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Invitation: Choreoreading EXOXE

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This semi-fictional chapter stems from the post-doctoral artistic research project called *xeno/exo/astro — choreoreadings*, conducted from 2021 to 2023 in the Performing Arts Research Centre, Theatre Academy, University of the Arts Helsinki. The project has materialised the relations between outer space, inter-planetary culture, queer sci-fi and choreography through several artworks and representational experiments. The process has combined astronomical-artistic research questions and a light sense of what I would call metaphysical clownish-ness (in Finnish: metafyyminen pelleily). This essay materialises the examination of the practice coined as *choreoreading*. The term was developed during my doctoral artistic research project, *Choreography as Reading Practice* (2013–2019). The exploration is based on the understanding in which writing and reading are simultaneously operative bodily practices, but (and on my explorations that) in the history of Western choreography, the potential of (choreo-)reading has been neglected. During winter 2022–2023, I have continued to experiment with choreoreading by filtering the embodied practice in a more specific dialogue with writer James Sosnoski's (1999) description of the characteristics of hyper-reading. This writing exposes from the position of a performer the de-tailed question of what happens *during* choreoreading and how specific eye-movements form its relevant dynamic component in the artwork titled EXOXE.

The Andromeda galaxy is visible to the
and so is the Orion Nebula.

corner of the eye

Here I am. (*Breathing heavily*.) I do not know how much time I have. The movement in the throat is produced by a mass of unbreathable air. I can feel

the hollow organ trembling while my spine forms an arch. Hands are hanging heavily, reaching towards the ground, which I cannot see. My feet, they burn with transparent dust and fluid ground in which the reflection, kind of like a dispersed halo, spreads around me. My eyes move rapidly, not focusing on or looking at anything. The vertiginous speed feels like stretching my face, my cheeks, my nose distorting. The eyes jump and scatter around, and they stop for a second, not seeing through the radiation that divides the space between me and you. The body, my hardware, is encapsulated into the gear from which the life-sustaining biospheres grow and generate the power of my activities. Movements are throwing and tearing the body. This space is fragmented. I can sense the tectonic plates and move with the lightspeed. The constant movement of the eyes produces kinesthetic ache, which spreads across the face into the back of the skull sending pulsing waves through the body.

Input: Am I here? Before arriving (have I arrived?) during this journey, I have ridden a meteor and danced pas de deux with the artificial moons, rubbed the toxic soil on my skin and gasped the airless air in the orbit, while locating the body into the history of the Universe. I have been chasing answers to the questions of how the light of the star materialises the experienced time, or how the same visual cue materialises the space that goes beyond my human understanding. Through *cue* (visual material) — *response* (immediate proprioceptive activation) — *action* (emerging intimate movement), I have been chasing the materialisations of the movements, which are generated by the lasting starlight and expanding dark space. Endlessly.

(Pause. Save.)

While getting ready, I remember the words by Professor Leena Rouhiainen (2017, 145): “Artistic research interrogates already established approaches and practices belonging to art. It does this by, in various ways, developing accepted conventions further, or by even attempting to renounce them altogether.” I look at my eyes from the visor, they are blurry. Focus. On this research journey, have I not renounced my practice of choreography as writing practice? Have I not transformed from choreographer to choreoreader? Or have I failed and turned into something else? Isn’t this the science-fictional way, following the wording by Pearson, Hollinger and Gordon (2008, 6), a queer attempt to “defamiliarize taken-for-granted construction” of (straight) choreography, movement and making choreography? The question in my hands is who or what is writing this moving body and how? What is the choreo-*graphic* apparatus that I am inhabiting and how? How do I get out of it? Or maybe better, how are such movements choreoread, that produce writing, which this body inhabits? How do I escape writing and delve into reading? (Am I in this text?) Is it possible? Is it impossible? In this binary Universe. In these non-binary Universes.

(Reboot.)

Maybe I need to clarify that with “choreo” I mean sensitivity to decode simultaneous multidirectional non-linear incoherence. It is an orientation towards surroundings and the perceived-experienced. When it comes to reading, in my vocabulary it stems from computer-assisted reading, which is also known as hyper-reading. Screens, emails, messages, codes, zeros and ones. I am not curious to explore how they are written but how they are read. How are your eyes moving from left to right? What happens when you move from word to word? What happens when you move between these printed symbols? When you move between the s y m b o l s. That is the space I am in, between symbols and signs with the act of hyper-reading but in an environmental materiality in which this space-between keeps on expanding beyond human perception. What is that opening terrain? I am falling in. Can you see me there, falling? I have left my writing base a long time ago and have been moving through the dense spheres of making otherwise, being haunted by hyper-reading. Other choices, other directions, other terms and conditions that I got used to as a choreo-*grapher*. It is exhausting and I am exhausted. Even if they, writing and reading, are simultaneously active bodily practices in my body, too. I can feel it, I can sense it. How would you describe the difference between writing and reading? Tell me. Record. Let me breathe.

(Let's move on this linear journey.)

As you know, the movement of the eyes does not stop even in sleep. I turn my head upwards and feel how the sphere around my head weighs. Neckache. Reveal of the throat, which is surrounded by the noise of a black hole. The eyes keep on jumping without focusing, without looking at, without taking over the material circumstances with the straight focusing gaze. It is not about what do I see, but how the organ is form-ing, which enables the scope of my visual perception. The corner of the eye is loud. Has always been. Also here.

Did you know that one of the best ways to get connected with the Andromeda in the dark night is to approach it with the corner of the eye? Fascinating, isn't it? There are people whose lives are filled with Andromedas and everyday nebulas. I am one of them. The practice with the corner of the eye has become a way to navigate in a straight world without being caught. Recognising sharply the micro movement practice of the other, or more specifically, The Other, who shares the sense-making of, and with, the corner of the eye. Mirroring the same desires. But here I am. Standing on a layer of transparent dust, wearing life-generating biospheres and eye-protecting visors. I am morphing, shape-shifting, reaching towards the movement of the eyes, but at the same time giving up. (Did I give up?) That is the way maybe. If only there were a magical monolith to touch (to go elsewhere). This place is called

EXOΞΕ.



FIGURE 6.1 A person wearing a big headpiece. Photograph by Vincent Roumagnac.

(Pause. Check the firewall.)

I am hesitating between registers. Should I jump to another one? But isn't that the case with reading as well? How to read in endless possible ways and make meanings and interpretations as I wish, no matter what is written? James Sosnoski (1999, 169) once said: "Reading — of whatever sort — is a process of selection." In the choreoreading practice, the concept of hyper-reading opens a hashtag to make sense and create meanings. #hyperreading is like a gate, an underground tunnel, literally two verticals and two horizontals: move through it and see what happens! That is what I have done in this research and its artistic works. Going through #hyperreading is manifested in the moving body, also here in EXOXE, the place that never existed and yet has always been there.

As a reminder, I dig it out from my portable, Sosnoski (1999, 163) characterises hyper-reading in eight ways:

1. filtering: a higher degree of selectivity in reading [and therefore];
2. skimming: less text actually read;
3. pecking: a less linear sequencing of passages read;
4. imposing: less contextualisation derived from the text and more from readerly intention;
5. filming-the "... but I saw the film" response, which implies that significant meaning is derived more from graphical elements as from verbal elements of the text;
6. trespassing: loosening

of textual boundaries; 7. de-authorising: lessening sense of authorship and authorly intention; 8. fragmenting: breaking texts into notes rather than regarding them as essays, articles or books.

Low battery red light. Switch it off. No back-ups. However, that is my eight-dimensional hashtag, an invisible collection of light-speed cords running through the body. This practice has led me to examine the inter-relation of the notions of composition and attention. I have moved from one to another. In this meaningful shift from composition to attention, I have focused on decoding Sosnoski's characteristics number 2 and 3, pecking and skimming. Even if nobody can see it, through my visors, I have examined these modes, because they destabilise my conventional understanding of reading, which in my cultural context happens with the movements of the eyes from left to right. Skimming and pecking, full of movement. I suggest we try it together, now: skim this page, peck this page. Go. What happens in terms of the reading-embodiment when the movements of the eyes do not follow linear left-to-right proposal? What about its relation to the starting points of making choreography from the perspective of reading instead of writing? Turn your gaze now away from this page. If you are sitting inside, turn your gaze towards the architecture of the building, of the surroundings there. Keep on skimming and pecking. How does that place teem in front of your eyes, in your eyes? What is going on in the back of your skull and in your hands, in your toes, now? (Maybe there is no now.) Keep enlarging the scale, keep skimming and pecking, move towards the sky and the soil, the speed, which is present, the orbit around the Sun, tectonic plate under the building, skim skim skim, peck peck peck, faster, faster.

(Pause.)

Thank you. That was the warm-up. Next time, try placing the purple transparent filter in front of your eyes and repeat the same while breathing heavily. Then we get closer, then I stumble and scroll on the same kinesthetic terrains with you. Log in. Welcome to the imaginaries generated by this kind of choreographic-being-in-the-world. This welcoming echoes Doll's (1998, 238) words that "Reading becomes not simply a matter of discovering themes and symbols, but of visiting other worlds in the expectation of discovering selves within." Through choreoreading, I am re-inventing myself and exploring possible selves. I am leaving other kinds of traces than I used to. It has taken me places like
EXOXĒ,
which discloses a vast vision for my hyper-reading eyes.

I need to take a break. The headpiece is heavy. I have come to the conclusion that it would be interesting to build an eye-tracking device onto this gear. The device would leave traces into the space like lasers, or it could be inverted,



FIGURE 6.2 A person sitting above the pedestal, wearing a big headpiece and leaning towards the left. Photograph by Vincent Roumagnac.

luminating the eyes and the body, someway similarly like in the video *If When Why What* (2022) by Douglas Gordon, but without words. Maybe I find materials to do that for the next journey. The eye movement and eye-tracking research are scientific fields of study, of which both could offer interesting insights into my inquiries, especially when used in the context of reading practices, but I have focused on deepening my understanding through embodied experimentation about the skimming and pecking movements of the eyes in the practice of choreoreading. The movement that is in focus is how the eye-tracking researcher Anna-Kaisa Ylitalo (2017, 2), who has done eye-movement research in relation to paintings, describes them as linear jumps between consecutive fixations of the eyes. Let's try this. Move your eyes quickly between two spots. Try not to look at those spots but direct your attention to the movements of the eyes. Add a little pause. Continue again.

According to Ylitalo (2017, 2), "The fixation is a state, when the gaze is staying fairly still around a location over a time period." These two descriptions, "jumps" and "fixations" also describe the actions of the eyes, into which I want to invite you, dear reader. Have you seen artist Julien Prévieux's (2018) work *Anthologie des regards*, from the years 2015 to 2018? There are visual traces coming from the eye-tracking technology. That is my connection to eye-tracking. But how does this kind of reading manifest as a moving body? And what does this have to do with choreography? The loop takes another turn.

I am sitting and thinking, breathing is easier now. But I know, soon... never mind. How about approaching these questions with more questions? How would you describe the movements that are present while you are reading these lines? Does the temporality of the movements extend from the fast movement of the eyes beyond an expected human lifetime? What about their spatial scale? How is your reading affected by the orbit around the Sun? That kind of speed that is present. What happens when you lift that reading gaze towards the material surroundings where you are? How do you take place in that condition while moving the eyes across these lines transforming into moving the eyes from one spot to another without looking at the surroundings? Or how does this motional sphere operate as a *choreographic* apparatus, and can you make sense out of it through choreoreading? Are you still reading? Are you still hyper-reading? I am still tired.

Here in EXOΧΕ
I have developed the practice by working with the movements beyond human scale to the micro-movements of the eyes. This may also challenge the idea of the mastery over movements through practice in which “looking at” something or “taking over” the environment or the objects with the “focusing gaze” is put aside and “looking at” transforms to attention towards the movements of the eyes. It is some sort of reflection instead of looking for an object for attention out there. For me, this approach is uploading perceptual practice in which “looking at something” is not primarily meaningful when it comes to finding the linguistic-embodied counterpart of the *choreographic* between perception and experience. But it is not an inverted gaze either, because acknowledging the teeming visuals is important. Based on my experiments, this kind of practice — which is based on rapid eye movements — brings forth the questions of selective attention. In the end, where do I decide to direct the attention in terms of the eye-movements? Toward colours, forms, lines, curves, lights, where? What leaks in from the corners of the eyes and what is left outside? Is this kind of binary online-offline approach even able to reach the realm I want to enter choreographically? Maybe it is about de-centering the attention towards the movements that are beyond the prevailing widespread approach to movement as material for dance. In my experience, it is necessary to slow down or even stop moving the eyes rapidly after a while. I don’t think it is interesting to aim to master these de-centred movements, instead the other way around I would say, to couple with the kinesthetic world and movement phenomenon in another way than mastery over the movement as material. Or maybe I am not trying enough. If in the dark the corner of the eye can establish a visual connection to the nebulas, how can it destabilise the dominance of straight gaze? What kind of a body emerges once it operates with this kind of queering gaze and, perhaps, with this kind of *queering* straight attention? Attention choreographies.

The breathing starts to materialise again in the throat and my legs tremble. I cannot see my back, but it feels like someone is hacking me. It is just my generators, artificial wings, antennas, which protect the body from the radiation. Sometimes I wish I could see the wings of flies again, because then I would be able to send thousands of gentle pulsing wing beats across the space towards you. Calm down, I say, closing the eyes. Why so anxious? Everything is fine and will be fine. Or maybe not. Open the eyes and move on with that kinesthetic universe, which constitutes the body. Loop. Maybe that is what choreoreading for me is: an exploration of an endless loop of alienation and restless, elusive longing for something missing in my *choreographic-being-in-the-world*.

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