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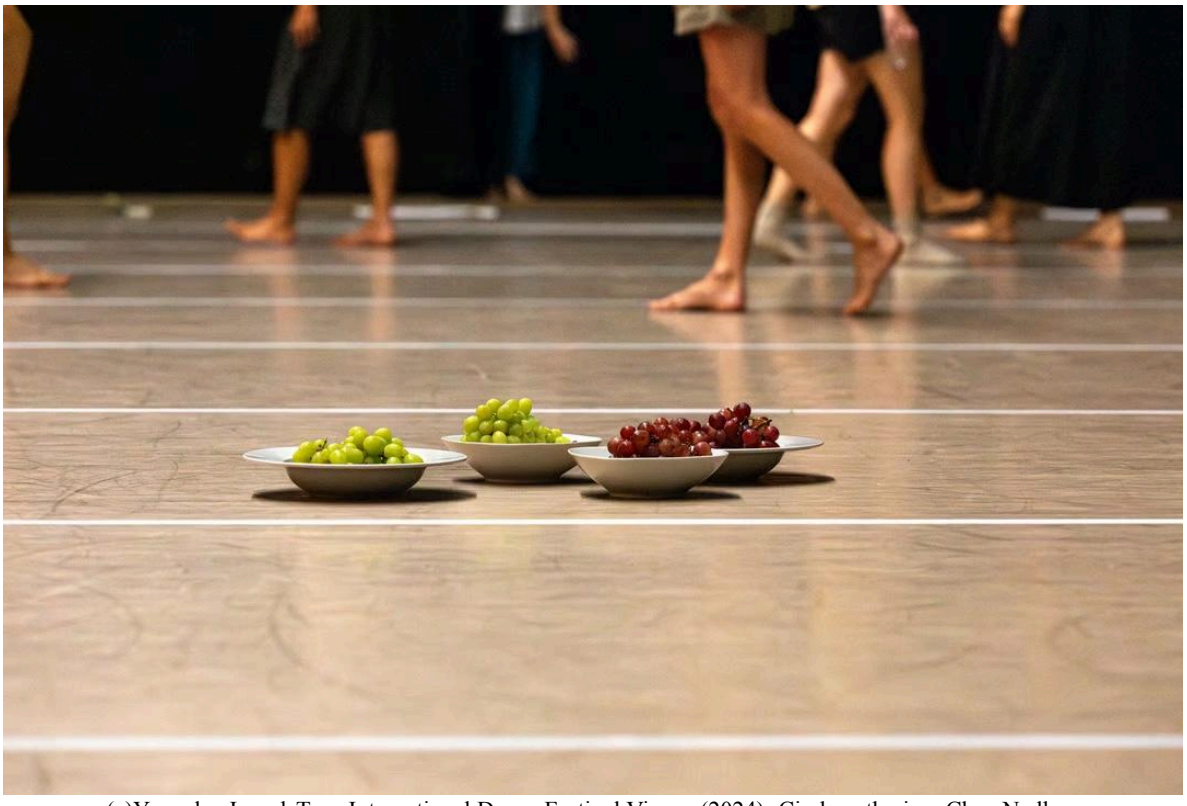
THESIS PROJECT

A Body Carries Many

Towards Visiting Practice in Choreographic Making

CHEN NADLER



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MASTER'S DEGREE PROGRAMME IN CHOREOGRAPHY

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The artistic work is produced by the Theatre Academy. ☒
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This written final thesis explores my choreographic research through the lens of an embodied choreographic practice I call the *Visiting Practice*. Drawing from methodologies and perspectives from pedagogy, dance, and movement-based practices, supported by artists' examples, the research combines concepts and notions from philosophical and ethical thinking in relation to performance-making.

The text first unfolds around the notion of practice, examined through three interconnected perspectives: an anthroposophical view on practice, transformative and transcultural approaches to movement embodied practice, and the mapping of my own dance background and bodily knowledge.
From this ground, I turn to the notion of visiting, first considering its ethical dimensions in relation to tourism, then expanding it as a conceptual and embodied approach within choreographic thinking and making. Situated within the current social and political atmosphere, the *Visiting Practice* is explored as both a movement and conceptual framework—one that activates the dancing body as a fluid archive through elements and tools such as repetition towards transformation, traces, and layers, and that invites performative attention to gaze, presence, and ethical responsibilities in choreographic creation with others.

This thesis offers the *Visiting Practice* as a method for engaging with embodied knowledge—one that opens relational, sensitive, and context-aware pathways in choreography. It proposes a way of sharing, transmitting, and generating movement-embodied knowledge through choreographic frameworks. Following a curiosity to explore its activation in artistic contexts, I reflect on my choreographic works as spaces where the *Visiting Practice* takes form, offering concrete examples of how it might be actualized in both embodied guided gatherings and performance-making.

KEYWORDS

visiting, transformation, body, transcultural, practice, becoming, embodied archive, collaboration

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I love you.

INTRODUCTION

Following my path and lived experiences, exposed to diverse influences, methods, techniques, and cultures, leads me to think and approach dance, choreography, and performance in a certain way. Before studying for a master's in choreography, I've been living as a professional dancer and choreographer, dancing and creating my works and collaborating with other artists and diverse disciplines. Previously, I studied dance for many years, then Social education, and Steiner education for four years. The master studies in Choreography encourage me to focus, to spend time with myself as a choreographer, to constantly renew, develop, reflect, and confront, through struggle and joy, my way of making. Those years invited me to re-enter what I'm interested in in connection to choreography, practice, processes, dance, and meetings through art, and to choose how to activate it, with and through my life experiences.

I find the written thesis to be one of the most interesting and challenging processes I have experienced. For me as a dance and choreography artist, the body is there all the time. Therefore, the process of writing has allowed me to recognize my tendencies—writing as a form of movement, unfolding through different paths and directions. This meandering reflects a process-oriented and non-linear way of thinking, even as I research from a more conceptualized perspective. I made a deliberate choice of centering through concepts such as practice and visiting, and to wonder about their connection to my work with body, dance, and choreography.
I'm in love with how movement exists only at the moment—ephemeral, never fixed—while text, on the other hand, remains. Recognizing these as two distinct yet valuable formats of artistic articulation and creation, *I have tried to frame this text as a dance*, not as a final product, but as an ongoing process- and here, I invite you, the readers, to follow the same thought. In reading this, you are- in a way, part of a process, and although written down, it is still in a mode of becoming, forming, and evolving together with your thoughts, reflections, and perceptions.

In this written thesis, I am engaging with theory and concepts from an artistic perspective—moving from a more conceptual, practice-based inquiry into a personally

driven exploration that reflects my own experiences and artistic process. The thesis starts with a background outlining my motivation, aiming to give a bit of context for the reader before entering the written journey itself. My written choreographic research is then organized into four parts.

In chapter one, I am addressing the notion of *practice* from three interconnected realms. I draw on perspectives and examples from Anthroposophical - pedagogical approach to *practice*, as a method for learning. Then, as an extension, I relate to *embodied practice*, introducing three choreographers and performance artists (Anna Halperin, Rochdi Belgasmi, and Paz Rojo) expanding the notions of embodied dance practice as a path of transformation, focusing on transcultural practices in choreography and performance. Then, I map my relations to diverse dance practices. Through this, I hope to invite the reader to discover more deeply what was and still is shaping my own body and approaches to making. In dialogue with cultural theorists Aleida Assmann and performance researcher, curator and writer Andre Lepecki, I explore the concept of the *body as a fluid archive*, developing it through my own dance practices and experiences—a body that carries knowledge from diverse influences, in a constant form of becoming.

In chapter two, I elaborate on the notion of *visiting*—first through the lens of tourism, examining the elements connected to my interest and embodied research and the ones that differ. Then I use the notion of visiting as an alternative way for inviting embodied dialogue with movement, dance, and choreography, shifting from a mindset of ownership to one of belonging with– an opportunity to share and circulate embodied knowledge with others. I explore the audience in performance from the perspective of visitors, extending the concept of Relational aesthetics, by Nicolas Bourriaud with Erica Fischer-Lichte into the physical and sensory realm, emphasizing how performance affects bodies, emotions, and spatial awareness. I expand this into the realm of dance and choreography, giving an example of an artist that influenced my approach and related to this framework- Isabel Lewis and her ‘Hosted Occasions’(2014). Supported by those, I then explore how visiting embodied knowledge can become both conceptual and movement-based practice for sharing and transmitting knowledge in choreographic

processes and performance, a way to navigate and reflect on ethical, political, and social togetherness in times of crisis.

Collecting those concepts, methodologies, and philosophical thinking into the choreographic work, chapter three is where I try to shape the embodied choreographic practice– the visiting practice. I expand on the core elements and tools in the practice; embodied movement tools– engaging with dance, body, and individuality-collectivity, through repetition towards change, following the notion of the body as a fluid archive, secondly, the notion of layers and traces echoing Jacques Derida philosophical and conceptual framework on traces. Then, performative tools– experimenting with performativity and social connection through the gaze, opening the notion of 'otherness' and witnessing as an ethical suggestion, shaping relationships between audience and performers, influenced by Emanuel Levinas's concept on the Ethics as Optics. Lastly, I develop choreographic tools—approaching choreography as a means to facilitate space. This micro-political approach looks beyond the performer's body, engaging with the dynamics of space and time where human interactions unfold. It explores how dance knowledge can be shared ethically, with a sense of responsibility, and through respectful dialogue.

Chapter Four is more reflective, as I examine concrete examples of how I activate the *Visiting Practice* within my choreographic frameworks. I reflect on past experiences and imagine future directions, center experiences within the frame of gatherings, choreography, dance, and performance. I give examples of facilitating a choreographic space (*Circle Gatherings*) in ImpulsTanz 2024, The Symposium for Dance and Other Contemporary Practices, and the evolving personal path with the Henna Ritual from my Moroccan roots. Lastly, I share three aspects of how I aim to activate the *Visiting Practice* with my MA artistic thesis production, *THE FEAST*. In this work, I focus on creating a gathering, a choreography, a dance—using tools and elements from the *Visiting Practice*. This includes interdisciplinary collaborative movement research with dancers and a sound-making process with artists from diverse cultural backgrounds. I explore how the practice manifests in performance as an invitation, fostering possible relationships with the audience as visitors. This also expands into the scenographic thinking—through light, costume, and spatial design—as ways to open and guide these relational directions.

Throughout this whole thesis, I work with questions. Questions challenge me and call me to reflect and meet- with myself, with the other, responding to the time that I'm creating in and the space that I'm being at. From a very young age, I was constantly asking questions. Sometimes, those questions led me into political and social trouble, and I soon learned that there are no simple answers. I'm grateful that, as I've grown—both personally and artistically—I've continued to have space for questioning, for pondering, for not being sure. A question holds space, it allows me to remain in the unknown, resisting fixed frames. From there, I hope to encounter something unexpected—an invitation to dive even deeper, to stir a motion of transformation. This openness to change is central to both my artistic practice and my life.

BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION

In many cases, within the framework of a master's degree in choreography, the writing of a thesis occurs after the artistic process as a reflective text. However, in this case, I am deliberately reversing the order. My writing precedes the artistic process, allowing me to enter ideas and concepts that are relevant to my choreographic practice, through reading and writing rather than solely through physical or artistic practice.

As a choreographer, dancer, and multidisciplinary creator, I recognize that my primary mode of creation has traditionally emerged from the movement itself—the research begins in the body. Through movement-based research, I have been able to identify ideas and concepts related to choreography, performance, and connection to culture and society. However, in this instance, I am engaging in an inverse practice: I begin with writing, reading, and intellectual inquiry before stepping into the studio with a collective of artists from various disciplines- a process that will culminate in a performance in a theater setting. As an artist whose dance education, transcultural traditions, and intuition are rooted in the body, this approach of starting from visualizing it through text is also new to me. The central question guiding my written thesis is: What can writing offer me as part of my choreographic research?

Writing from the perspective of a choreographer-dancer, my research is not confined to textual analysis; rather, it is interwoven with studio practice with other dancers, sessions with collaborators, individual movement improvisation, and exploration with artists from diverse disciplines and cultures, such as music, dramaturgy, and design. These encounters generate reflections, which I then integrate into the development of my thesis production, choreographic methodology, movement research, physical tasks, scores, conceptual frameworks, and my written component.

My interests in ways of collaboration- to be in dialogue with the dilemmas embedded in a meeting, and to communicate through art- choreography with the external world has always been an inherent part of my work. In addition to my formal dance training and professional dance experience, I studied Social education and Steiner

education-Anthroposophical pedagogical approach, for four years. Following this, I worked with children of various ages, including those in homeschooling settings, and children on the autism spectrum, and as a choreographer within community-inclusive projects that integrate dance and pedagogy. The movement was always a fundamental element of my educational work, and pedagogical learning continues to inform my artistic creative processes. Today, it enters my choreographic and written work as both an ethical inquiry and a practical methodology—raising questions such as: In what ways does dance interact with various social and cultural contexts? How can a sense of collaboration and fluid community, shared knowledge emerge within each new group?

My work grows out of years of creative investigation as a dancer and choreographer and is part of my ongoing desire to develop and shape the *Visiting Practice*. At its core, this inquiry continually returns to those essential questions: How do we work together? How do we share, teach, transmit, and evolve movement and embodied knowledge? How can dance, movement, choreographic research, and multidisciplinary collaboration—with people from different places and backgrounds—remain meaningful and relevant today? This urge within me is active: a need to understand artistic research through acts of sharing, and through the search for ways of being together. It is about exploring collectively, navigating the tensions that already exist between us, and opening paths for new relations, with artists, older forms and different formats. Therefore, the investigation presented in this written component weaves together multiple perspectives, references, and wide-ranging sources—not only because this is my path to explore these questions, but as a way to actively study the emergence of a practice. A practice that centers on the concept of a visit as a choreographic and ongoing invitation.

I aim to articulate, through writing, how movement-based choreographic practice and interdisciplinary approaches inform and shape one another, offering new pathways for choreographic thinking and artistic engagement.

CHAPTER 1. ON PRACTICE

2.1 Practice who?

What does practice have to do with doing, making, thinking, action, transformation, discipline, repetition, training, habit, and performance? (Boon & Levine, 2018, p.12). The concept of practice, derived from the Latin *practica* and the Greek *praktike*, meaning "action," "doing," or "activity" (Merriam-Webster), has been widely explored across artistic and theoretical discourse—for example: André Lepecki (2006, 2016), Bojana Cvejić (2015), and Trinh T. Minh-ha (2016). Given its broad and multifaceted usage, I approach practice through three interconnected perspectives: practice as a method of learning- linking pedagogical framework in relation to my choreographic practice, practice as means of transcultural and transformative engagement, and practice as a personal exploration of diverse dance and movement methods, demonstrating how it becomes a continuous process of learning, assimilation, and critical reflection.

Given the broad and often ambiguous use of the term "practice" in artistic discourse, defining its role within my choreographic work has been both a challenge and a necessity. In Practice (2008), Boon and Levine highlight practice role as a site of ongoing negotiation rather than fixed execution, *"a proposal for other frameworks in which thinking, making, and doing can be valued"* (Boon & Levine, 2018, p.13). Similarly, I relate to practice as a continuous dialogue—one that sustains itself through repetition, adaptation, transformation, and collective engagement- learning on oneself and with others. Practice and process are both connected in my choreographic work, however, what distinguishes practice from mere process is its repetitive yet evolving nature—a continuous dialogue between movement, self, and others. Unlike process, which suggests a more trajectory toward an outcome, practice here is a commitment to ongoing engagement, a return to the same actions and questions with the possibility of change.

My choreographic processes involve usage of movement based research through different techniques, improvisation tasks, scores, together with conceptual inquiry,

experimentation, failure, reflection and revisitation. It is a method of learning through doing, a way of creating shared structure that can be revisited, reshaped, and passed on.

2.2 Anthroposophical approach to practice

One possible lens through which I approach practice is a pedagogical framework that continuously informs my choreographic practice. As I elaborated above, I refer to practice as a method for learning, therefore, my layered role as a choreographer—engaging in both professional artistic creations and community-inclusive dance projects—intersects with my background in Social and Steiner (Anthroposophical) education, offering an opportunity for choreographic practice to go hand in hand with pedagogy and social engagement. The questions that I keep revisiting are- in what ways does it relate to my artistic path and what social and anthroposophical knowledge can I give to my artistic work?

How does practice facilitate the connection between teaching and learning in the choreographic process? As a choreographer, how am I also engaged in teaching and learning—both myself and others—when in processes of movement and choreographic practice?

I engage in choreographic practice by weaving together theoretical knowledge and professional dance experience, with a pedagogical perspective, practical tools, and methods. The dialogue with the anthroposophical approach, particularly through a way of holding-facilitating space and the development of specific tasks, proves especially valuable in my artistic path. In the following, I will discuss Stiner's pedagogical approach, to further understand how I experience this artistic value.

The anthroposophical approach to philosophy and education, developed by Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925) in the 1910s and 1920s, emphasizes the holistic integration of physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual dimensions. It involves practical engagement with various arts—such as poetry, movement (eurythmy), music, painting, and sculpture, alongside biodynamic gardening, educational community work, and engagement with diverse populations, such as individuals with specific needs and those who have been through considerable trauma. Through this comprehensive approach, it aims to incorporate practical exercises that support intellectual, spiritual, and physical development.

However, it has also been criticized for its spiritualistic approach, which does not easily align with contemporary education systems. In Doubts on Spirituality: Interpreting Waldorf Ritual (2000), Karen Astley and Peter Jackson examine these ideas within the context of educational research. They explore the challenges of engaging with spiritual and transformative approaches in pedagogy, arguing that *"it needs some agreement on the kinds of things we take as evidence of spiritual change"* (Astley & Jackson, 2000). From my perspective as a choreographer, creative dancer, teacher, and facilitator, I find that similarly in artistic practices, as they point out, such an agreement remains difficult to establish. Likewise, engaging in dialogue through movement, composition, and choreographic processes with others—especially when integrating spiritual and transformative elements—is also challenging to fully conceptualize or perceive.

Steiner's perspective on practice emphasizes the integration of theory and action, the disciplined cultivation of inner capacities, and the application of insights through systematic engagement. In his lecture Practical Training in Thought (translated by Henry B. Monges and revised by Gilbert Church, Ph.D. 1966), he describes thoughts as actualities and introduces exercises designed to enhance thinking, memory, observation, and concentration. He maintained that systematic practice—through repetition—encourages more dynamic and flexible thinking and doing. In shaping my choreographic practice, I draw from my background in Steiner education, incorporating tasks that provide opportunities for reflection, adaptation, and renewal into artistic processes. Within this context, the choreographic practice is embedded with pedagogical tools designed to explore the connection and reflection between thought, emotion, and body.

One such task-based practice I engage with in my choreographic work, and invite collaborators to explore with me, involves working with remembering and forgetting. In The Foundations of Human Experience (1996), Steiner proposes that the phases of awakening and sleeping are fundamental to learning, and coincide with the states of renewal and change; *"making use of the rhythm of awakening and sleeping, remembering and forgetting"* may provide an opportunity to process and release intense or challenging experiences while consciously acknowledging them. (Steiner, 1996, Lecture VIII, p. 93)

This individual task is intuitive, repetitive, and meditative. It unfolds at the end of the day, just before sleep, as a mindful recollection of daily events in reverse order—starting from the present moment (bedtime) and moving backward to the morning. This practice encourages embodied relaxation while allowing for reflection on the day's experiences. By witnessing one's encounters and events, one can uncover moments that might have otherwise been forgotten but contained subtle interruptions or emotional-embodied-spiritual imprints. When pausing on these moments, questions arise: What was happening there? With whom? Why does this memory\encounter stand out more than others?

Following that, for me, this task can serve as a reflective somatic tool, an observation of what is happening when we meet another being. In The Foundations of Human Experience (1996), Steiner discusses the possibilities of perceiving another "I" - And the ongoing internal dialogue of dealing with the dilemma and paradox of the encounter; accompanied by feelings of sympathy and indifference- *"What is the basis of actually perceiving the I of another human being? ...this is the relationship that exists when one person meets another and perceives the other I—that is, devotion to the other–inner resistance; sympathy–antipathy."* (Steiner, 1996, p.151). This is one of the tasks I incorporate into my choreographic and embodied practice to explore the dilemma inherent in the act of meeting.

The anthroposophical approach to pedagogy provides me with practical, holistic, and spiritual tools to explore how to hold space in different choreographic processes, supporting an ongoing dialogue between teaching and learning with those I work with. This pedagogical foundation remains an integral, hands-on aspect of my choreographic process, expanding the way I construct tasks that embody the choreographic ideas and concepts I seek to explore. Furthermore, my pedagogical background serves as a pool through which I examine and give feedback on my own presence in the choreographic space—how do I facilitate while also learning from others? How to use rhythms of doing, reflecting, and releasing when needed? What tools do I employ, and how do I translate these into a shared artistic language with my collaborators?

2.3 Transformative path

2.3.1 Embodied practice from a transcultural perspective

Continuing the exploration of practice as a method of learning, in this part I will further examine its role within movement and transcultural perspectives—analyzing how practiced knowledge is transmitted over time through culture and how embodied practice can serve as a vehicle for transformation. Rooted in diverse cultural histories around the world – whether through meditation, embodied traditions, or communal rituals – practice serves as a source of learning, retention, transmission, and transformation of knowledge. Performance scholar and professor of Theatre Studies Erika Ficsher-Lichte and Theatrologist and teacher Benjamin Wihstutz, in the volume Transformative Aesthetics (2018), address the cross-cultural concept of transformation in art, one that facilitators, artists, spectators, listeners, audiences and readers often refer to. In this volume, they wish to provide a step toward *"rising awareness of art's transformative potential as a cross-cultural factor"* (Fisher-Lichte & Wihstultz 2018,p.19). As they mention, the ways to approach transformative aesthetics in performance—whether for performers, the audience, or both—are diverse and varied. Artists and choreographers engage with practice in ways that intertwine transcultural, ritualistic, and transformative dimensions, drawing on different influences and approaches to do so.
To go deeper into this topic with precision, I intend to connect with cultural theorist Aleida Assmann as well as three selected artistic examples that explore this notion and resonate with my research into embodied practice as a transcultural and transformative factor.

Cultural theorist Aleida Assmann, in her article "Archiving the Body: Cultural Memory and the Practice of Intangible Cultural Heritage" (2024), explores how cultural heritage and memory shape societies, emphasizing the role of bodily practices as living archives of cultural memory. She highlights the significance of dance and performance in preserving intangible heritage, demonstrating how embodied practices act as vital repositories of cultural knowledge. These practices constitute a dynamic and lived experience of cultural memory, sustained through regular enactment and communal

engagement, ensuring the transmission of values, histories, and traditions across generations.

"With the concept of intangible cultural heritage, ... it was finally acknowledged that there are not only material but also immaterial media of cultural memory, and that cultures are also sustained across generations and centuries through performances and practices, through singing and dancing, music-making and storytelling, cooking and pottery, rites and festivals" (Assmann, 2024, p.198).

Embodied movement practice, as *"immaterial media of cultural memory"* (Assmann, 2024) situate a path for learning, transmitting, and transforming knowledge, takes shape through rituals, gatherings, and performances, where the body, perception, sensation, and awareness serves as a landscape that contains and transforms information. Over time, individuals and collectives engaging in such practices—hold both the agency and responsibility to influence cultural memory while sharing and practicing transcultural traditions, as this immaterial knowledge is practiced and memorized, continuously evolving and adapting across generations.

2.3.2 Artists examples

Anna Halprin, choreographer, and dancer, born in Illinois (1920), has been developing innovative dance pieces and performing therapeutic movement rituals for more than sixty years. Halprin has long worked with diverse communities, developing embodied practices that serve as tools for personal and social transformation. One example is Planetary Dance (1995), a participatory movement ritual in which participants run, walk and move in a circle to create collective intention. This work was part of her broader exploration of healing through dance, particularly in times of crisis. (Halprin engaged individuals from various backgrounds, including those living with HIV/AIDS). Through the piece, participants were able to express their experiences of loss, grief, and hope, while also strengthening collective action and solidarity. I consider Halprin's work as partaking in Assmann's concept of intangible cultural heritage, as it embodies a living form of cultural memory—where the body becomes a site for healing, shared experience, and the transformation of knowledge through participatory, embodied practice.

In Making Dances that Matter (2019), Halprin explores how dance and art function as powerful means of healing, addressing deep-seated wounds within the body. As she writes, *"Dance and art offer primary ways for people to access their inner collective power. We can use art expressions to contain, express, release, and heal our fears and motivate us toward social change. Movement expresses universal human responses through a vehicle we all share—the expressive, mysterious, complex, human body"* (Halperin, 2019, p. 3).

I draw from Halprin's approach to creation and exploration, particularly the way she navigates complexities and tensions through dance practices, sustaining long-term artistic and movement-based work while adjusting to the socioeconomic requirements of her day.

Rochdi Belgasmi (1987) is a Tunisian dancer and choreographer engaged with preserving and renewing traditional Tunisian forms of dancing. He works with dance and live music through a multidisciplinary approach, addressing dance as both a reflective practice and a laboratory of the body—a refuge and a fundamental mode of expression. His work often explores ambiguities and engages with provocative themes, particularly the cultural and social dimensions. One of his pieces, "Ouled Jellaba" (2016) pays homage to Tunisia's cultural history and brings attention to overlooked traditional dance figures, it’s a metamorphosis of a sexual body, criticizing gender and questioning roles in traditional arab-muslim dance culture.

In a 2016 interview with Susannah Walden for The Daily Star, titled “Preserving History Through Dance,” Rochdi Belgasmi explains the relationship between tradition and its evolution as part of his choreographic work; “I developed choreography around this (tradition) to represent the weight of colonization in this era. In this way I give new meaning within an old form.” (Belgasmi, 2016). A new form of traditional dance practice, then, functions as a means of personal transformation while also expressing greater societal and cultural common understandings. Rochdi Belgasmi's choreographic work both maintains and reinterprets traditional Tunisian dance, transforming embodied knowledge into a dynamic medium for cultural critique and collective memory reconfiguration. This aligns with Assmann’s emphasis on bodily practices as living archives of cultural memory, highlighting their role in sustaining and reshaping cultural identity. In connection to my approach to choreographic and embodied movement

practice, this example shows how re-visiting cultural traditions through choreographic practice can ‘call’ for new forms of dance and meanings- and by that, offer an opportunity for transforming through reflecting, suggesting, practicing, and performing. This is relevant in shaping new relations with specific traditions while being open to more perspectives and understandings. It is also an important method to work through tensions and engage in critical thinking.

Paz Rojo is a choreographer, dancer, and researcher born in Madrid (1974) who works in a variety of disciplines and formats, including meetings, research contexts, video essays, books, and live performances. In her piece, Lo que baila (What Dances) 2023, she is researching and performing the distribution of knowledge and experience, the lived experience of dance. In an interview within the framework of ESTUDIO V (2024), she speaks about dancing with awareness as a way to evoke a call to what remains, describing dance as “leaving a space” (Rojo, 2023). For her, one must leave to enter something deeper. This perspective aligns with a movement practice that engages different states and layers through dance, an exploration of dance as a space of absence and emergence that highlights embodied knowledge as an unfolding process—where repetition, sensation, and awareness evoke invisible layers of memory and potential transformation. Resonating with Assmann’s concept of cultural memory and my approach—the embodied practice of dance can serve as one that reveals and unfolds layers of information, through action and repetition, exploring the “invisible and visible” (Rojo, 2023), within the body.

Bringing in artists' perspectives on embodied practice such as Halprin, Belgasmi, and Rojo, I recognize the ways movement and choreographic practice serve as a method for working through social, political, and transcultural tensions while adapting, changing, and transforming through practicing. Whether it is Halprin's collective dances for healing, Belgasmi’s work of criticizing, reviving, and transforming tradition, or Rojo’s insistence on the invisible layers of movement, these practices share a commitment to engaging the body as a site of inquiry, change, and memory. These artists explore movement through their bodies and their work. I see how embodied practice becomes both a means of questioning what exists and a way of creating space for what is yet to emerge.

2.4 A body recalls: Embodied mapping in dance and movement practices

In the final part of this chapter, I expand on my experience through a variety of dance and movement practices, both as a choreographer and a dancer influenced by diverse disciplines and cultures. This bit is a personal observation, addressing how different movement practices are learned and assimilated into my own dancing body. Building on the previous sections, I consider my dancing body as a fluid, changing archive—an immaterial medium of cultural memory. Through this lens, the body becomes a site for learning, transmitting, and reflecting knowledge. It is also a space of continuous inquiry, where I critically examine the information I engage with—deciding what to develop, transform, question, or leave behind. I write from the perspective of both a dancer and a choreographer who sometimes performs in my works, much like Halperin, Belgasmi, or Rojo, who not only choreographed but also danced within their pieces. Similarly, my work is intertwined with my own embodied knowledge and traditions—as well as the ritualistic, social, and political questions and tensions they carry—as someone who grew up in Israel and carries transcultural roots.

In Exhausting Dance: Performance and the Politics of Movement (2006), André Lepecki explores how contemporary dance and performance challenge traditional notions of movement, emphasizing themes of stillness, endurance, and political resistance in choreography. He draws connections between ritual and experimental choreography, showing how repetition and duration disrupt the expectation of continuous motion in Western dance traditions. He states: *"The dancer's body is not simply a site of movement; it is a site of exhaustion, a site where history, politics, and subjectivity are inscribed through repetition and endurance."* (Lepecki, 2006, p. 15).

Growing up practicing a wide range of dance disciplines through classes, workshops, and formal dance education—from Classical Ballet to Modern dance, Contemporary techniques, Graham, Gaga, Floor work, Jazz, Release techniques, Somatic practices, Hip Hop, Locking, Popping, Yemeni dance, and Improvisation—I was initially unaware of the knowledge my body had absorbed as part of my "informal" dance education. In connection with Lepecki's notion of the body as a site of history and politics, and drawing from Assmann's concept of bodily and performative archives of cultural

memory, I find it valuable to reflect on my journey of transcultural embodied practice and dance learning. Expanding on these aspects allows both myself and the reader to gain a more transparent lens through which to understand what my individual body carries, and through that, my choreographic thinking and making.

My embodied knowledge and memory encompasses physicalities and specific dance practices rooted in my transcultural history. From my Moroccan heritage, practices such as the pelvic articulations found in belly dancing and the head circulation movements, Ras حركة الرأس (Harakat ar-Ras), which refer to rhythmic head isolations and figure-eight patterns traditionally performed by women. Similar movement qualities can also be seen in Chaabi, a Moroccan folk music and dance originating from northern Morocco, which aims to induce trance states in both the dancers and the audience, carrying a spiritual transformative element. It is typically performed with hand-clapping, singing improvisation, dancing, shouting, oud playing, and hand drumming.

From my Romanian roots, I learned various circle dances practiced in events and gatherings, those circle dances (called "hora" or "sârba"), are a traditional Romanian and Moldovan folk dance where dances performed in a circular formation, sometimes with dancers holding hands or linking arms while the circle spins, usually counterclockwise. The steps are verified from easy patterns (a sequence of three steps forward and one step back) to more complex sequences. These dances are often accompanied by folk music, played on instruments such as the violin, accordion, clarinet, and flute. The rhythm of the music is typically fast-paced, with strong, regular beats that guide the dancers who clap their hands and click their fingers in rhythms related to the music.

The "Hora" traditional circle dances also were woven together in Israel—originating from Eastern European folk tradition, associated with Jewish culture, and performed at celebrations such as weddings, festivals, and other communal gatherings. I practiced those dances every week in an outdoor open-to-the-public session. Those dances are characterized by simple to more complex, repetitive steps that allow the participants

(not necessarily dancers) to easily join in, creating a sense of unity and collective celebration.

Reflecting on my own embodied- dance and movement background—rooted in diverse movement traditions, classical, contemporary, and somatic practices—I see how my understanding of choreographic-embodied practice is shaped by the interweaving of these influences. My dancing body is a dynamic space where memory, heritage, and contemporary inquiry meet, and are being questioned, where personal and cultural histories are not only remembered but also re-imagined through the body.

To weave together

In this chapter on practice, I transition from a more broad notion of artistic practice to a perspective on practice as shaped by a pedagogical approach—one that continues to inform my choreographic work, where it functions as a method of learning. I then elaborate on the transcultural transformative perspective of embodied practice, addressing practice as both a form of learning and a means of transmitting knowledge across cultures. This includes an examination of specific artists who shape their choreographic embodied practices while engaging with culture, tradition, politics, and the body. Finally, I turn inward to reflect on my own transcultural journey through diverse embodied and dance practices. In reflecting on the notion of Practice throughout this chapter, I think of Practice as a form of learning, continuous dialogue, and transformative act— shaped by embodied exploration, and transcultural, spiritual, and pedagogical dimensions. It is a space of repetition that allows for change, a space of learning that opens to unpredictability, and a way of embodying both individual and collective social dialogue.

CHAPTER 2. ON VISIT

2.1 Arriving somewhere: On the notion of visiting

"To visit is to dwell in the threshold, to touch without possessing, to enter and leave traces without erasure…To visit is to stay aware of one's own foreignness while practicing a form of care. What does it mean to be a visitor in a land, in a body, in a history…and yet to move as if part of its breathing?"

— Trinh T. Minh-ha, from *"Reassemblage"* (1982)

The idea to use the notion of *'visiting'* as part of my choreographic-embodied exploration, first emerged during my initial year of choreographic MA studies. It was within this period of inquiry that I began to explore more deeply my relations with my transcultural roots, centering my research on a specific ritual: the Henna Ritual from my Moroccan heritage (A celebratory gathering combining dance, music and food, where hospitality, meeting and being with strangers are at its core). This tradition, which has its roots in Jewish-Moroccan cultural practices, resonated with me as a site of embodied knowledge, encapsulating essential aspects of both my choreographic research and embodied movement practice.

In relation to the notions discussed in the previous *Practice* chapter, my lived experiences compel me to reflect on the temporality, vulnerability, and transformative power of the body. As a choreographer and a dancer, I consider how movement embodied knowledge can be transmitted and shared in ways that are both respectful and mindful of questions surrounding belonging, while being attuned to multiple perspectives that coexist alongside one another. Coming back to Assmann, in my choreographic embodied exploration, I found a repetitive need to *'visit'* the varied *immaterial* knowledge, movements, emotional and spiritual information that had been inscribed in my body for generations. Furthermore, informed by both my past and my more recent experiences living in Finland, I continuously revisit the notion of 'visiting'—exploring its meanings within choreographic, social, and cultural frameworks. This position renews and deepens my perspective on how I wish to

construct my choreographic practice in collaboration with others (diverse disciplines, cultures…), and on which critical points I seek to address and engage with through this shared work.

I am aware that there are multiple ways to approach the concept of *visit and visiting*— for instance, as a social or cultural act, such as hosting in a private home; as a visit to a foreign country; as a visit in a museum, or even in the context of a football match, where a visiting team plays in the home stadium of the host team. When I began exploring this concept from different perspectives, I realized that it encompasses distinct elements, behavioral-social codes, aesthetics, and qualities. However, for this exploration, I have chosen to focus on visiting through the lens of *tourism*, as I grew up in a specific region and life situation that compels me to observe, question, and critically reflect on the concept of *belonging with*. This reflection also challenges me to confront and ask key questions about visiting itself: How do I move through the world while embodying care, both of myself and others? What is my connection to a specific landscape, culture, and set of practices? How do I continue to connect with my transcultural roots in a foreign land?
How does *visiting* expose or challenge social and political issues, and how do I negotiate the ethical dilemmas within these complexities?

To address the notion of visiting from a more embodied perspective, I want to come back to Assmann, and to the exploration of memory and forgetting as survival strategies, a repetitive rhythmic way to visit a particular knowledge, memory, embodied-physical practice. In *"The Body Archive: Cultural Memory and the Practice of Intangible Cultural Heritage"* (2024), she is talking particularly of the way dance and performance embody and transmit cultural memory. She writes: *"Technics of memory and rhythms of regular repetition support the memory in creating continuity and carrying the life of the community into the future"* (Assmann, 2024, p.197)

Assmann presents the declarative memory - mnemonics - that is an integral part of celebration as cultural memory. This is a specific mode of remembering that is related to continuous physical repetitive practice. *"Mnemonics are an integral part of intangible cultural heritage and a prerequisite for the celebration of traditions. The term stands for*

a specific art of remembering in the form of continuous practice or physical training" (Assamann 2024, p. 200)

Reflecting on the above- the notion of remembering that is related to a physical continuous repetitive practice, and while 'visiting' in my own memorised embodied exploration, I have noticed that the process revealed traces of bodily knowledge and memory that, while seemingly dormant, had never been forgotten by the body. Through this, I was compelled to interrogate the ethical dimensions of cultural embodiment, the way through which knowledge, movement and tradition are transmitted, and the critical evolving place of this within both my personal life and its place in my artistic practice. In this chapter, I aim to explore further the potential I see in *visiting*, connecting it to choreographic, embodied, performative and social aspects. *Visiting* as a concept that entails specific qualities, initiates responsibilities and connects to time, space and temporality that play a relevant role in my choreography-embodied practice and artistic thinking.

2.2 Between guest and stranger: Thinking the visitor in tourism

"visit", originates from the Latin word "visītāre", which means to go to see, to attend frequently, or to inspect (Etymology World Online). "To visit" is a term related to varied spheres.

In relation to the area of tourism, *to visit* is to travel to a place for leisure, sightseeing, or temporary exploration. In *The Tourist Gaze 3.0* (2011), John Urry and Jonas Larsen discuss the historical, geographical and sociological variations of the gaze inside the phenomena of tourism, considering the development and transformations within the tourist relationships. They suggest; *"Tourist relationships arise from a movement of people to, and their stay in, various destinations. This necessarily involves some movement through space, that is, the journeys and periods of stay in a new place or places".* (Urry & Jonas, 2011, p.3*).* When defining the characteristics of visitors—particularly tourists—Urry and Jonas describe tourism as an experience that *"involves corporeal movement and forms of pleasure"* (Urry & Jonas, 2011, p. 21). In this sense, visiting is an active process tied to a specific duration and spatiality—an act

of ‘stepping into’ a context, physical space, or conceptual realm. It entails engagement, movement, and a commitment to an experience. However, visiting as a tourist also carries ethical implications, raising questions about locality, impact, and the privilege of mobility—especially when travel is undertaken for pleasure, tied to economic ability to travel, and to a certain population being in a privileged position.

In their text, Urry and Jonas discusses the social dimensions of visiting as tourists in a space, where the physical exploration, the gaze, and the attitude of the visitor is bound to cultural, social and political codes that changes with every tourist, *“tourists look at ‘difference’ differently”* (Urry & Jonas, 2011, p.3). ‘Being a tourist’, connects to the will and ability to experience something not ordinary, out of one’s own daily life. Therefore, *to visit* is not merely to observe; it is to participate, to inquire, and to be affected by difference. An expected social behaviour of a *visitor* is to *“look at the environment with interest and curiosity”* (Urry & Jonas, 2011, p.1) , to not claim ownership but instead, to enter with awareness and respect, recognizing the boundaries of what they encounter.

A tourism visit inherently implies a certain temporality—a time that is about to end, and as noted- *“there is intention to return ‘home’ within a relatively short period of time”* (Urry & Jonas, 2011, p.3). But , I will argue that visitors, sometimes, return to the place of their origin, only to find that it is no longer home, and there, they can find themselves as some kind of tourists in a place that once was familiar. When I consider the concept of *visit* for my own investigation, I choose to take both perspectives - when the visitor is ‘engaged with difference’ solely for pleasure from curiosity and respect, and when they are visiting out of necessity. In the context of dance, choreography, and the development of embodied practice, I see the relations of visiting with ‘returning home’ as something much more layered and complex. This leads me to those questions:

In this context, could a visit become, in a sense, part of the home itself? From a dancer\performer perspective, can the act of visiting in a curtain physicality, sensation, embodied knowledge be similar to the act of connection to ‘home’?

What then is the ‘home’ one returns to, particularly in the context of globalization, linking it to choreographic practice or dance-embodied knowledge, in a body that learns from a myriad of cultures, places, techniques, and histories?

My interest in studying the visitor through the lens of tourism—is linking choreography, body and movement to social considerations and interactions, where individuals come into contact with their environment in a way that raises ethical questions. I put emphasis on the body as a source of information, one that learns through movement in time and space, through multiple cultures and outer- inner forces. Whether in relation to the 'other' or 'difference'-, the environment, or culture, dance and embodied practices in choreographic framework, these encounters provoke self reflection, an opportunity for learning.

As a conclusion, *the visitor*, in my exploration, the context of choreography, dance and performance embodies a complex active role, where learning and transformation occur through time, specific space and embodied experience. Unlike the premise of tourist, a visitor in my choreographic research implies a more two-sided relationship, hinting towards more individual responsibility. Visitors in this sense, interact with and contribute to the space they enter, and they get influenced by the experience in return. In this dynamic relationship, the visitor shapes and is shaped by a context while respectfully engaging with and belonging side by side with. Related to performance-making, it asks to evoke notions of temporality, agency, and ethics, as well as responsibility, a possible way of thinking about relationality to movement and space, passing of energy, and transmitting, and sharing embodied knowledge with others.

2.3 Audience as visitors: Thinking the visitor in performance

The role of the audience can be as well connected to the activeness of 'visiting' discussed above; The audience as visitors, whose presence potentially shapes the space, composition and the choreography, transforming the performance into a shared, relational experience.

Relational aesthetics, a term coined by Nicolas Bourriaud in the 1990s, describes art as a space for social interaction, where meaning emerges through relationships rather than being solely contained in the artwork itself. In his 1998 book *Relational Aesthetics*, Bourriaud defines relational art as *"a set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space."* (Bourriaud, 1998)

This connection echoes the framework and theory of performance scholar Erika Fischer-Lichte, known for her work on theatricality, performativity, and the transformative nature of performance. While Fischer-Lichte does not explicitly frame her work within a relational aesthetic, some of her theories of performance share key overlaps. Bourriaud's relational aesthetics focuses on social relations in contemporary art, Fischer-Lichte extends this idea into the physical and sensory realm, emphasizing how performance affects bodies, emotions, and spatial awareness.

Fischer-Lichte explains how performance can transform the audience and the performer, resulting in new ways of seeing, acting, and feeling in The Transformative Power of Performance (2008). She draws attention to how the artists' and audience members' corporeal co-presence produces a dynamic interplay in which gestures, motions, and spatial arrangements elicit visceral reactions, using examples like Marina Abramović's Lips of Thomas (1975). According to this viewpoint, performance serves as a catalyst for embodied encounters that alter perceptions and a place where the *"transformation of some spectators into actors"* (Fischer-Lichte, 2008, p.15) takes place. My approach, on the other hand, views the audience as visitors and places them in an in-between setting —one that extends an invitation to participate while maintaining the autonomy to abstain. This framing seeks to explore whether the agency granted to the audience as visitors can facilitate a performance space where multiple situations unfold organically, without imposing participation, allowing them to navigate their own level of interaction within the performance environment.

2.4 Artist visits: Isabel Lewis

Choreographer and artist Isabel Lewis takes this interconnectedness dynamic between performers and audiences further in her work-hosted *occasions* (2014) where she is busy working through performance, hospitality, and environment, inviting participants to engage in a multisensory experience that wishes to question the relations between art and life. In a conversation at the *Moving in November Festival* in Helsinki (2021), Lewis speaks with the festival's artistic director, Kerstin Schroth, about the concept of *heterotopia* as the starting point for her ongoing artistic exploration. Drawing inspiration from the ecosystem of a garden and the intricate ways its elements interact and influence one another, she describes heterotopia as encompassing *"worlds within*

worlds and the multiplicity of modes of relationship within them, which often produce contradictory, confusing, disturbing, but perhaps also transformative effects" (Lewis, 2021). Reflecting on this idea, she explains that it resonated with her own lived experience of contemporary life. *"I wanted to create dances that could be heterotopian"* (Lewis, 2021).

This process connects with my understanding of choreographic embodied practice as an invitation for the *visitor* to become an integral part of its overall composition. The performance is approached as an interconnected system, where all elements— artists, designers, dancers, spatial environment, technical staff, and so on—mutually influence one another throughout both the creative process and the live performance.

The performance 'world' cannot achieve equilibrium without the audience-visitors, who are therefore a crucial part of the potential of the performance. They are perceived as a meeting point that not only informs the preparatory process but also coexists with the performance in the present moment, influencing its unfolding and extending its resonance beyond the act of presentation itself.

"The design and layout of the garden suggests but does not determine forms of engagement" (Lewis, 2021). Similarly, in my work, audience-visitors are invited to engage by stepping into a choreographic invitation that may call for interaction. The term "visiting" reframes the audience's role—not as passive witnesses, mere spectators, or "actors" (drawing on Erika Fischer-Lichte's work), but as possibly engaged contributors having the potential of shaping the performance in one way or another. This invitation encourages a form of respectful engagement, in which audience members, through their chosen level of interaction, leave behind traces of their presence and participation.

CHAPTER 3. VISITING PRACTICE

3.1 Stepping in: Embodied choreographic practice

Continuing the previous discussions, in this chapter I engage with specific elements and tools that have arisen through conceptual research and studio based experimentation (with dancers and musicians) in relation to "visit" and "practice", towards shaping the *visiting practice.* This embodied choreographic practice is not perceived as fixed or complete, but as in a state of becoming. From this perspective, writing is an integral part of the process itself, supporting me in communicating my research more effectively within the choreographic frameworks.

In the following, I delve into embodied tools– engaging with the dancing body, exploring the interplay between individual-collective transformative embodied experience. Then, I move to performative tools—experimenting with performativity and social connection through the gaze. Finally, I explore choreographic tools—where choreography becomes a way of facilitating space. This includes micro-politics, which involves looking beyond the body of the performer to consider the spatial and temporal dynamics in which people encounter one another.

As a continuation, in Chapter Four, I discuss potential forms of representation for the practice- how the *visiting practice* is activated within my choreographic research through two examples.

3.2 Core elements and tools in the Visiting Practice

3.2.1 Repetition → Transformation

The concept of the body as an archive is addressed by Aleida Assmann in *"Archiving the Body – Cultural Memory and the Practice of Intangible Cultural Heritage,"* published in *Materialities in Dance and Performance: Writing, Documenting, Archiving* (2024). Assmann explores how the human body functions as a living repository of cultural memory, particularly within the realms of dance and performance.

"The body itself becomes a living archive in which gestures, rhythms, and practices are stored, repeated, and transmitted across generations—not as fixed data, but as mutable, embodied knowledge" (Assmann, 2024, p. 196).

The body as an archive serves as the foundation for my understanding of the dancing body within *Visiting Practice* as a *fluid archive*. This fluidity can be illuminated through André Lepecki's interpretation of translation, as explored in *Singularities: Dance in the Age of Performance* (2016). Drawing on Walter Benjamin's essay *The Task of the Translator* (1923), Lepecki proposes that translation is not simply the act of transferring a work across time, language, or medium, but rather an ongoing process of re-creation—*"across new and transitive instantiations of their unlived life"* (Lepecki, 2016, p. 115).

In this sense, I perceive the body as an archive in a continuous act of translation. It holds knowledge, but not in fixed form. Rather, this knowledge is constantly reactivated, reshaped, and transformed. Just as each translation, through repetition, subtly alters the original, the body too revisits and reinterprets its learned movements, gestures, and unconscious memories—making them something ever-evolving, fluid, and alive.

Following Assmann and Lepecki's interpretation of Benjamin, I see the dancing body (understood here as the whole self—intelectual, physical body, spirit, perception, memory, motion…) within *Visiting Practice* as a fluid archive: a site of knowledge, but also of exchange, transformation, and in a state of becoming. The act of dancing becomes a form of translation—*not* the reproduction of a form, but a re-creation imbued with new potential. A repetition toward difference. As Lepecki puts it, translation happens *"any once again, with difference"* (Lepecki, 2016, p. 115).

Through this lens, the dancing body carries artistic and cultural work forward in ways that both preserve and transform it—opening up possibilities that extend beyond the initial form, and inviting an element of the unknown into the very heart of performing.

Lepecki's (2016) notion "*any once again, with difference"* within the *visiting practice,* positions repetition of difference as a central tool—an evolving process in which each recurrence becomes another translation, practicing with movements subtly distinct from the ones before. Connecting this to the elements of the *visitor* from the previous chapter,

the use of repetitive movements that repeat with subtle transformations can be a way of forming ever-changing relationships; between the dancer-performer to the space and audience, between the dancing body and itself, and between performers and one another. Ultimately, to *visit repetition* is to return: to an information you know (self, body, perception, sequence, task, movement), and to moments that invite difference.
To dance with subtly shifting movements, gently opening awareness to the possibility of small transformations. Transformation can come as an internal or external impulse, and the dancer has the freedom to choose what impulse to follow. The decision may concern the direction of movement, spatial orientation, timing, movement quality, tempo, or composition in relation to others in the space—just to give a few examples.

An example of this would be working with repetitive movements and gestures while the dancer remains in constant awareness of the small transformations that emerge in the act of repeating; At each moment, the movement is perceived as visiting the dancing body, and the dancer may decide: what change do I follow? The dancer's agency to choose what kind of impulse to follow is, for me as a choreographer, particularly compelling, as it generates both responsibility, and freedom, and possibly invites new compositional, spatial, social, and durational relations. The visiting elements - of not owning but belonging with, the responsibility and respect towards a context and information- space, audience, fellow performers, influencing and contributing through one's bodily knowledge is reflected here: the performer can interact actively with- how much do they want to engage with this particular information? How do they contribute and influence their knowledge of the space of creation while respecting it?
This experimentation aims to invite a flow of movement and thought, celebrating creativity at the moment—while remaining aware of the group and situations around. This way of working also welcomes choreographic compositions that I- as a choreographer, cannot fully predict in advance.

The question that arises from this could be: *how, through the repetition of movement, elements, and gestures, can we observe and invoke even the smallest transformations?*
It allows me to think of the dancing body in *visiting practice* as an ongoing dialogue between inner reflection and outer action through repetitive gestures-translated with difference, movements of constant transformation- where one is learning through

repetitive bodily experiences and encounters with others. These modes of practice serve as practical tools in the *visiting practice*, where the dancing body itself learns, negotiates, and then transforms relationships of closeness, difference, resistance, apathy, and empathy. *Repetition toward transformation* contains latent energy—a potential that allows a translated idea, movement, or piece of information to both reflect past knowledge and offer new perspectives.

3.2.2 Traces and layers

Continuing the exploration of the body as a fluid archive - through which there is preservation, learning, and transformation of movement and knowledge, I return to the example of Paz Rojo, whose work *Lo que baila* (What Dances) 2023 refers to systematic movement practice with what exists and with what is hidden or not visible at first. In the *visiting practice*, the dancing body reveals and unfolds layers, exploring traces (both old and new), embedded within the individual body, tracing its history and continuously unfolding its potential.

The notion of traces is central to my understanding of *visiting practice*. Jacques Derrida's concept of the trace offers a lens through which to explore how movement, cross-generational memory, and encounters leave imprints that persist within the body—layers that exist, change, and adapt. For Derrida, a trace is not merely a mark left behind; rather, it is like tracing a blurred image of essence itself—never fully present as a whole. In 'Of Grammatology' (1976), he addresses the trace as *"not a presence but rather the simulacrum of a presence that dislocates, displaces, and refers beyond itself"* (Derrida, 1976, p. 156). It is as if one is trying to capture movement while moving—an attempt to grasp something that can never be grasped, beyond itself.

In the perspective of dance, movement is hardly fully perceivable in its entirety. In a way, a dancer plays with 'ghosts in time', as movement exists in relation to what came before and what follows, and place- where, with whom, in what context. It is fleeting, inherently linked to the performer, the audience, the performance space, and the collective experience. To consider the *"simulacrum of presence"* (Derrida, 1976), in relation to movement, means centering the idea of trace—following hints and staying with the imagination of a possible, yet always incomplete whole. In this sense, this embodied movement practice can be understood as an ongoing dialogue with these

traces, allowing individual and collective memory to resurface, transform, and take new forms while embracing the unknown whole.

For example, when a dancer revisits a movement, the act of repetition does not erase the past but instead layers it with new contexts, tempos, and relationships. These accumulated layers reflect both the dancer's evolving self and the traces of their encounters with others—bringing in the notion of collectivity into the *visiting practice*, while multiple traditions, techniques, and influences are shaped by beings, objects, time, and space. Repetition, as discussed earlier, is a form of *"once again but different."* (Lepecki, 2016, p. 115). Trace—drawing from Derrida's notion—complicates this further by questioning what presence even is to begin with. The way trace refers beyond itself is connected to my choice of bringing in Benjamin's work on translation, which moves *"across new and transitive instantiations of their unlived life."* (Lepecki 2016). If I transpose this into a dance and choreography framework, working with traces as tools, extends beyond the purely physical, visible body and the idea of dance as an art form centered on presence (even with its emphasis on ephemerality). It gestures toward something much harder to grasp—*"unlived lives",* (Lepecki 2016) - to somewhat of unseen forces. It opens up a space for thinking about movement not just in terms of form but also in terms of energy.

3.2.3 Ethics and the gaze- towards performative exploration

Moving from the dancing body to potentiality in performativity, I engage with *The Ethics of Visuality: Levinas and the Contemporary Gaze (2008)*, where Hagi Kenaan explores Emmanuel Levinas's philosophy of the 'optics as ethics' (mid-20th century) and its ethical implications, primarily centered on the idea of the *Other* and the responsibility towards others. In the book, the Face section describes the fundamental role of the visual dimension in the understanding of our human existence. *"The face too is always part of the visual space: there it breathes and, ultimately, only there can it be revealed."* (Kenaan, 2008, p 31).

He argues that the human face symbolizes 'Otherness' (alterity and transcendence), proposing that this perspective can open up a new kind of optics essential for ethical

living in the contemporary world. In the *visiting practice*, this element is perceived as a performative element, and practiced as a physical tool: We (performers, dancers) explore the multiple ways of using the performer's gaze, serving as a pathway to an ethical response. By recognizing the face as a symbol of alterity, performers acknowledge the ethical responsibility inherent in our gaze, emphasizing respect and sensitivity in our interactions. *"The face, in [Levinas' view] concretely expresses the living presence of an infinite dimension that cannot be conveyed through a reflective language aspiring to totality. The face is a testimony."* (Kenaan, 2008, p.25)

K'naan's discussion on ethics and the gaze connects to the idea of reflection and ethical self-awareness, especially through the presence of another person. This relates to the Anthroposophical (Steiner) perspective, which emphasizes the role of inner observation and responsibility in relation to others. In The Foundations of Human Experience (1996), Steiner examines the complexities of perceiving another "I," emphasizing the continuous internal negotiation that takes place in such encounters. He describes this process as a dynamic inner dialogue between openness to the other and internal resistance, between sympathy and indifference. This tension—the simultaneous reflective pull toward connection and separation, is related to K'naan's notion of the ethics of the gaze which is reflected through witnessing the face of the other.

Following this, an example of a reflective somatic tool in the practice involves observing what unfolds in the encounter with another being—how movement, presence, and the qualities of the gaze shape our perception of both self and other. Through physical relational tasks, I explore how changes in the quality of gaze can transform interactions. The gaze becomes a tool for reflection—helping us experience ourselves, connect with others (whether performers or audience-visitors), or even choose to disconnect. In this way, it opens up new possibilities for presence, perception, and embodied communication. The gaze is researched in its various forms, for example—direct, peripheral, fleeting, or sustained.

While working with the dancers and performers, I use a guided embodied improvisation that invites the performers to observe- While walking, sitting, or moving freely in the studio space, I'm asking questions like "What do you see, what do you or sense? While moving in the space, performers interact by observing the space (shapes, colors,

textures), other artists, and one's own body. Then, we experiment with how we use the gaze as a source of recognition of the audience- as visitors- researching what could create a welcoming feeling for visitors to enter a choreographic performative space. How do we change the qualities of gaze from inviting, observing, and inner gaze, and how it helps to create different meanings in the dramaturgy of the performance?

Coming back to the *visitor*, in *The Tourist Gaze 3.0* (2011), by John Urry and Jonas Larsen, here, I also connect to the gaze as *" regulates the relationships between the varies sensuous experiences…identifying what is visually out-of-ordinary, what are relevant differences and what is the 'other'"* (Urry & Larsen, 2011, p.12) thus, central to this inquiry is the ethical responsibility of meeting: how do performers and dancers, engage with the "other" in ways that invite to see and be seen? How can the gaze—a potent and vulnerable act—serve in the *visiting practice,* as a performative tool for opening a space for ethical engagement, in dance performances?

3.2.4 Dance to be shared… Ethical and political dimensions of the Visiting Practice

My exploration suggests the *visiting practice* as a practice of spatial facilitation—one that encompasses micro-political dimensions by moving beyond the performer's body to the rhythms and relations that shape how people meet in time and space—elements that are invaluable within a creative choreographic process. These dimensions, as choreographic tools, suggest a way to reimagine roles, responsibilities, and the conditions for circulation of knowledge. At the same time, it is crucial to address and critically assess the issues surrounding the sharing of knowledge, representation, and ethics as part of this process. In Singularities, Dance and the age of performance (2016), Lepecki reflect on an earlier work of him (Lepecki 2013, p.14-15), related to movement and the political :

> *" a movement (bewegung), defined by intersubjective action, that moreover must be learned, rehearsed, and experienced. Again and again and again, through every repetition, renewed. And what is the practice that needs to be practiced in order to*

*ensure that the political not vanished from the world? Precisely that thing called freedom. The vanishing of the political from the world is the vanishing of the experience and practice of movement as freedom." (*Lepecki, *2016, p.13).*

Dance, movement, exists in the moment of performance, deeply tied to human nature and the inevitable truth that nothing lasts forever—nor belongs to any one entity. Instead, dance belongs *with*, existing *for* a moment in time and space. As Isabel Lewis argues in a discussion on *Tanz Macht Berlin* (2025), *"dance is not easily made into a commodity and that is not its weakness but rather its strength. Dance is a form of shared transcultural wealth."* In my invitation to *visit as a practice*, I seek to welcome a choreographic approach that transcends cultural and national boundaries, positioning dance as a collective resource rather than a private, owned commodity—one that enriches societies through exchange, adaptation, and collaboration. However, this process also requires attention and sensitivity to the political and social complexities of how we are transmitting knowledge. Sharing cultural, traditional, embodied practice or any specific expertise, must be approached with respect and deep understanding, ensuring that adaptation remains ethical and does not erase or appropriate, but rather fosters meaningful dialogue, possible exchange.

Born and raised in Israel, I have lived within an intense political, social, and ethical climate marked by constant lack of physical and emotional security, abuse of power, restriction of freedom of movement, war, loss, helplessness, and discrimination, a strong sense of life, always on the edge of disappearance. This has been alongside a strong sense of community, commitment, hospitality, care and feeling of belonging with. For me, engaging in artistic creation with others takes on a political and activist role. It's a space where sharing and belonging comes with personal responsibility, suggesting possible conditions for artistic exchange and the opening of new relational dynamics within established frameworks. Approaching politics in the back door, the practice of coming together, looking at the lines of tension and working with it, in and out of the studio and choreographic research, reflects the complex reality I have experienced. My ongoing work explores the layers embedded in my body—knowledge, strength, care, the lessons of hospitality—and seeks tools for survival by addressing what has been missing.

The understanding that embodied knowledge is vast, complex, and rich—coupled with the desire to share it— raises critical questions and issues, many of which cannot be fully resolved at this moment. Conscious work is required within creative processes: responsible and ethical exploration, along with the continuous adaptation of the conditions that make collaboration both possible and appropriate. From my experience, these questions are ongoing, and each artistic process becomes a space for further learning and adaptation, shaped through dialogue with others across choreographic and interdisciplinary practices.

CHAPTER 4. LIVE PROCESSES - ACTUALITIES FROM CHOREOGRAPHIC RESEARCH

4.1 Circle Gatherings

The *circle gatherings* serve as a practical space for inquiry, reflection, and exchange, where tools from *Visiting Practice* are activated. First developed in my first year as a choreography MA student, performing my solo\duet ‘gathering night’ (2023), then re-shaped and conducted as a guided gathering when I was invited to share the practice at Impulstanz Vienna International Festival 2024, The Symposium for Dance and other Contemporary Practices (LACE 2).

In these guided gatherings, choreography emerges as a relational field—where embodied knowledge and encounters generate intimate, shared experiences. Through the act of being together—dancing, witnessing, and exchanging—participants dive into reflective embodied explorations. The tasks in these gatherings are inspired by the Moroccan Henna ritual, serving as both a conceptual foundation and method for exploring the premise of “being with the possible other”. Those gatherings were shaped through specific questions: How does one engage with a movement, language, or ritual rooted in a particular culture or tradition? What does it mean to inhabit such a practice as a visitor—respecting its origins while allowing oneself to be affected by difference, and to influence it in return? From this perspective, how might a traditional ritual be renewed—reimagined in response to the needs of the present moment, this specific place, and the people who take part in it? This approach engages with social, political, and ethical dimensions while questioning the potentiality of community within both daily interactions and artistic processes.

© Daniel Motola / from *Gathering Night* (2023) / Kadence Neill (left) and Chen Nadler (right)

4.1.2 The Symposium

The Symposium for Dance and Other Contemporary Practices 2024, initiated by pavle heidler, Deirdre C. Morris, and Sylvia Scheidl, is a format that *"examine the challenge of place, the restriction of its specificity, and explore strategies for successful interpersonal cross-cultural contact-making in the age of gentrification, polarization, and segregation."* (heidler, 2024). The Symposium structure focused on three days; opening with a shared meeting, then *Deep Dives* where choreographers or researchers shared their practice and creative vision on the topic of hospitality and embodied practices, followed by panel discussions.

As part of my facilitation of *Deep Dive*, I introduced the *Circle Gatherings* as a space for participants—from the intersections of art, academia, activism, and multidisciplinary practices—to engage in reflective, embodied tasks, combining ritualistic practices of self-observation while encountering strangers. Resonating with Levinas's concept of ethics of the gaze, and Steiner's perspective on encountering the self through the

relational movement to others, where the self is felt, moved, and mirrored through others, we experimented with the 'otherness' we perceive in the world—and recognized it within ourselves- *"Between the self and the world, you will discover yourself."* (Steiner, 1922). By being physically present with one another, and reflectively observing what unfolds between us, we became aware of the movement that takes place between two bodies: staying with the initial strangeness, and allowing the time it takes for comfort and familiarity to emerge.

(c) Lara Cortellini / *Circle Gathering*, ImpulsTanz / Stéphanie Janaina (left) and Chen Nadler (right)

4.1.3 A ritual, now we meet

The Henna Ritual, a traditional ceremony in Moroccan Jewish culture, is shaped by Berber, Arab, and Sephardic influences and traces its origins to ancient North African and Middle Eastern traditions. Dating back centuries, it also appears in different formats in other cultural ceremonies, such as Indian and Iranian traditions. Originally a pre-wedding celebration, the gathering brings together both people who know each other (family, friends) and those who are strangers. The ritual weaves dance, live music,

and food, creating an inviting social space. Throughout, the roles of host and guest shift and blur, as everyone is invited to participate equally, cultivating the sense of shared agency and collective responsibility—both in caring for one another and in carrying the event together.

The celebration comes to an end when participants apply henna to their hands in a circular pattern. Traditionally, the henna is prepared in advance by a family member, and each participant is invited to take part in the ritual—applying henna to the center of both palms and then performing the same ritual for another person. After the henna is applied, a cloth is placed over the hand and tied with a thread—often a red velvet ribbon—so that every guest leaves with this shared "gift" carrying it home with them as a symbolic trace of the collective experience.
This gesture carries meaning, reflecting both an individual's place within the community and an offering of goodwill toward strangers who are welcomed as friends. In exploring the act of applying henna to the palm, I discovered a choreographic-social potential and a practical tool that supports my research—especially in relation to the afterlife of each encounter. Even after the celebration ends and the henna is washed away, its stain remains on the skin for days, sometimes weeks. It lingers as an imprint, a layer of memory that holds a sense of relational possibility.

At The Symposium for Dance and Other Contemporary Practices, we explored this element as participants engaged their kinaesthetic awareness—walking, sitting, standing, touching, noticing details and textures—while guided to find comfort in each position and movement. This sensory exploration invited attunement to their bodies and the presence of others, all while holding a quiet mantra: How can I feel comfortable, safe, and effortless while moving and being with people I don't know? Then, in pairs, they practiced the act of seeing the eyes of the other, as a form of attunement—to see and to be seen. A central moment in the ritual involves offering an intention- a wish to the other. This is then symbolically sealed, marked like a trace, as a thread is tied over the palms, echoing the gesture from the original henna ritual. To close the encounter, participants in the symposium were invited to reflect physically—moving solo through the space in response to the experience and the new layer held in their hands.

Meanwhile, their partner took on the role of witness. They then switched roles, allowing each person to experience both the act of offering and the act of receiving.

Through those individual and couple tasks, repetitive ritualistic gestures, and reflective improvisation, the question of who are the visitors and who are the performers are brought into focus. This recalls Erika Fischer-Lichte's discussion on the shifting roles between audience and performers elaborated in the transformative act of performance (Fischer-Lichte, 2008) —in the Circle Gatherings, participants practiced how they notice difference, affect each other and the space, while moving fluidly between those who perform and those who observe, continuously alternating between them.

5.2 THE FEAST

In May 2025, my thesis work *THE FEAST*, will be performed. This interdisciplinary piece includes dance, music, food, and design, exploring the layered notion of a possible meeting through the concepts, elements, and tools of the *Visiting Practice*. Stepping into this creation, I carry a memory from my grandmother, Hasiba, who not once told me: *"You are my eyes"*. This phrase becomes a personal meditative suggestion and an ethical consideration. It gently points to the idea that through the presence of the other, I come to meet myself.

THE FEAST will be made in collaboration with a group of artists from various disciplines and cultural backgrounds. The group consists of artists spanning various ages and stages in their careers, some I have worked with for a long time, while others will be new collaborators. In January 2025, I started working with them through meetings, recordings, improvisation sessions, and guided movement exploration in the studio. We also discussed thoughts on the concept.

Working with a large number of artists presents difficulties as the process involves bringing in different viewpoints and views from the beginning. This is where the Visiting Practice becomes an actuality: working with a diverse group of people reveals a constant need for conversation, a process of ongoing readjustment—one that reflects the multi-layered complexities of encounter, which are frequently entangled with ethical,

political, and social dimensions in alongside differing artistic perspectives. Even though it can be complicated, it is also generative since it forces me to be explicit about roles and decision-making processes at every stage and opens up alternatives I might not have thought of on my own. Through experience, mistakes, and reflections from the past, I have learned the importance of establishing clear roles and responsibilities from the outset of any collaboration. In this framework, we move between communal decisions, to full autonomy to the collaborators pursuing their creative directions, while at other times, I take a more defined role in shaping, choosing, and guiding the work. The very choice to engage in collaboration with artists from diverse disciplines and cultural backgrounds is, for me, an activist gesture—a deliberate commitment to a practice I wish to see more of in the world.

5.2.1 Let's dance together? Embodied-movement dialogue in choreographic creation

Four dancers, including myself, will take part in the making of *THE FEAST*. Pi Sandas, a Finnish-Swedish dancer, is currently a bachelor's student at the Academy of Dance and Theater. Jacqui Aylward, originally from Australia, is a dancer and creator who completed a master's degree at the Academy in Dance and Performance. Noam Segal, originally from Israel, is a dancer with the Cullberg Ballet Company in Sweden. With them, I will dive into the *visiting practice* through the dancing body(ies), exploring performativity and possible social dynamics in performance.

The work in the studio will center on engaging with the dancing body as a fluid archive, an embodied, transcultural, and transformative exploration. Through tasks, set material, group scores, and guided improvisation, we will explore the bodily knowledge each dancer carries - their embodied memory, recognizing their capacity to *visit* the wide dance practices embedded within them, traces and layers they can recognize and recall from everyday actions, together with learning set material and dance practices from my bodily-transcultural exploration. In one particular task, we will practice repetitive movements inspired by Moroccan rituals focusing on head circulations and experimenting with the hair as an extension of the body—an additional layer that invites

subtle transformations. This practice approaches the dancing body as a site of continuous change.

We will explore how the concepts of layers and traces take form, both physically from within the dancing bodies, and through external visual elements- using scenography, integrating objects, both real and fake food, and adaptable costumes. Research of layering as a dynamic material—garments that can be worn, removed, or transformed in space. Together with the dancers, we will practice how these layers function as extensions of the body, and how they influence their presence—while exploring exposure, intimacy, and individual identity within the collective.

Similar to my last choreographic works, also in *THE FEAST*, the gaze will be explored as a performative tool —considering the different qualities of the gaze as a gateway to ethical reflection, ranging from opening dialogue or pointing to ignorance, welcoming or acknowledging the presence of the 'other'. Drawing from my background in pedagogy, I adapt tasks and exercises that support this artistic process, following Steiner's notions on the circular flow of relationships, mutual dependence, and shared responsibility. I work with meditative practices that involve immersive attention to thought and bodily sensation, inviting the unfamiliar within ourselves and recognizing the familiar. *"To truly know the world, look deeply within your own being; to truly know yourself, take a real interest in the world."* Steiner, from *Verses and Meditations* (1985). This meditative thinking reframes reality as movement, where the in-between makes a difference. In this choreographic process, we will experiment in creating our meditative texts. Through repetition, meditative practice itself may become a movement toward the other, a space for holding and carrying the presence of another.

5.2.2 The collective craft, making with rhythm

The process will unfold in collaboration with several sound artists: Janna Hurykangas, a Finnish sound designer and MA student; Joni Vierre, a Finnish musician and MA student in the global music department at the Sibelius Academy, with a background in jazz and African music, João Luis, a Portuguese percussionist, and Sibelius Academy graduate; Nemat Battah, a Palestinian-Jordanian singer, musician, and oud player, who teaches at the Sibelius Academy and primarily uses her voice as her main instrument;

and Daniel Motola, a Finnish-Israeli musician, sound designer, and videographer working with electronic instruments.

My practice with the sound artists takes place mostly in one-on-one or paired sessions, allowing space to adapt to each artist's unique process of exploration and improvisation.

(c) Chen Nadler / *recordings* / Joni Vierre (left) and Chen Nadler (right)

Together, we develop both compositional elements and sound landscapes for the piece. Our process is rooted in trial and error, shared improvisation sessions involving both movement and live or recorded music. We refine compositional ideas by activating the *Visiting Practice* tools, for example, repetition toward transformation—creating durational soundtracks that explore subtle transformations in sound and voice, and work with the concept of layers and traces —researching how elements appear, disappear, and how certain motifs can be refined from this approach. In our meetings, we share a range of inspirations—from personal ones to more concrete directions rooted in North African, and Middle Eastern traditions and extending into Techno rhythms. Throughout the process, we remain in close dialogue with Janna, who creates the sound design, including original electronic parts and manipulations on live music recordings, while maintaining an overview of the entire sonic landscape.

5.2.3 Performance as an invitation

In *THE FEAST*, I intend to engage through the components, tools, and elements previously explored—positioning the visitors as an audience within a theatrical setting. I imagine the performance as a space where an invitation is extended—a chance to gather, to 'step in' at certain moments. This framing is continuously being evaluated, as I also feel a responsibility and respect toward those who choose to witness and absorb, so the agency is there for each person to decide *if* and *how* they wish to engage. The performance, then, becomes an optional space of meeting, where presence itself is also a form of participation.

To unfold this exploration further, I have been in ongoing dialogue with scenographer Tua Holappa and lighting designer Pinja Kokkonen—both MA students at the Theatre Academy in Finland—as well as costume designer Meri Craig, an MA student at Aalto University, also from Finland. Our focus has been on the presence and participation of the visitors-audience: how they might move, stand, or sit within the performance space with the notion of 'invitation' in mind. We reflect on the significance of seating arrangements, spatial objects—including food and drinks—and costumes, all as elements that support the atmosphere and the core concepts being explored. We also consider light design as a spatial element—how it can guide, contain, or dissolve boundaries within the space.

This is not a participatory performance, nor is it strictly frontal. Returning to questions of audience relations, as explored by Fischer-Lichte and Isabel Lewis, in *THE FEAST*, I aim to work within the existing tension around the nature of the encounter between audience and performers. The relationship is, in a way, bilateral—constantly producing differences through repetition. Echoing Lepecki's ideas on repetition and the translation of difference, in every repetition of a performance new relations and translations can happen. The performers carry a significant responsibility: to open the experience and make space for the audience-visitors. Yet, in each performance, the audience-visitors respond in their way—reacting, participating, and choosing differently. In this sense, not only do the performers keep the performance alive and change it through their bodies, interpretation, and repetition of difference, but also the audience is constantly shaping the experience and affecting the event.

Perhaps this exploration also reveals the essence of an encounter—highlighting the impossibility of fully capturing the event in its entirety. Drawing on Derrida's notion of *traces*, what occurs is never fully there in its whole. The unknown, the unseen, and the fleeting are intrinsic to the experience, where the movement and energy between audiences and performers, unseen forces, carry the performance further hinting at the potential for transformation.

WHERE THIS DANCE HAS TAKEN ME

Here, I return to my question from the beginning -what can writing offer me as part of my choreographic research? The shaping of the *Visiting Practice* through writing occurs at a point in time between “doings” - between my ongoing embodied-movement research, and my new artistic creation as a master's student in choreography - which will end with a choreographic work for the stage.
My recent choreographic works have also been a way of researching the concepts and themes explored in this text—through a process-oriented, conceptual, and bodily practice. In this writing, I touch on certain aspects, principles, and methodologies that bring me closer to what I want to see, how I want to create, and what I need to focus on more within my choreographic framework.

In resonance to the question I posed; the written research allowed me to examine, investigate, dig in, curve, release and choose. The writing served as a connecting thread between past and future artistic experiences, enabling me to reflect on how I am navigating through different frameworks as a choreographer through the specific practice I'm shaping. It supports me in observing and reframing ways of working across various contexts, situating and deepening my understanding of *Visiting Practice* in my choreographic-movement methodology.
I believe I've been navigating how different philosophical, pedagogical, and artistic influences form and emerge in my artistic thought and choreographic approach. This process has allowed me to articulate and deepen my embodied choreographic practice while embracing the mystery of not knowing where it will lead. This openness has, in turn, opened new pathways and expanded the potential implications of the research.
I also come to understand how I think through both words and choreography, and how I wish to continue exploring this intersection. One area I’m particularly interested in developing further is the notion of choreography as a situation—an unfolding event that makes space for movement, social relations, and collaborative considerations.

There are many things that I could have done differently, or expanded further upon. Many things will change over time. Throughout my choreographic studies, various

shifts in my personal life unfolded alongside complex political and social realities that I had to carry and continually reflect upon—accompanied by a persistent sense of helplessness, and a deeply personal lament for a world at the mercy of human ignorance, being far from my family and friends, and a sense of a comprehensive alteration in the world has generated uncertainty and complete shaking of encompassing questions concerning identity and collectivity. This has unfolded alongside a deep love and curiosity for dance, choreography, and creation with people- one that has only deepened over time. I chose to commit to practicing creating with an open heart and to work with the tensions I carry and not hide from them. I was lucky to be able to learn with and from artists, professors, and friends in a space of constant creativity, and care while being surrounded and influenced by Finnish nature that kept me in awe. I realize that all of those complex life situations have helped me to see and adapt the way I approach choreographic work, it led me to continue asking questions, while constantly reflecting on what I can offer, adjust, and create in this field of dance, performance, and choreography.

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