work and offer the dancers an opportunity to challenge themselves in ways other than the physical (confirmed by many of the dancers) she would need to stick to her guidelines. Had she let go of them there would

have been no risk-taking at hand, certainly not for her. If there had been no rules or constraints either, such as RA and the HFs, which O'Donnell thought of as enabling, the potential for failure would have also been absent because if there is nothing to lose there is no risk-taking either. If one cannot dissociate risk-taking from failure and if accepting and foreseeing failure turns failure into a success, then O'Donnell has failed well. She succeeded in her artistic endeavor. She maintained her commitment to experimentation and probed what it meant to hold a form anarchically. Thus, for her, RA and the HF did not fail in practice (in the negative sense of failing). She was not afraid to fail. Fear of failing would have meant a distraction away from her vision. This would, without a doubt, apply to Rodrigues as well, certainly in how she approaches her work in the favela.

For failure to be a gain, an added value, failure must be embraced and not embellished or used as a term of judgment. If the risk of improvisation in dance indeed harbors the imminence of failure, failure as the loss of something that matters not only to the individual, but also to the work and its proposal, risk needs to be enveloped by trust, the trust of knowing that to fail not only is 'allowed', but that it is essential for a reassessment of one's own knowing. Only then will one be able to risk the letting go of self-control, to lose the fear of disorientation or proximity, to give in to a foreign situation, to become another, even if for just a very brief, short-lived moment. Seen in this light, risk-taking becomes a highly skilled exercise in trust. Trust in oneself and others is thus a necessary condition for one to venture into the unknown and perhaps be granted the gift of surprise, whatever this may mean to any individual.

Image of *Pororoca* by Sammi Landweer

It is important that the way in which bodies come together in *Faust* and *Pororoca* does not represent or prescribe any one idea or image of what a group should be. It rather makes visible the processes in which these bodies engage in in the moment they engage. If in *Faust* trust in oneself and the other was a necessary condition for one to tap into the unknown and perhaps allow for the possibility of failure in the live act of performance, including the failure of trusting, in *Pororoca* trust also becomes the condition that enables a thinking of the group in which the freedom of an individual's creative act does not have to be dissociated from a sense of individual responsibility or obligation towards another—which in *Faust* was a less straight-forward affair.

Carefully listening to one another and to what is there *in the moment*, discerning what is relevant to it and trusting that oneself and others can handle the situation to support the work (and not just

the moment) involves decision-making at the level of the individual and beyond. How this is so in *Faust* and *Pororoca* and what else it can contribute to our understanding of the nature of risk-taking in dance improvisation is what I now turn to.

5.6 Risk-taking in Relation to Decision-Making

In Chapter 4 we learned from Luhmann that there are no guaranteed risk-free decisions, because a decision for him, entailing a future about which we do not know much, always entails a risk. In fact, to decide and to risk for him are the same. Therefore, if one agrees with Luhmann, one should abandon the hope that more knowledge will permit a shift from less risk to more security. The position that I take in this book, as I unfolded in Chapter 4, is that the way in which Luhmann seems to disqualify knowledge does not hold in every situation. One cannot deny that when we engage with the future there is always a leap of faith involved. However, the fact that it is impossible to lead a risk-free life does not mean that risk cannot be diminished by knowledge. Translated into the language of choreography and improvisation, specifically in their usual binary opposition, this means that the knowing more in advance often attached to choreography does not mean that in improvisation there will be more risk than in choreography. It only says that the knowing more of choreography—more planning ahead, more deliberate thought—might more easily shed light on what is at stake in a work, in the sense of informing one about what could go wrong should one not follow or spoil the plan. This is what the examples above point to.

Luhmann also posited that because of the temporality of risk (how can one conceive of alternatives in a future about which one can know so little?) decisions are always new. Neither the past nor

the future are 'fixed' or fully known. Translated into the binary of choreography-improvisation this means that regardless of the context within which one makes decisions—a set choreography, a structured improvisation or even a so-called free improvisation—there will always be a risk involved, as no decision, and so no risk either, will be ever the same. This is because decisions already taken, for example, in a set choreography or decisions yet-to-be-taken in a structured improvisation will always oscillate in the moment they are taken, because the past and the future are always contingent; they oscillate in our perception (construction) of them. It does not, however, directly follow that every individual decision will have the potency to affect the work in its overall form. Some decisions may 'disappear' or pale out under other decisions that prove to be more potent, for better or worse.

In *Faust*, O'Donnell believed in the capacity of the group to decide what was best for the work, to increase its potency (potentia), but we have seen that the conditions were not ripe for this to happen. In relation to some of the HFs, RA did not satisfactorily function as an enabling constraint. It did not increase the group's potency. It rather exposed the inner mechanisms of what one could perhaps call a struggle for power (potestas), resembling again the workings of Governmentality.

Putting to work the differentiation made in Chapter 4 between prediction (a general orientation towards the future), expectation (referring to a representation of what one predicts) and anticipation (the state of anticipation and the process that produces this state) will help us better understand how contingency operates differently in *Pororoca* and *Faust,* as well as the tension between potency and power. Let us start by shedding further light on the initial conditions created for each work.

O'Donnell alone, prior to the rehearsal process of *Faust*, made decisions regarding the overall concept of the piece, the HFs as well as which dancer would play which character. She was very well prepared, having thoroughly researched Pessoa's *Faust* and thought through the overall structure of the piece. She also knew what she wanted—partly predicting the direction the work could go and partly expecting certain images to occur, as for example the scene 'Dread of Death' with the naked bodies and Maria, the dressed dancer—but she was open. The dancers had agency in developing almost entirely the movement materials and, importantly, in how to relate to the HFs assigned by her. The dancers employed different compositional exercises focusing on how to create material, especially on how to work in couples or groups.

For example, the 'Madness Solos' in *Faust* were created in couples, one dancer moving and the other speaking, through an associative list of words that the person moving would respond to spontaneously. Afterwards, dancers quickly set short choreographies drawn from the pool of material arising. The dancers in this scene were involved in a mixture of both expectation, prediction and anticipation in that even though they had developed ideas (images) of what these soli should be or look like, the circumstances in which these soli took place (the particular scene) and their anarchic relation to the HF prevented them from holding on too tightly to the representations they had, asking them to remain open to the situation at hand which in turn generated a strong but precarious feeling of anticipation and even thrill: *how will it turn out*?

Rodrigues, on the other hand, does not really have a way of working, except perhaps for the duration of her creation processes, which tend to be long. Silvia Soter explains how the company works:

> For Lia, each creation is a lake or pond. First, everyone involved throws many fish into this lake. Over the period of a few months, the fish thrown into the lake are 'fed' with various readings, ideas, ongoing conversation, improvisations, and discussions. At a certain point, Lia starts to fish [still in dialogue with all others involved] and only some of the fish will become part of the finished piece. All others will remain in the pond, available perhaps during the process of another creation.[147] (*Um Pé* 138, my translation)

Pororoca and its specific proposal of finding a body that would communicate the togetherness of the group and, less directly, the togetherness of the group and the favela, led the company to become more interested in concrete action, that is, activities more like pulling someone's hair than abstract movement involved with executing lines in space or abstracted from particular meanings following specific norms qua form. Throughout the process of *Pororoca*, individual decisions were being made and recalibrated based on tacit agreements between the dancers, in what Calixto Neto described as a "conversation without words within the work," an idiom that, at the end of the process, when it was minutely written by Rodrigues, was finally shared by all, which means that in a performance dancers could notice when something foreign to this idiom emerged and could thus quickly accommodate. The dancers here

147 How Rodrigues thinks of the 'pond' is akin to the RSVP cycle (Anna Halprin), where authorship is, in some way, shared by the collective while working with different ideas and resources to get to the point of performance itself. Fish and lake would be resources, the food for the fish the scores and the fishing itself value actions. See also Garcez, Rodrigo. "Antropofagia Nômade e Etica no Processo Criativo em Lia Rodrigues."

were also predicting, expecting and anticipating, but, because they had been able to develop fuller and more precise representations of what Rodrigues and the work expected of them, their feeling of anticipation of how things would unfold was perhaps less anxious than the dancers in *Faust*, due to the more limited amount of space for change within the structure of the piece. This intricacy in the construction of movement sections forced them to focus on the moment, for which they had enough time to practice, figuring it out and developing the necessary skills to do so (including trust in oneself and others, as already discussed).

In *Faust*, the future was for some of the dancers perhaps too open, and so for these dancers there were too many options available. The dancers in *Faust* were less able to focus their thinking and reduce the complexity of some of the scenes. This influenced their decisions because O'Donnell did not invest time to exercise trust. At the other end of the spectrum, in scenes in which the HFs were less subtle, such as the one constituted by the figures of Faust, Goethe and Christ, the dancers had perhaps too much time to deliberate, exercising a way of thinking that was too self-conscious. Hence, too many options can produce either paralysis or a rush into too quick a decision. In the lack of practice, this might result either in a rupture, as something one had not predicted, or, on the contrary, in sheer and mindless reproduction of habit, a reproduction of the same.

Rodrigues grants full autonomy to the dancers enabling them to work from within their own desires. By the time Rodrigues sets the piece, the work starts to become a work of desire from all involved. This was the proposal of O'Donnell in *Faust* as well, but was not what the process produced. The extremely short amount of time for rehearsals and the lack of clear, straightforward shared guidelines made it impossible for dancers to arrive at such a sense

of communal sharing; they did not share a narrative of what they together wanted to create, they did not even share a narrative of difficulty. Does this mean then that they could not decide as well as the dancers in *Pororoca*?

No, not necessarily. Each choreographer had deliberately decided to employ a different methodology to deal with the issue of being together, partly because they had different aesthetic values and concerns and, more importantly, because each focused on two contrasting possibilities regarding the coming together in and with difference on stage (and in the world).

O'Donnell's approach to improvisation under the guidelines of OFC and RA, demanding a non-compromising shared responsibility for oneself and others, raised awareness amongst the dancers of how difficult it is for a collective to come together without guidelines from without. It also illustrated the need to continue to rehearse this apparent impossibility, because an awareness of it does not necessarily mean having to make compromises in terms of one not 'being oneself', but rather in the sense of what could be gained by letting go of ingrained ideas of self. *Faust* also showed that the less one knows, the more one is dependent on others to make decisions.

Rodrigues, on the other hand, by means of her long process of collective improvisation, leading to a meticulously set choreography, showed that coming together is possible, but it takes a kind of work that unleashes the dancers' energy while simultaneously taming it. One should not understand this taming in its negative connotation, i.e., as a force from without that diminishes the potency of the self. On the contrary, the process was of continuously assessing what the group needed, which was the condition that has enabled dancers to choose otherwise, that is, to ask what is in it for *us* and not for *me*, and as such, contribute to the potency of the group.

5.7 Conclusion

The analysis of *Faust* and *Pororoca* showed that improvisation and choreography as well as knowing and not knowing are not in opposition to one another but rather in a dynamic, differential relation of contrast. 'Not knowing' in large-group dances therefore does not necessarily entail risk-taking that matters to the work. Risk-taking, as I discuss it here, is like improvisation, choreography, knowing, and not knowing, not a 'thing' that can be fixed, objectified or made general, but rather a dynamic, highly singular, multifaceted process whereby one understands and experiences the world in singular spatiotemporal contexts. Therefore, one can understand risk-taking itself and the dimensions through which it manifests as a form of knowing that is *both* constructivist *and* realist. Risk-taking is a quasi-object (Beck via Latour) involving a myriad of dimensions that themselves are hybrid, dynamic and multifaceted, identifiable only in their making, which is always singular and situated. This examination has allowed me to investigate an answer to the main question of this book: what is the nature of risk-taking in dance improvisation?

More specifically: in Chapter 1, we learned that one should not generalize or overrate risk-taking in dance and particularly the improvisatory therein. Individual dances require individual and situated analysis, and improvisation involves negotiation (Dell) and so does risk-taking. As Ramshaw says, one cannot reduce improvisation to pattern repetition (knowing) or to 'making things up' (not knowing). Equally, one cannot reduce risk-taking to forms of knowing (or not knowing) that are absolute.

In Chapter 2 we learnt that, despite colloquial parlance, improvisation and choreography, and knowing and not knowing, are

not in opposition, but rather in a dynamic and differential relation of contrast.

In Chapter 3, based on a critical analysis of the notion of spontaneity, improvisation emerged as an art practice that, performed with and for an audience, can bring to the surface what usually remains submerged within the tight grip of habit. Improvisation becomes thus, arguably, a practice of becoming more conscious, of turning the familiar unfamiliar and the known unknown, or perhaps better, known or unknown anew. Put in slightly different terms, improvisation can be a practice through which one can let go of habit. It is also a practice founded on habit, for without habit there would be no habit to let go of. Improvisation also emerges as a practice of combination and juxtaposition, through which new (or not yet consciously discovered) movements, insights, or experiences *may* arise. One could then perhaps infer from this that freedom arising from improvisatory agency is not a given.

In Chapter 4, we learned that risk-taking is generally thought of as a negative force, threat, hazard, or harm lurking in the future. In looking for ways to avoid potential harm, most of us look for strategies to prevent the failure associated with risk from happening. We also found that in advanced capitalism we are pushed into having a paradoxical attitude to risk-taking: on the one hand, one needs to take risks because institutions no longer provide certain forms of security, and, on the other, the constant imminence of danger ahead, says mass media, pushes one towards looking for safety. Risk thus leads to more risk and in taking preventive measures concerning a future that may not even occur, one does not live in the here and now.

All the above have thus led us to an understanding of risk-taking in which risk is a multifaceted and distributed process whereby one

comes to know and experience the world in distinct spatiotemporal contexts. Consequently, risk itself is a way of knowing whose function changes over time and space, a knowing that can be affective, rational, physical, bodily, emotional, imagined, real and so on.

To reflect on what the function of risk-taking in dance improvisation beyond dance may today entail, compared to how Banes has above described it in the 1960s and 1990s, in the Epilogue I will reflect on the problem of being together in the world (of advanced capitalism) and what we can possibly learn about this from these two dances.

Epilogue
The Question of How to be Together in the World

> We are here as a part of a process of unfolding ourselves in a universe that is not always supportive. How do you stand in a storm? What makes human beings get through life's joys without becoming dependent on joy to survive, and to get through life's sorrows without giving up hope? (O'Donnell, *Release* 217)

> How can we critically look at the ways in which we live together? Is it by bringing bodies to a point of near fusion? Is it by affirming their limits and singularities? Which rituals, pacts, and sacrifices do we need to form a collective body, even if fugitively? (Lia Rodrigues, publicity for performance of *Pindorama*)[148]

I will now tentatively argue that for dance improvisation to attain a status as an art practice that is affirmative and critical (discerning, non-naïve), its practitioners must rehearse resisting some of its most celebrated attributes, such as spontaneity, freedom, flexibility,

148 Published on the website of *Culturgest*, Lisbon, my translation. *Pindorama* is the third of a trilogy of pieces of which *Pororoca* is the first. Web. 3 Mar. 2016. <http://www.culturgest.pt/arquivo/2014/05/pindorama.html>.

autonomy, and immediacy, focusing rather on something that is often ascribed to choreography, namely planning. I believe that in advanced capitalism the very same attributes celebrated in improvisation arguably fuel a flow of production that does not strengthen the position of the artist and her work.

Artists' precarity[149] is not a new or exclusive-to-dance-improvisation phenomenon, but as we saw earlier in the Introduction, this precariousness has undoubtedly become pervasive in unprecedented ways. Arguably never before has art in general and improvisatory agency in particular been in such proximity to the logic of market. With the rise of immaterial labor, capacities such as imagination and creativity have become primary sources of economic value—mostly, however, not for artists themselves. Verwoert goes as far as to say that "in a high-performance culture we [the artists] are the avant-garde but also the job-slaves" (14). Dancers perhaps, more so than choreographers, may not generally be recognized as avant-garde, but they could be considered good slaves or as what Foster has called 'hired bodies', given the way they are often found at or put to work. For Foster the 'hired body' "fuses together multiple techniques into a single economy of movement that services the expectations for spectacle and virtuosity" (*We need to work*). Their ability to do so has, to an extent, to do with the fact that dancers are usually obedient and disciplined, knowing how to take care of their bodies, not only to cater to the needs of the project at hand,

149 I here use precarity as political theorist Isabell Lorey articulates it in her book *State of Insecurity: Government of the Precarious,* particularly how she defines governmental precarization, as "not only destabilization through employment, but also destabilization of the conduct of life and thus of bodies and modes of subjectivation" (13).

but importantly so that they can cultivate a dance practice in the long term. Dancers, in following their calling, are thus able to work hard under situations that are psychophysically strenuous, often doing it for no or little money.[150] In short: dancers are extremely flexible subjects and today must be able to do many things and one of these is to improvise.

As we have seen in the Introduction, Laver helps us further unveil how similar the improvisatory 'attributes' the dancer must possess are to those employed, for instance, in discourses around entrepreneurship, innovative business or consultancy. For him, the creativity involved in innovative business requires autonomy, passion, risk, innovation, and full-bodied listening. Many other domains employ knowledge that comes from improvisation in the performing arts. In the case of dance, this knowledge includes a vast body of somatic work such as the Alexander Technique, Release Techniques, Yoga et cetera. This shows how excellent the knowledge base that performing artists develop is. The issue I see with this, however, is that a domain such as innovative business consultancy employs this body of knowledge, and improvisation especially, for fundamentally different purposes than dancers do, namely for enhancing efficiency and profit within a project or organization. Dancers themselves

150 In a similar way, sociologists Vassilis Tsianos and Dimitris Papadopoulos talk about the symptoms through which artistic subjectivity is currently felt, namely in terms of "vulnerability (the feeling of flexibility without any kind of form of security), hyperactivity (the imperative to keep up with constant accessibility), simultaneity (the ability to keep up the various rhythms and speeds of various simultaneous activities), recombination (transgressing between different networks/social spaces), post-sexuality and fluent intimacy (the bodily production of indeterminate sexual relations), anxiousness (connected to communication and interaction overload), cunningness (the ability to employ opportunism and tricks) and affective exhaustion (emotional exploitation)." (Cited in Kunst 142-143)

employ this knowledge mainly to maintain the minimum conditions for the exercise of a calling that, as profession, is extremely uncertain and for many also short-lived. They do not do it primarily for economic profit. This is the reason I think that illuminating the position of the choreographic as always already embedded and active within the improvisatory is so important. Not to erase or expand the choreographic *ad infinitum*, but rather to become more articulate and nuanced about what it does and how it does it, especially when improvising. Therefore, if dance improvisation is to be more than just a means to an uncertain and short-lived end, a makeshift, if it is to become a means through which one could *rehearse* countering the logic of the market (innovation) in advanced capitalism, one needs to think of it differently. I propose that one thinks of it as a form of rationality that, counter-intuitively perhaps, involves planning, which Moten and Harney call *fugitive* and Lepecki *choreopolitical.*

Even though these terms find their ground in different discursive contexts, both posit planning as involving a kind of imagining ahead, a leap of thought, in the present, that constructs, without commanding, prescribing or fully determining an affirmative and non-naïve image of the future. Given how risk-taking and hope are enmeshed, but not necessarily frozen, in ideas and images of the future, planning in the context of this book becomes a tentative but affirmative, discerning and non-naïve image of risk-taking and hope *in* the present as well. I think the questions posed in the two quotations at the beginning of this Epilogue clearly point to these. Hence, in what follows I will attempt to elucidate the potential of planning (*fugitive or choreopolitical*) in the quest of empowering dance improvisation. I will do this by first further elaborating on how Lepecki, who draws on Moten and Harney, articulates planning (as discussed in Chapter 2) and second by referring to and expand-

ing on the clusters of dimensions of risk as I have unraveled them in Chapter 5. At the end, I will have *rehearsed* showing how the labor dancers engage with in *Faust* and *Pororoca* tells us something about risk-taking beyond dance in advanced capitalism.

Planning

Drawing on philosophers Hannah Arendt, Giorgio Agamben and Jacques Rancière, Lepecki sees the dancer and her impersonal devotion as a relevant site in and by means of which one can address and rehearse freedom politically, that is, with others in the public space. Contrary to the police cop, who imposes circumscribed spaces of circulation, he sees the dancer as a "political subject that transforms spaces of circulation into spaces of freedom" (*Choreopolice* 20) from within, that is from within dancing itself. Freedom thus entails a kind of movement that is not circulation[151]. It is rather a movement of resistance, one that halts, deviates or slows down the demand placed on the subject to keep on moving in circles that, ultimately, lead nowhere. The dancer as a political subject, moreover, in Lepecki's view, is presented as such firstly because Lepecki finds it crucial that we look into the conditions for "the enactment of freedom in today's control societies" (15), and secondly in order to shed light on how the concept and practice of choreography has consistently been perceived as an "art of command"[152] (16), which for

151 I do not refer to circulation here in its more usual denotation, namely as the number of copies made available of an object, but rather in how the police tend to address those who are 'stationary' or 'still' in places they allegedly should not be.

152 Forsythe cited by dance scholar Mark Franko in Franko, Mark. 2007. "Dance and the Political: States of Exception." *Dance Discourses: Keywords in Dance Research*. Eds. Susanne Franco and Marina Nordera, 11–28. London: Routledge.

Lepecki implies that choreography is also an art that "implements, needs, produces and reproduces systems of obedience" (idem).

To unsettle this conception of choreography as a system of obedience and command—the choreographer as the cop and the dancer as the one who diligently obeys the cop's command—as well as to empower the position and movement of the dancer, Lepecki proposes a notion, namely the choreopolitical. As we saw in Chapter 2, Lepecki finds inspiration for the choreopolitical in how Harney and Moten differentiate policy-making from fugitive planning. For Harney and Moten, policy is a corrective and prescriptive operation from above, designed primarily for the increase of economic profit and fugitive planning, on the other hand, is that which enables an escape from within, which the authors seem to refer to as involving a kind of improvisation such as one can find in Jazz music. Moten and Harney do not write about choreography as such, but do seem to loosely associate improvisation with disorder and choreography with order (7, 11, 79). Thus, a planning that is fugitive, following the example of Jazz music, for them accounts for a movement (a dis-order) from within order, a kind of escape. One could perhaps name this escape within as what artist and theorist Michelangelo Pistoletto called 'inodus' (cited in Corsten and Gielen *Being an Artist* 66), that is, an exodus that is not a movement elsewhere or outside, but rather a movement here and now, *within.* Lepecki's choreopolitical aligns with how Moten and Harney define fugitive planning and his choreopolice with their definition of policy making.

Elsewhere, in an earlier article written in Portuguese, Lepecki proposes choreography as both a "political practice and as a theoretical frame that maps, incisively, performances of mobility and mobilization in urban scenarios of dissent" (*Coreopolícia* 42). Lepecki follows Rancière here in his understanding of dissent, namely

as that which connects art and politics, producing "ruptures in habits and behavior" (43, my translation). For Lepecki, choreographies that are political, thus choreopolitical, are choreographies that "reveal how body, place and movement are interlaced" (55, idem), "transforming a space of circulation into a space in which the subject, political, can appear and exercise [her] capacity for dissent" (56, idem).

I propose that an engagement with the choreopolitical (and thus with planning as understood by Harney and Moten) is what O'Donnell's RA clearly shows when she abstained from exerting authorial control over the actions of the dancers in *Faust*, leading them to have to follow their own commands within the dramaturgical frame of the piece. Through the exercise of their capacity to intervene in the work, at times disrupting it, dancers can appear as subjects that are political. Moreover, how Lepecki interprets Goldman's ideas about improvisation as danced techniques of freedom, as discussed in Chapter 2, leads me to propose planning as one of the fundamental conditions for the possibility for change beyond the kinds of movement and spaces one is 'prescribed' by the choreographer or the context in which the dance emerges.[153] This is what I think the work of Rodrigues in the favela continually rehearses. For me, Rodrigues and her company have not simply gotten used to the favela 'as it is', adapting to it. The favela itself changed (and still does) on its own terms, at its own pace, but together with the work of Rodrigues, dynamically. This means that the difficulties arising from being together in the favela (and in *Pororoca*) have

153 For Lepecki these danced techniques of freedom suggest an understanding of choreography as a "planned, dis-sensual, and non-policed disposition of motions and bodies" (*Choreopolice* 22).

enabled the company to live in the favela (and in *Pororoca*) in the same way that RA enabled the stakes of *Faust* to become evident. What at first sight seems a hindering constraint (the favela and RA) becomes, with a choreopolitical or fugitive understanding of planning, an enabling condition in the sense that, with it, all involved rehearse how to move differently, in ways other than the previously known or thought. Moving differently here is a form of dissent. It is a mode by means of which habits and behaviors of all involved are, if not ruptured, at the very least exposed.

Planning in how I propose it here is thus never individual or private, never based on only one agent; it must be set in motion in relation to others who are always spatiotemporally conditioned. Individuals and their sense of privacy are very important in this, but they are not the cause or primary condition of a work, be it improvised or choreographed; individuals (subjects) are rather a result; they become individuals through the work. In Lepecki's terms, this means that planning "must be dared, collectively, into existence. Once in existence, it must be learned, sustained, and experimented with, again and again" (*Choreopolice* 22). A planning that is fugitive (choreopolitical) therefore becomes a mode of taking risks that enhances the potency of both the individual and the group, in the short and long term, even if such planning offers no guarantees for success. Thus, if with Lepecki's choreopolitical planning becomes a synonym for a more positive and potent view on choreography, planning for me in this book becomes a synonym for a more positive (and enabling) view on improvisation as well, provided, let me remind you, one keeps in mind that, as I have argued, choreography and improvisation *at their limit* can only be perceived as ideal, and as such not to be achieved in practice. This

is the reason planning, choreopolitical or fugitive, will not provide certainties or guarantees.

Inflected in a connected but different way, planning, according to Dell, becomes a way to rehearse steering or sharing insecurity and uncertainty, a way to extrapolate the plan itself, to seize it tactically and modify it in the seizing. Not to embellish any possible failure in its workings, but rather as an acknowledgement of how one can create space for change (more movement, more freedom) *within*, micro-politically, moment by moment, step by step, together with others, as in improvisation. Such a planning involves both the improvisatory and the choreographic, and becomes a more nuanced proposal for doing what one wants, 'now' and in the future, with others. Improvisation, seen as a form of planning, becomes thus less celebratory and more affirmative, discerning. How one could see this, perhaps, as a way that enables one to *rehearse* countering the logic of the market *beyond* dance as well is what I now turn to.

Regarding Boundaries, Control and Enabling Constraints

Dancers in *Faust* and *Pororoca* differently exposed, stretched, and strove to maintain the boundaries of their actions. In *Pororoca,* dancers had to work hard towards keeping structural and formal boundaries for the integrity of the overall form of the piece to hold and for the singular way of moving together to emerge. I suggest that dancers in *Pororoca* engaged in an activity like those described by *Edgework*, but with an important difference to Lyng's understanding of it. As we saw in Chapter 4, Lyng suggested that Edgework activities expose the nature of risk-taking in advanced capitalism because those engaging in such activities practice a radical form of escape from institutional constrain and routines, by cultivating

skills to better function in and integrate into the very institutions that constrain them. If for example one keeps in mind the favela context within which *Pororoca* arose, one can conclude that Rodrigues and the dancers did much more than cultivate the skills to function in and integrate into the favela, itself considered an 'institution' and major infrastructure in the context of a Brazilian metropolis. They contributed (and still do) to the transformation of the favela from within it, by doing something within it that was unfamiliar to it. In so doing, the potency of the work and the favela increased and *this* is precisely what adds to the discussions about Edgework. Not only because dance has not yet been referred to as an Edgework activity or theorized through the lens of Edgework, but because *Pororoca* is an example from within dance that shows how institutions and infrastructures themselves may change from within, becoming more potent, through the careful agency of its agents.

In *Faust*, working towards an RA, dancers were encouraged to maintain *and* challenge boundaries, both personal and formal. As such, one can perceive RA as a form of Governmentality, a specific way to create and manage uncertainty as well as to govern and control what dancers do. In the absence of norms or codes of behavior shared by all, dancers had to become autonomous in disciplining themselves, also in being responsible for and taking care of themselves. While doing this was a necessary and determining condition for RA as a concept to materialize on stage, dancers did not know the boundaries in advance. These 'popped up' on stage as actions unfolded. This means that, despite her intentions, O'Donnell in *Faust* did not manage to create the conditions for enabling the dancers to co-exist on stage with what she called 'uncompromising awareness'. She rather raised the very question of such a possibility, showing perhaps the limits and the 'evils' of Governmentality as a

way of thinking about freedom and control. Here, in this exposure, lies the strength and the actuality of the work, especially if one considers how old it is. *Faust* illustrates that without a common ground or plan, it is virtually impossible for institutions and infrastructures to change (become more potent) from within.

Moreover, while for Douglas risk is that which keeps self and other apart, through real or imagined boundaries, dances such as *Faust* and *Pororoca* show how self and other can come together through risk, either by bringing down boundaries as with *Pororoca* or erecting them as in *Faust*. The former is attained by focusing on what is there to gain when one bets on the 'good' of the group and the latter when focus resides, instead, on the gain of one single self. Both works showed that such a shift from individual self towards the other or the group is not easy and needs constraints that are enabling.

To return to a consideration of planning, now as a constraint that enables: Lepecki proposed the choreopolitical "as the formation of collective plans emerging at the edges between open creativity, daring initiative, and a persistent —even stubborn—iteration of the desire to live away from policed conformity" (*Choreopolice* 23). Based on what we have just seen regarding Edgework and Governmentality, one can suggest that, in not wanting to decide for the group and in not telling dancers what to do, O'Donnell induced dancers to become their own arbiters and to take responsibility for how much they would move. As such, dancers could move freely, on their own terms, or simply 'circulate', that is, move upon someone else's command or turn on their own axis, and so go nowhere they did not already know. The difficulty of the demand O'Donnell placed on the dancers enhanced the precarity, ambiguity, or openness of how dancers could decide, becoming arguably a constraint that

did not enable. As far as what concerns the work of Rodrigues, one could say that she herself and the dancers have moved freely repeatedly, despite the dangers always lurking in a Brazilian favela, simply because the work they did enabled movement that was, previously, not thought as possible. While at the microcosmic level dancers repeatedly reinvented the known, at the macrocosmic level the work enabled a movement into the unknown.

Regarding Trust, Failure

Many dancers attest that risk-taking is not so much an action, but rather one of the modes one aims for in performance, in which the artist deliberately throws herself into something she cannot fully control or understand, regardless of how much she has prepared. This manifests for example, when one consciously creates strategies to bypass or resist habits, including the habit of spontaneity, letting go of too-ingrained ideas of self, even if ever so fugitively. Doing this always entails a degree of risk of failure and requires trust in oneself and others. One can think of RA as a strategy for bypassing habit, but also a strategy that, if engaged in without reflection, reinforces habit. Either way, for failure to be a gain, one must embrace it instead of embellish or use it as a term of judgment. Failing is fundamental for a reassessment of one's own knowing. Moreover, in activities that are complex, such as *Faust* and *Pororoca,* trust becomes an enabling condition because it helps one focus on what matters and as such, it reduces, without trivializing, the uncertainty inherent to the complexity in the work. I here want to suggest that planning, not surprisingly perhaps, can be a means for enhancing trust.

Understanding improvisation as always entangled in choreography, and improvisation as a form of planning, enables planning to be

a means to encounter uncertainty in an affirmative manner. As such, uncertainty does not paralyze us. Planning becomes, borrowing from Beckett, a rehearsal to "try again, fail again, fail better." Failing better, however, should not become procedural, that is, a technique that allows for the faithful repetition of the same (failure), and as such easy to anticipate, control, instrumentalize or commoditize. This process would qualify as policy-making or police procedure. Failing better in dances such as *Faust* and *Pororoca,* implies, on the contrary, risk-taking with a discerning and non-naive awareness of the fact that knowing is always contingent, partial and incomplete and *precisely because of that* one is called-upon to make good use of what one knows, consciously or not, however little or vague this may be. It is here that planning becomes productive in the context of this book, in that it helps one map the situation one finds oneself in while it helps think, construct and calculate potential movement within it. Consequently, I suggest that what conditions risk-taking in dance, without, however, ever fully determining, taming or enhancing its potency, is *how* dancers handle, in the act of live performance, the problems and constraints suggested by the choreographer (or by themselves in the eventual absence of a choreographer). As such, I propose this situated, distributed and enhanced knowing as a form of planning that supports, without guaranteeing, an encounter with what one wants and not only what one needs, and this may well be an encounter with the unknown, unfamiliar or strange.

Hence, to think of choreography and improvisation as forms of planning becomes a way to rehearse acting more aptly within the collective, allowing one to better discern how much one can rely on and trust or resist the known, to recognize where the options may be as well as rehearse seizing them. Freedom here would mean the ability to intervene in a manner more in line with one's own terms,

not the market's; to be in relation to reigning rules or codes, rather than eluding these as if they did not exist. Consequently, with planning, the production of the 'new' would not be a primary concern or aim. At best, the 'new' would be the result of the artists' persistence in following their own plan and criteria for evaluation.

Regarding Listening and Decision-Making

Carefully listening to one another and to what is there in the moment, discerning what is relevant to it as well as trusting that oneself and others can handle the situation in a way that is good for the work and not only for the person or moment involves decision-making beyond the level of the individual. Lack of careful listening can diminish the potency of the group because it may compromise trust. One must therefore practice trust as much as listening. Trust itself is perhaps the highest risk one must take for a being together that is ethical to arise, that is, never fully knowing *a priori* where an action may lead to, but affirming it nevertheless as one performs it.

Faust showed that the less one knows the more one is dependent on others to make decisions (always from *within* the event of dancing). *Pororoca*, on the other hand, by means of the long process of collective improvisation, leading to a meticulously set choreography, showed that coming together is possible, but it takes a kind of work that unleashes the energy of the dancers while it simultaneously tames it. Again, one could label it as a very good example of an Edgework activity in advanced capitalism as theorized by Lyng. However, one should not understand this taming in its more negative connotation, as a force from without that diminishes the potency of the self, only allowing her to reproduce a routine *ad infinitum* until exhaustion. On the contrary, the process leading towards this taming in *Pororoca*, of continuously assessing by means

of improvisation what the group needed, is the condition that has enabled dancers to choose otherwise (to choose for the collective), and to avoid obliviously falling back into the known. How dancers in *Faust* and *Pororoca* engage with the question of how to be together on stage gives us an indication of how planning could be a minimal condition for socialization beyond dance and as such for the possibility of encountering the unknown, whatever this may mean.

Regarding Responsibility

In *Pororoca,* dancers knew what they were responsible for because they had the opportunity to learn how to think of themselves through the lens of the group. In *Faust* responsibility itself became a question, including the question of what would happen if dancers did not take personal responsibility for their actions in the context of the piece. Meeting the other and taking responsibility for the encounter is thus a challenging adventure in both pieces, but in *Faust* I suggest it was more difficult, because even though the 'group' was weak, that is, individuals could not exert control over risk within the group, every individual, under RA, was called upon to take responsibility for the whole.

This was (is) an impossible demand, but one worth rehearsing because doing so points to a kind of radical seeing, a radical imagining that is not utopic (of a perfect world), but one that asks one to see otherwise, which in the words of Skrimshire means "to unveil the possibilities and impossibilities of the present through the eyes of the future" (126). This radical seeing could be improvisation itself, in its etymological origins, entailing the impossibility to see the future fully or clearly *in* the present, but nevertheless engage with it, with what we can do 'now'.

Following Derrida, one could say that this involves a responsibility that is "revolutionary, since it tries to do the impossible, to interrupt the order of things based on incomplete information" (Derrida cited in Skrimshire 137). Embedded in this affirmation of uncertainty and not knowing lies the potential of negating affirmation itself. Affirmation always contains the negative facet of what it affirms: the potential not to align, belong or communicate, the potential not to build a collective body, but, importantly, also the potential not to conform to the rules and criteria of the market.

The imperative to perform and improvise in advanced capitalism, to be ever ready, poised, in the 'here and now' relies, according to Verwoert on "the assumption that [one] could be" always poised and ready (48). For him this is problematic because "it is only through assuming that [one] has such inexhaustible potency that [one] willingly accept[s] the request to prove it, then take it to heart when [one is] reprimanded for failing to do so" (idem). Dancers thus must practice an unwillingness to perform this role as well as to say to themselves that failing to perform this role is not a problem they have personally, individually. However, this is not to say that artists have no share in this problem. As part of the system, to change it, artists must rehearse speaking up for themselves, on their own terms.

The power of improvisation thus is not inherent, but depends on how those who use it assert their individuality and collective agency against the constant constraints of advanced capitalism: perpetual readiness to take and prevent risk and at the same time be flexible about doing this. This means exercising imagining another logic, beyond a logic of yes and no, either/or. Philosopher Bojana Kunst suggests in her book *Artist at Work: Proximity of Art and Capitalism* that such logic involves practices of non-alignment, non-compliance,

uncooperativeness, reluctance, reticence, weariness, unwillingness, and improvisation. I agree with her and indeed say yes to improvisation, but not as being just spontaneous and free, because spontaneity and freedom are precisely the fuels advanced capitalism feeds on. One of the problems with flexibility, in this context, is its underlying assumption that once 'flexed' an individual or practice can simply return to the original state, form or place. To think that being perpetually ready and flexible will not change who one is at a fundamental level is a (negative) naivety dancers should be wary of. Flexibility does not necessarily mean a new emergence that enhances potency, but merely adaptability. Improvisation in dance must be more than a technique that turns one into an expert on adaptation. It must enable conscious change, which is different from adaptation.

If dance is to be more than the physical body and how it moves or circulates from place 'a' to place 'b' and if dance is to be (and be about) consciousness (and change), then dance improvisation must engage in and enable conscious reflection. As such, dance improvisation can reveal the fact that when dancers always and only adapt and are flexible under conditions that they themselves do not create, dancers and their bodies will not return to their original state unscathed. They will have changed. Fully controlling how change occurs is, of course, impossible given the amount of movement there already is in the world of the dancer and her body before 'dancing' itself begins. However, seizing *more* control of how this change occurs, controlling the movements of circulation, is something dance improvisation could offer when thought of as fugitive planning, as a form of change, not flexibility. *Faust* and *Pororoca* provided us with specific and situated glimpses of how one can rehearse seizing control of change.

Regarding Knowing and Not Knowing

Regardless of its allegedly extempore nature, improvisation is dependent on an economy of time for its recognition, dissemination and legitimation. The new or unique arising out of improvisation must emerge, at least partially, from the known. It can thus never be entirely new or out of time. This is perhaps the reason philosopher Jacques Derrida said in an unpublished interview (1982) that he believed in improvisation and fought for it, but always with the belief that to improvise is the most difficult thing to do. In *A Certain Impossible Possibility of Saying the Event* one can find clues as to how one could better understand this.

In this text Derrida speaks of giving, forgiving, inventing and hosting as 'events' in the following manner: [an] event to be an event must produce an absolute surprise. For giving, forgiving, inventing and hosting to be possible, these need to appear impossible. Giving, forgiving, inventing and hosting therefore are doing the impossible, because one can only give, forgive, invent and host when it is not possible to give, forgive, invent, or host. Giving, forgiving, inventing and hosting can only be possible as impossible. This impossibility, however, is not simply negative, because the *impossible must be done (*447-451, emphasis mine). Applying this to the improvisation-choreography dichotomy it would read like this: I can only improvise when it is not possible to improvise, that is, when an event has already been fully written, choreographed or known in advance.

As in the context of this book I propose this absoluteness of not knowing or being absolutely surprised to be an ideal, that is, not possible in practical terms, however much improvisers may look for it and believe in its possibility, Derrida's proposition is here perceived as ideal as well, because an event (dance) as it is here understood is always and already *both* improvised *and* chore-

ographed, and as such always conditioned, to an extent, by what is known, the known itself never absolute, where the possibility of being surprised absolutely is impossible. Thus, improvisation (or choreography) can only be impossible in practice if one believes that choreography (or improvisation) is possible without any degree of improvisation (choreography) in it. This is not the premise of this book even though one must believe that the impossibility of absolute surprise is possible to attain.

Derrida seems to have conceived of improvisation from a view of life in its finitude, the boundary of which could be death, of and beyond which one will never be able to know anything. One could say that for Derrida the time of death, a time out of time, is the time of improvisation par excellence, death arguably being the only time about which we know nothing, a sort of absolute unknown, which we may be able to fantasize or speculate about, but cannot describe or predict.

Cixous—by means of her *écriture féminine*[154]—unlike Derrida, seems to believe in the life-affirming possibility of improvisation, though she is well aware of the extremely difficult task of dismantling or getting outside of the known codes of language because as she herself says "we are all born into language (...) and so there is nothing to be done, except to shake them [the codes of language] like apple trees all the time" (Sellers cited in Ramshaw 167). From within this 'shaking' arises the potential for the untimely. When the untimely that arises from this shaking is tempestuous, as psychoanalyst and cultural critic Suely Rolnik suggests (n. pag.), that is, when

154 Cixous's *écriture féminine* project recognizes that Western thought has been determined by an endless series of binary oppositions, which for her always come down to the 'man-woman' one, with man being privileged over woman. *Écriture féminine* thus aims to create a 'feminine' way of writing, a language that attempts to subvert the privileging of both logo and phallo-centrism.

a difference destabilizes or shocks us, separating us from what we think we are or know, there arises a demand on us to consciously think. In the tempestuous encounter with the unknown one "takes the risk of losing oneself, perhaps irrevocably" (Blyth and Sellers 32). Is then the difference between Cixous and Derrida—between the possibility and the impossibility of improvisation—found in the actual 'shaking the apple trees' of what we know, in Cixous' insistence in being (writing) the present, in an insistence on giving time to time (Ramshaw 167), on disregarding linear or logic continuities between life and death, past and future, old and new?

My experience as a dancer and teacher of both improvisation and choreography has continually led me to think that the unknown alluded to by Blyth and Sellers and acknowledged by both Cixous and Derrida is, in professional practice, very hard (rare) if not impossible to encounter. In the going after the perhaps-impossible-to-find unknown, in the being shocked by thought as suggested by Rolnik above, dancing takes place in a space that is 'marked' by feelings and thoughts of distance *and* intimacy, of knowing *and* not knowing rather than in a space marked by absolute knowns or unknowns. Should we then finally abandon modernism and its concern with resisting the past and its focus on the future by means of ongoing innovation and novelty? Should we continue to strive for the rare or impossible-to-find? My reading of *Faust* and *Pororoca* and my incipient proposition of choreo or fugitive planning as ways to rehearse countering the logic of the market in advanced capitalism lead me to answer both questions affirmatively, as I do not see them in a diametrical relation of opposition. Because, again, with Peters, the new of dance improvisation is not the embodiment of freedom, but rather a search for it in the here-and-now of the work's ongoing collective planning and becoming. This search requires

a psychophysical effort paramount to any freedom wishing to be capable of willing the future, a future always past, because of its dynamic and differential anchor in it (72, 167). This is to say that we must remain open to the possibility that our speculations may be off the mark. This involves a kind of knowing that, according to performance theorist Konstantina Georgelou "must remain at all times in relation to its own openness" (184). A knowing that what one knows will never be final and always contingent. *Faust* and *Pororoca* have in their different and specific ways shown how one can rehearse knowing openly.

Coda

I suggest dancers in *Faust* and *Pororoca* rehearsed envisioning a wanted future without taking on pressure to produce the new. They rather persisted in the present tense of their doings, *think-ingbodyfeeling* it, to a good extent also calculating it, constructing it micro-politically, that is, by cultivating an acute awareness of the conditions of the immediate context within which they operated. As such, these two dances provided images that can help us understand what we are, where we live, what surrounds us, and how it may affect us. They provided us with instances of how one can rehearse emancipation from unwanted control or command, that is, to act according to our own terms, as the capacity to hone our abilities to act in the world. In this way, again following Foster, dancers in *Faust* and *Pororoca* did not reproduce cultural values and norms unconsciously, but rather exercised their capacity to formulate new contestatory and critical stances towards the status quo *in their present*. With planning, dance improvisation becomes more than just a means to an end or a makeshift; it becomes a positive and dynamic force, a condition for rehearsing transformation beyond

the individual self. As such, dance improvisation also enables what Randy Martin has called an alternative "somatization of risk, or a sustainability of difference (42). Thinking inside the box, as hope, as improvisation, as planning, as affirmative risk-taking, is perhaps a way to assure others come along with you.

One might achieve hope for an affirmative future by positioning it (the future) not as outside of the present, outside of language, but as profoundly imbricated in the present and language. It is not enough to simply take a step aside and forget or pretend to forget what one already knows (or feels, thinks, and fears). To affirmatively engage with the unassailable weight of contingency one must do more than make diffuse, undefined promises of change in the future, but rather consciously think of a wanted, "given future, naming it" (Wrangel 101), here and now, persistently, on one's own terms but never alone; always with others. After all, we are all in the same boat. Dance improvisation, as understood in this book, as differentially imbricated in choreography, as planning, might be a way toward it.

Appendix 1
List of works by Mary O'Donnell (Fulkerson)

Please note that this list is most likely incomplete and some of the dates inaccurate. O'Donnell has herself not kept a record of all her performances. I have thus compiled this list from several sources, including O'Donnell's own writings, especially *Release: 7 Zones of Comprehension*, program notes, and publications in which her work has either appeared or been reviewed, such as *Contact Quarterly*, *Writings on Dance*, *Dance Theatre Journal* and *New Dance* Magazine.

Mary O'Donnell (Fulkerson) is one of the founders of Release Technique. She has choreographed particularly using Open-Form Composition strategies and is the initiator of the concepts *Responsible Anarchy* and *Ethical Reformation*, which she has promoted, through performance, as concepts and as aesthetic positions describing our time. She has also had leading positions at innovative schools in Europe such as Dartington (1973-1987), SNDO, School for New Dance Development (1987-1989) and EDDC, European Dance Development Center (1989-2001).

1962	First solo (at age of 16)
1966	*For Queen Elizabeth I*, solo
1968	69_participation in John Cage's *HPSCHD* and *Sound Circle* event (Illinois, USA)

1969	Met Steve Paxton and Yvonne Rainer (*Continuous Project Altered Daily*)
1969	*Form and Movement*
1972	*Empty Whispers*
1973	Participation in the first Contact performance in Europe (Italy)
1973	*Knot Tying as a filler* (Berlin), solo
1973	*Small Brown Shell* (For Strider)
1973	*We love you Dennie* (solo for Dennis Greenwood)
1973	*Three Women*
1973	*Late Night Soup* (first piece composed in Britain)
1974	*Robin*, solo
1977-1979	solo performance series: *-The World is Round* *-Robin, Fly South* *-I saw Myself Standing* *-Dark Coming* *-I see the Edge* *-Remember Hearing* *-Waiting and Waiting* *-Game of Mouse* *-She Said*
1979	*Shoe Dance*, duet for Greenwood and Tufnell
1979	*Animal Dances*
1980	*Charges Woman*, solo (introduction of text as major source)
1980	*She Meets Her End*
1980	*Notes on a Passing Circus*
1980	*Little Theater* (starts to experiment with groups)
1981	*Song from country*, solo for Madee Dupres

1981 *Field*, Duet
1981 *Testament to one Thought*
1981 *Swedish Dances*
1982 *Louisianne*
1982 *Country Dance,* solo for Julyen Hamilton
1982 *The Raft is not the Shore*, duet for Michael Clark and Beverly Sandwith
1982 *Put your foot down Charlie*, group with students of Dartington
1982 *Undergrowth*, piece for Eleven Students (in the frame of Darlington Festival)
1982 *Collaboration_* (with Frank Denyer), Darlington Dance Festival
1983 *Rat's Tale* (6 dancers)
1983 *Track Follows*, group with students of Dartington
1983 *Julie and the Henchman* (group piece)
1983 *Fine Romance*
1984 The Woman Writer speaks
1984 *Real Life Adventures*, solo
1984 *The Same Story*, solo
1985 *Out of Thin Air*
1986 *Imaginary Music*
1986 *Feminine Psyche in Trouble*, Group piece
1986 *Paganini,* duet with Lise Ferner
1989 *Whose wings are those?* Group piece
1989 *Puppet Theater*, Group piece
1991 *Curtain,* Group piece
1992 *The Thread of the Plot,* Group Piece, students
1992 *Wisdom of Romance*, Duet, students
1993 *Faust*, group piece, professionals

1994	*Antigone*, group piece, professionals
1995	*Direct Surrender*, group piece with students and professionals
1994	*17 Landscapes*, group of EDDC students
1995	*Eden*, group piece, professionals
1996	*Veil*, group piece, professionals
1996	*The Master and the Servant*, solo
1997	Respekt, group piece (commissioned), students and professionals
1998	*You infinite*, group piece, professionals
1999	*Garden and Nature*, group piece with students
1999	*Access to Idols,* group piece, professionals
2000	*Paracelsus Project*, research group piece with students of EDDC
2007	*One man and...* (Video)
2008	*Arctic Fox* (Video)
2009	*Eyes of Innocence* (Austin, USA) mixed group
2010	*A Closet Full of Images* (Austin, USA), mixed group

Appendix 2
List of works by Lia Rodrigues

Source: http://www.liarodrigues.com/page2/page12/page12.html Web. 17 Sept. 2017.

Lia Rodrigues is an internationally prominent Brazilian choreographer. After taking part in the contemporary dance movement in São Paulo in the 1970s and joining Maguy Marin's dance company in the early 1980s, she returned to Brazil and created her own company in 1990. In 2003, she and her company started developing artistic and educational activities in Maré, a favela in Rio de Janeiro. This led to the creation of Maré Center for the Arts in 2009 and the Free Dance School of Maré in 2012. She was also the artistic director of Panorama Dança Festival (1992-2005).

1990	*Gineceu*
1991	*Catar*
1993	*MA*
1996	*Folia I*
1997	*Folia II*
1997	*Resta Um*, for *Ballet do Teatro Municipal do Rio de Janeiro*
1998	*Performance for the opening of Lygia Clark retrospective exhibition,* Paço Imperial, RJ
2000	*Aquilo de que somos feitos*
2001	*Dois e um dois*
2001	*Resgate*

2001	Performance for *Teresa* (by visual artist Tunga). Opening of Centro Cultural BB
2001	Performance for the project *Anos 70: Trajetórias*, Itaú Cultural.
2002	*Buscou-se portanto, falar a partir dele e não sobre ele*
2002	Formas Breves
2005	*Contra aqueles difíceis de agradar*
2005	*Encarnado,*
2005	Performance for *Laminadas Almas* (by visual artist Tunga). Espaço Tom Jobim, RJ
2007	*Hymnen,* for *Ballet de Lorraine*
2008	*Chantier Poétique*
2009	*Pororoca*
2011	*Piracema*
2013	*Pindorama*
2016	*For the Sky not to Fall*

Appendix 3
Survey on Improvisation (2010)

This appendix consists of the answers given by the 3rd and 4th year dance students at ArtEZ University of Arts to the question 'What is Improvisation?' I asked students before the teaching began. Classes took place between January and April 2010.

Answers:

"I think improvisation is a way to express oneself, in a [manner] that has not been planned before. One can use improvisation to create something and solve problems. Improvisation can help one get out of difficult situations (but it can also get one into difficult situations). Improvisation happens all the time. Every day one improvises something." (Carita Lahteenmaki, guest student from Finland)

"Be there. At *this* moment, at *this* place. Make choices or choose not to choose. Take time." (Irene Cortina Gonzales, 3rd year dance student from Spain)

"To improvise is to move from an inner source, mentally or physically, out into concept, context or not at all." (Debbie J., 4th year dance student from the Netherlands)

"Improvisation is a way to move without thinking beforehand what to do." (Laila Luukkonen, guest student from Finland)

"Improvisation is action and reaction with a specific sensitivity to a moment in a specific time and space. Specific in ideological terms, but unspecifically open in terms of how an idea becomes

concrete." (Barbara Ebner, 4th year dancer-maker student from Germany)

"Improvisation means the ability to move in space and time without having a plan of how one will move. It is to be able to be open for any kind of situation on a mental and physical level. Through improvisation one can get to know qualities and emotions from a different perspective. Improvisation is the greatest way to find myself, to rediscover my personality and its different colors. Improvisation makes me feel satisfied." (Elisa Marshall, 4th year dance student from Costa Rica)

"On the one hand, improvisation means to let go of one's habits and, on the other, to use habit in order to improvise. I like to improvise only if I feel emotional or when I feel that I have something to say. Improvisation also means relaxation." (Ornella Marcwicka, 3rd year dance student from Poland)

"Improvisation is a platform to experiment (and experience) with all that is new. It is to combine the mental/intellectual with the movement/physicality." (Denise Klevering, 3rd year dance student from the Netherlands)

"Improvisation is the basis of dance. It is a playground where the connection between the brain and the body and the emotional experience all comes together." (Myriam Silevis, 3rd year dance student from the Netherlands-Pakistan)

"Improvisation means for me to show emotions and the state one is in in the moment. To dance how one feels and to express that emotion; to feel free in how and what one is expressing and to play with your body-mind connection within seconds to decide." (Dirk Jeukens, 3rd year dance student from the Netherlands)

"Improvisation means for me to rely on my intuition and to do what at each moment seems to me to be the best. It is to use my

surroundings as inspiration source and develop from there. Above all it is to not be afraid of how it looks like." (Romanna Delauw, 3rd year dance student from the Netherlands)

"Improvisation for me is a space where everything is possible, at the same time that there can only happen this one thing that takes place, after a decision is made. And that is what needed to be." (Katharina Malong, 4th year dance student from Germany)

"Improvisation is to make choices in the moment. It is doing something that has not been 'set' before it happens. Following the movement until its end, even further, or breaking it, in the middle. Improvisation is doing your thing and doing the opposite. To go into the uncomfortable, unfamiliar places and stretching borders, but especially to indulge in the task at hand and enjoy." (Eline van Ark, 4th year dance student from the Netherlands)

Appendix 4
Survey on Improvisation and Risk (2013)

Below are the questions I have asked respondents to consider:

How did you get in touch with improvisation?
How would you define improvisation in general and according to your practice?
How would you define risk in general and in your practice, if applicable?
Is risk-taking necessary when improvising? If so, could you give an example?
What is for you the opportunity/gain of improvisation?
Are there any conditions without which improvisation would not 'work'?
When is an improvisation successful for you? Examples?

What does one need to know to improvise?
How do you prepare for an improvisation?
Does 'not knowing' in improvisation play a role for you? How?
How does the 'not knowing' of improvisation relate to risk-taking?
How does this relation in turn relate to the spirit of our time?

Which emotions do you associate with risk-taking in improvisation?

What psychophysical effects does improvisational risk-taking have on you in general?
What do you experience/feel when you take a risk in dance improvisation?

How would you classify improvisation in general? As an easy or a complex activity? Please give examples of both if appropriate.

Do you consider improvisation a radical act? Please elaborate.
Is it important to cross boundaries when you improvise? If so, could you give examples of such boundaries?

(Please finish the sentence) Improvisation is a freedom to...
(Please finish the sentence) Improvisation is a freedom from...

How do you make decisions when improvising?

What is the role surprise play for you in improvisation? Could you give an example of having been 'surprised' during an improvisation?

Would you like to add anything?

Respondents: Kent De Spain, Eva Karczag, Saara Hannula, Andrew Wass, Bruno Listopad, Erik Kaiel, Melina Seldes, Gabriela Tarcha, Alessio Castellacci, Cecilia de Lima, Juliana Atuesta, Maria Ramos, Helena Nikolau, Sofia Mavragani, Ayara Hernandez, Emilie Gallier, Doran George, Salva Sanchis, Iris van Peppen, Ulla Mäkinen, and Angela Vadori.

Synthesis of answers to the question: Is risk-taking necessary when improvising as performance?

The answers to this question are relevant here both because of the specificity of the question and the range of respondents. As already stated, one does not find this question explicitly posed in the literature reviewed in Chapter 1, and the wide range of respondents, which included professors, young and seasoned, as well as established and less established performers and choreographers, is also missing from literature that explicitly includes the views of practitioners themselves, examples of which are the works of Benoit, De Spain, and Buckwalter, who interviewed exclusively seasoned and well-known practitioners. The material offered by my survey has allowed me to further focus the literature review by providing a unique means of testing the widely-accepted assumption that risk-taking and improvisation are intrinsic to one another.

Most respondents answered the question affirmatively, but also made sure to point to the fact that risk-taking is a very personal, situated and dynamic affair, reiterating the point I made in Chapter 1 that one cannot generalize risk. Moreover, all respondents, except one, immediately perceived risk-taking in improvisation as both necessary *and* good. Choreographer and dancer Salva Sanchis, the exception to the rule, thinks that risk-taking in improvisation is a misleading idea. First, because it focuses unnecessarily on the possible negative outcomes of the work and, second, because risk-taking implies that one is using danger as a parameter to guide one's decisions in the performance. He finds both premises very narrow. Further elaborating on this lack of breadth, he identifies two kinds of risk-taking: physical and emotional. The risk of physical harm does not, for Sanchis, say much about improvisation as such. It says

more about the style of moving of the dancers that, for him, hinges on recklessness. As for the psychological risk or fear of failing, for example, being ridiculous or misunderstood—this only gets in the way of the work.

Choreographer Erik Kaiel, on the other hand, does not conflate danger with risk-taking in this way, going as far as to say that if one does not extend beyond one's grasp, technically and conceptually, one is not improvising; one is simply doing laps in the pool of familiarity. Without shedding knowledge, emptying the vessel, making room for a becoming, an epiphany, there is no improvisation.[155] Kent De Spain, falling somewhere between these two opinions, thinks that one can improvise without taking risks and still call it a satisfying experience, at least for the dancers. It depends on what is at stake in each performance.

155 Some argue exactly the opposite: that the repetition of the same, of the habitual, provides more opportunity for resisting the force of habit. See Bertinetto, Alessandro. *What do we know through improvisation?* <https://www.academia.edu/6346492/What_Do_We_Know_Through_Improvisation>. Web. 20 Dec. 2014.

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Acknowledgments

This book stems from my PhD research *Risk-Taking and Large-Group (Dance) Improvisation* (2012-2016) and so I thank Maaike Bleeker and other members of the Theatre Studies Department of Utrecht University as well as colleagues and students of ArtEZ University of Arts for their support.

I would also like to express my gratitude to Kirsi Monni, who has generously invited me to turn my PhD dissertation into this book and Ari Tenhula, who has supported to make it possible financially. I would also like to thank Paul Dillingham for proof reading the book and Jenni Mikkonen for seeing it to publication.

Last but certainly not least, I thank choreographers Mary O'Donnell (Fulkerson) and Lia Rodrigues for their inspiring, relentless and thought-provoking work.

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I have published earlier versions of parts of Chapter 2 and 5 as "Improvise or Else" in *Danswetenschap in Nederland* 8. I have also used excerpts of Chapter 5 for my entry for the 2nd edition of the Contemporary Choreography: A Critical Reader, by Routledge (upcoming Jan. 2018).

I have published an early version of parts of Chapter 3 as *O'Donnell's Open-Form Composition (OFC): A Possible Stance to Abridge the Divide Improvisation-Composition in Dance?* Master Thesis Utrecht University.

Publications in the Kinesis series:

Heikinheimo, Ismo-Pekka (2017). *Taidesidonnaista koreografiaa museokontekstissa*

Kirsi Monni & Ric Allsopp, eds. (2015). *Practising Composition: Making Practice. Texts, Dialogues and Documents 2011-2013*

Jeroen Peeters (2014). *Through the Back. Situating Vision between Moving Bodies.*

Kai Lehikoinen (2014). *Tanssi sanoiksi. Tanssianalyysin perusteita*

André Lepecki (2012). *Tanssitaide ja liikkeen politiikka.*

Kirsi Monni (2012). *Alexander-tekniikka ja autenttinen liike-työskentely. Kaksi kehontietoisuuden harjoittamisen metodia.*

This book examines the often-posited opposition between dance improvisation and choreography, despite the emergence in the last fifteen or twenty years of an all-encompassing, expanded notion of choreography. In this alleged relation of opposition, choreography is often identified with the 'known' and improvisation the 'unknown'. Concomitantly, the more unknown and spontaneous the action, the more risk-taking will be involved. This book challenges this opposition and proposes that choreography and improvisation are indeed different approaches to making dances, but their differences are best exposed when one thinks of spontaneity, the notion at the core of the difference but hardly scrutinized, in a more dimensional, situated and less determined manner. Doing this helps us to understand not only how improvisation is indeed not just "spontaneous and free" and choreography not just a "system of command and obedience", but also how improvisation does not necessarily entail more risk-taking than choreography. Risk-taking is as a multifaceted, distributed and situated process as are improvisation and choreography. In order to argue for this, the book engages with the work of two choreographers, Mary O'Donnell (Fulkerson) and Lia Rodrigues, as well as a vast and eclectic number of theories.

João Cerqueira da Silva Junior, PhD, is a dance practitioner, bodyworker and academic. He is currently senior teacher and researcher at ArtEZ University of the Arts, Arnhem (NL). He has published articles in *Kinesis, ArtEZ Press, Dutch Society for Dance Research, Inflexions* and *Transcript* and his current interests revolve around artistic research, intimacy and 'going public'.

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