DOCTORAL THESIS

Encounters with Somatics and European Choreography: Discourses, Narratives and Embodied Ethnography between the 1980s and the 2010s

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by

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the influence of somatic knowledge within European contemporary choreography by examining representations and embodiments in different choreographic works premiered in the 1980s and their 21st century restagings. The 1980s decade encompassed an evidential change in choreographic practices stemming in part from the dissemination of somatic knowledge within the field and reconsiderations of corporeality in dramaturgical approaches. The development of the field of somatics and its international connections are established through archaeological analysis of writings by somatic pioneers and somatic practitioners.

Forging new ground in documenting European choreographic trends, this thesis expands on seminal historical accounts to fill gaps in knowledge. Contemporaneous publications by dancers and choreographers during the 1980s shapes analysis of the New Dance movement in Britain and the New Flemish Wave, which were carriers of innovative paradigms in how to consider the performative body. Focusing primarily on British Gaby Agis and Belgian Wim Vandekeybus, links are established to the third case study in the work of German Isabelle Schad, offering a genealogical connection and exemplifying the integration of somatic practices into choreographic processes in the 21st century.

As a somatic movement educator and dancer, I utilise embodied ethnography in the process of participant-observation and analysis of the case studies. Connections are traced between somatic practices and choreography through encounters with ten dance artists and somatic practitioners, observation of three reconstructions, including performing in one of them, and witnessing a new creation in progress. The perspective

of the inter-relationships between dancer and choreographer informs fieldwork analysis, delving into the direct and indirect impact of somatics on their works and creative approaches. The enquiry combines theoretical perspectives and fieldwork that acknowledges methodological interactions and parallels in different choreographic narratives.

Significant influences of somatic practices in 1980s European Dance Theatre are reinforced through a focus on restaged and new works, while the fieldwork offers a unique perspective into creative methods, providing a somatically informed investigation and a historical reflection on working processes.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

I. Introduction: Background

This thesis analyses how dance artists have used somatic approaches in practice, with a specific focus on the 1980s, drawing on two reconstructed pieces from this time frame and onwards to the 21st century. Through a somatically informed perspective, I explore different directions of thinking and creating in choreography that have contributed to expand perceptions and conceptions of dance-making processes. Based on ethnographic fieldwork, an investigation using movement analysis, combined with a theoretical research, I investigate the work of three choreographers: Gaby Agis, Wim Vandekeybus, Isabelle Schad. I compare examples of how somatic approaches, bodily awareness, theories, and practices of embodiment have built different ways of thinking, delineating mechanisms from which this physical approach creates new ways of moving in connection with innovative cultural and choreographic systems.

The thesis time frame focuses on the 1980s when movement discoveries and practices developed in the 1960s and 1970s were consolidated into theatrical regimes and settings (George 2020). Whilst developing a historical consideration, the pieces from the 1980s at the centre of my investigation were seen in their reconstructions during the 2010s decade. The two choreographers who started their careers in the 1980s are being considered in their current positions. Furthermore, the geographical frame of this research is Europe, with a specific focus on Britain and Belgium: the countries were embraced by two fertile dance waves, Britain's New Dance and the New Flemish

Wave[1]. Acknowledging their specific and unique conceptualisations of choreography, movement practices and vocabularies, these 'waves' questioned what could be considered dance, within the frame of the post-modern dance movement and influences from German *Tanztheater*. Britain and Belgium are at the centre of my inquiry for their distinctive characteristics: Britain for the assimilation of somatic practices into the dance field (somatics is defined in this chapter, section V), and Belgium for revolutionising the concept of Dance Theatre (defined below). In their choreographic process, both waves re-evaluated and re-considered what theatrical dance is (as developed in Chapter 3.II.C), evaluating different corporealities (Chapter 3.II.D).

The initiation of this research in 2013 was drawn from curiosity sparked by observing the dance entitled *What the Body Does Not Remember*. This dance by Flemish choreographer Wim Vandekeybus and his company Ultima Vez premiered in 1987 (Toneelschurr, Haarlem, NL). Some of its choreographic frames were inserted in Vandekeybus' work for the camera *Roseland* in 1990, and in the occasion of its 25th year anniversary in 2013, *What the Body Does Not Remember* was reconstructed and re-staged. I saw it first on video and then the reconstruction at Cultuurcentrum Hassel (BE) in 2014. In this theatrical dance production what drove my interest and provoked questions was the specific movement quality of the dancers and the choreographic challenges. Recognised as a groundbreaking work for its movement language composed in part of falls, runs, and throwing of objects (see for instance Kisselgoff 1987), in watching this work I reflected: How do they physically respond to external stimuli? For instance, how do the dancers react to having bricks thrown at them without injuring

[1] Through the thesis I use the terminology the 'New Flemish Wave', following translation from the French *nouvelle vague flamand* (Manente 2003), while acknowledging the terms 'Flemish Wave' (mainly used by Laermans 2015), 'Flemish dance wave' (Laermans and Gielen 2000) and 'Flemish new wave' (as reported in Mackrell 2007).

themselves? In this specific example, how do the dancers perform movement sequences throwing bricks to each other in real time? Which physical strategies does the choreographer apply to prepare the body and make it ready to deal with such complex movement dynamics? What I witnessed, or at least I thought I saw, was an awareness, a freshness in the movement quality of the dancers, both in the video and on stage, that started my enquiry into the training and creative process: dancers were not merely executors, but they were present, they were 'there'.

There was a moment that particularly captured my attention: at a certain point they throw bricks to each other: the bricks are real and their runs to catch them are real, not choreographed. Interestingly Emilyn Claid in *Falling Through Dance and Life* (2020) describes this same moment:

> A man at full run throws a brick across the stage to be caught mid-chest by a woman who is thrown to the ground by the impact. 'The brick is real and its flight through time cannot be stopped' ([quoting] Hrab 2016: 5).
>
> Bricks are thrown; bodies are thrust harshly aside. The choreography is tight, precise and repeatable; yet the demands of the material cannot be relied upon to happen unless performers are alert and responsive to the risks posed by each action.
>
> (Claid 2020: 57)

Claid's and Ondřej Hrab's words show the immediateness of their actions, and whereas the choreography is constructed, it could not function without the full receptivity of the dancers. As I discuss in Chapter 3. IV-V.B.-V.B.1, in Vandekeybus' work the concept of 'reality' is a pivotal one, for instance in the scene using bricks, the dancers 'exposed themselves to genuine danger. It was their infallible reflexes alone that saved them' (Vandekeybus and Boudens 2016: 6). These issues and others will be discussed extensively later within a detailed analysis of the piece (see Chapter 3.V.B.1).

What the Body Does Not Remember could also been considered as an example of physical theatre, here meaning a hybrid genre determined by highly trained physical and athletic motions of the dancers, sometimes combined with text but not exclusively, to transmit emotions, storytelling or abstract narratives. Physical theatre became a predominant form during the 1980s in connection to dance (for example the well-known group DV8 Physical Theatre). As Claid (2020: 61) explained, 'physical theatre embraces narratives of human existence as its basis for creativity'. In contrast, in Claid's opinion, 'Dancers motivated to dance by somatic impulses tend to ignore expressions of sexuality, loss, abandonment and anger, or the hysteria of behavioural, psychological or autobiographical narratives (Claid 2020: 61). I am not discussing this distinction further, but as developed in Chapter 3, both somatics-informed dance and physical theatre informed productions are contributing to the development of a new dramaturgy, and in both genres, a new specificity of the body emerged.

At that time of viewing Vandekeybus' work, I was concluding my training as somatic movement educator with the Body-Mind Centering school, between Italy, France, and Germany, and what I perceived with my intuition, that for sure at that time was framed by these studies, was that the awareness and perception of the dancers in Vandekeybus' work were comparable to the awareness and perception that I could experience in my somatic understanding.

Shifting countries, I had an encounter with the work of Gaby Agis, my second main case study. Agis is a leading choreographer from the 1980s in Britain who integrates somatic knowledge — Skinner Releasing Technique and Release Technique — in her choreographic practices and training. Her works investigate mainly the figure of woman

and issues regarding collectivity through physical research that encompasses bodily and emotional awareness.

From the start, my two main case studies have clear differences, both in their countries of origin and in their working methods. I am introducing them in Chapter 3.V.A-B. However, I choose them because, whereas Vandekeybus, as we will see is not directly using somatic practices in contrast to Agis, they both reach for a whole body understanding and bodily awareness through specific mind-body and choreographic practices (as explained in Chapter 4 and 5). For each of these three choreographers I investigate one or more choreographic pieces in order to analyse their creative methodology in relation to physical practices.

My third case study, which I consider a lateral one, is Isabelle Schad, a German choreographer from the 1990s with a background in ballet and also former dancer for Ultima Vez/Vandekeybus. She combines eastern practices (such as Zen philosophy and Aikido) with western somatic techniques like Body-Mind Centering into her creative and aesthetic process.

The choreographers that I am investigating are considered ‘contemporary’. According to dance scholar and sociologist Rudi Laermans, contemporary dance is an extended category: 'contemporary dance is, in fact, not a coherent artistic trend, it is scarcely a genre, not an exclusively artistic but mainly a social practice, centered around the belief in the notion ‘contemporary dance' (Laermans in Ertem 2016: 36). Even though the term ‘contemporary’ dance has been used from the 1960s onwards, during the 1980s-1990s this term gained a remarkable differentiation from modern dance or post-modern

dance, including a large variety of approaches, not always searching for a radical break from the past but using dance history as a source of recreation.

My background as a dancer is rooted in modern dance (Limon and Horton technique) and ballet, and I continued with release informed techniques. I performed for some Italian independent groups and my own works until 2014. As previously mentioned, when I started this research, I was studying as a somatic educator with the Body-Mind Centering school and I had embodied some release informed training systems (such as Feldenkrais, Alexander, and Klein Technique), mainly at Movement Research (New York) and Independent Dance (London). Therefore, my theoretical research was enlarged by an understanding of corporeal and movement processes that were influential to an understanding of choreographic processes as connected to training forms. These specific practices and bodyworks opened up my interest to the larger discourse of what we could understand with somatics and concepts and practices from this field. During the research process I encompass and use an extended terminology connected to somatics from diverse perspectives. Words such as 'somatic field', 'somatic awareness', 'somatic knowledge', 'somatic training' became part of my life and research, and I am using them in this thesis.

Prior to summarising the thesis structure, key concepts are introduced starting with somatics. According to the practitioner Thomas Hanna (1986) somatics is 'the field which studies the soma: namely, the body as perceived from within by first-person perception' (Hanna 1986: 4). When the definition was coined, western practices successively labelled as 'somatic' were already constituted and in use from the end of the 19th century. Starting from specific practices for an exclusive community of users, over the years somatics has become an extended field that embraces various areas. With

somatics we could address a wide range of diverse practices where the body-mind connection is integrated through specific sets of movement exercises, anatomical information, and exploration. Furthermore, somatics explores a variety of uses, from dance to pedagogy, to recovery from injury to postural concerns. Nevertheless, before becoming an umbrella term of practices, somatics focused on the individual perception of their body. Later discussion explores a broad spectrum of terms related to somatics, such as somatic knowledge (intending concepts related to somatics, both intellectual and corporeal) or somatic approaches (meaning the various forms of application of somatic practices).

Somatics as noun represents the numerous techniques developed and classified from the beginning of the 20th century onwards (for example, Alexander Technique, Feldenkrais, Skinner Releasing, Body-Mind Centering which are defined in more depth below). 'Somatic' as an adjective is associated with a variety of nouns not directly connected with specific techniques but instead with a distinct understanding of the perception. The various uses of the term are connected to the numerous possible functions and forms and the unstable nature of somatics. Fundamentally, the term somatics refers to a range of techniques and various modes of application, from anatomical classes into movement, to movement and dance related classes, to one-to-one hands-on work. The most used terms are 'somatic practitioner', 'somatic field', 'somatic practices', 'somatic approach', 'somatic awareness', and 'somatic knowledge'. A somatic practitioner is a person who completed a specific education program in a somatic training course. Somatic field is a term for outlining the specific fields of knowledge and practices that relate to somatics, both as practices and as approaches. Somatic practices are various body-mind and movement techniques that have developed specific trainings and regimes. A somatic approach implies a somatic understanding, without being related to

an exclusive somatic regime. Somatic awareness is considered a mind-body consciousness of the individual. With somatic knowledge I intend all those theoretical and practical fundamentals related to the somatic field.

Whereas the term 'somatics' was coined in the 1980s by Hanna, as previously seen, 'Somatic work did not begin in a vacuum, it arose synchronistically in disparate locations around the globe from the turn of the nineteenth century into the twentieth century' (Eddy 2016: 8). According to Kelly J. Mullan (2016: 71)

> The history of western body-mind methods (what has come to be known as somatics) is connected with the European and American physical culture movement of the nineteenth century. Approximately 200 years ago, European physical culture systems were developed and designed to motivate individuals to improve their health by either increasing strength or by generating greater mobility, agility, range of motion and capabilities for physical expression.
>
> Mullan (2016: 71)

Interestingly, as George (2020) points out the contribution of German modern dance in creating somatic practices is relevant. In particular, the reduction of muscular tension in Somatics 'is indebted to an instructional lineage of German teachers. Some mid-century New York dancers exploring the reduction of tension also turned to Hanya Holm's work, which they felt was more flowing and easier on the body compared with Graham technique' (George 2020: 176). Holm was influenced by the work of German choreographer and teacher Mary Wigman. Through their collaborations, Holm brought Wigman's work in the U.S. and later developed her own method. George recalls this as a time period where somatics did not exist as a field but changes in the perspective of the body were being made.

I must furthermore acknowledge the international links between the somatic and dance forms. Pre, during and after the Second World War, an exodus of German thinkers and scholar from various background to the U.S. influenced American scientific and artistic

fields (Eddy 2016: 49). Martha Eddy highlights also that 'The migration of Jewish intellectuals was particularly important to somatic education. Examples include the fact that Feldenkrais was a Russian Jew immigrating to Israel. (…) Bartenieff fled to New York City because she was married to a Russian Jew. Selver also left Germany and joined other Jewish (as well as non-Jewish) intellectuals at Esalen in California' (Eddy 2016: 49).

According to George (2020: 139), before being categorised, somatics was 'Initially established as a collective antihierarchical culture beginning in the 1960s'. During the 1980s 'dancers reworked somatics toward entrepreneurialism in the 1980s' and finally in the 1990s the shift from a counterculture to an institutionalised one was evident (George 2020: 139).

George explains also that the institutionalisation of somatics began when 'dance education began embodying a competitive corporate model' (George 2020: 142), where somatics became a system to 'protect health and enjoy career longevity' (George 2020: 142). In pointing out that somatics as a source of innovation in the late twentieth century relates to its use as a source of excellence in execution in twenty-first century dance education' (George 2020: 143), interestingly George stresses the difference we are experiencing nowadays in thinking on somatics in the dance training. The social, aesthetical, and philosophical landscape in which today we mostly experience somatics differs from the one during, for instance, in the 1960s through the 1980s. According to George, somatics today is mainly considered a way to promote a 'better' execution of the movement than a real source of creation. Of course, this is a generalistic discourse, but we need to consider this when we look back at the 1980s works.

In this work I adopt the term ‘release’ in various way. Release is used in relation to somatics developed from the work of the American innovator in movement theory Mabel E. Todd (1937) starting in the early 20th century, where she was using the term ‘relaxation’. The terms Release Technique, Anatomical Release Technique are used to identify the work of American somatic practitioner and choreographer Mary Fulkerson back in the 1970s. Later the term release has been labelled and related in a specific way to move and to conceptualise movement, taking into account elements such as efficiency, muscular easiness, and moving with no effort. Nowadays release is a term used in dance studios and by many dance companies — from contemporary dance to ballet companies — and flourishes in many diverse approaches. In this light I will adopt the terminology such as ‘released informed practice’ or ‘released informed movement’ or similar to understand movement and dance practices which are adopting principles from the release. I must acknowledge that back in the 1970s, ‘release’ was also considered a philosophy of life not just a way to move (Lansley and Early 2018). Nowadays, release is going through a commercialisation of its process similar to what is happening to somatics as discussed above. I analyse Release Technique in more detail in Chapter 2.IV. In this understanding somatics and release go hand in hand and release itself could be considered under the somatics umbrella.

As a dancer and somatic practitioner, I had different encounters in my practices where the borders between dance and somatic applications were not defined, and where one acted in support of the other and vice versa. Examples include the use of Alexander Technique in release classes, Feldenkrais sessions applied to contemporary dance, Klein Technique with its session related to movement, Body-Mind Centering practices connected to dance and so on. It was when I started to practice somatics that my vision

enlarged. This has affected not only my personal practice as a dancer and as a Pilates instructor but also informed the way I viewed the choreographic works of others.

At the same time, in those years I became very interested in the dance scenario created by specific choreographers. My interest was directed not so much towards their choreographic mechanisms, but rather towards how they were employing the dancers/performers' bodies. Thus, I became intrigued by how the bodies in works by some Flemish choreographers were reacting to very complex movement stimuli. At the start of the research, meanwhile investigating the works of Vandekeybus, especially the earlier works such as *What the Body Does Not Remember* (1987), as previously explained (and further analysed in Chapter 3.V.B.1), I noticed a specific body movement language, derived from a distinct form of research that implied and had connection with what we could refer to as somatics. Somatics here is not intended in its holistic nuance, but in its intrinsic quality of movement practices, in relation to instinct, physical awareness, and body-mind connection (see Chapters 2 and 4). Even though somatics could be considered a specific field, its intrinsic nature makes it an open and interdisciplinary territory (see Chapter 2), able to enter in dialogue with other fields. Interestingly these choreographers contributed to an expansion of the Dance Theatre genre. Dance theatre is considered that specific dance form deriving in part from the West German *Tanztheater* of the 1960s-1970s established by choreographers such as Pina Bausch, Hans Kresnik, Reinhild Hoffmann. According to the *Oxford Dictionary of Dance* (Craine and Mackrell 2010) this genre 'emphasizes the theatrical staging of the work as much as the choreography and that takes its material from real-life issues and emotions' (discussed further in Chapter 3.I.C and Chapter 3.II.C). I will examine the extent to which somatics became a tool not just for improvisation but also for set choreography. This research situates somatics and somatically informed practices as

corporeal and generative processes and methods through which the choreography could be embodied and engendered.

My research also arises from a desire to understand and deepen some inner connections present in the fields of somatics and choreography, and how they manifest and embody the realities of dance making today. When in September 2011 I had the opportunity to hear American philosopher Judith Butler speaking about the poetry found written on a Guantanamo prison wall (referring to a text of 2009), the powerful concepts of physical transmission and transfigured transition offered a glimpse of the forceful uses of concepts such as breath, bodies, and words. In her speech on the poems from Guantanamo, the body was again at the centre of focus thanks also to the power of the performative words. How did the word become performative, giving back the sense of a body in a relationship with a space, with the other? Butler (2009: 61) explains: 'The body breathes, breathes itself into words, and finds some provisional survival there. But once the breath is made into words, the body is given over to another, in the form of appeal.' Rather than offering a direct connection to the present research, I would like to offer this excerpt of Butler's words as a background source of inspiration.

II. Research Topic and Objectives

This study emerges from a desire to understand how the physical translation of the bodies of dancers has been influenced by somatic theories and practices. The primary aim of this research is to investigate how somatic practices have informed and fed choreographic processes and methods and how they have changed them, even without an explicit recognition and understanding by the artists. This study problematises and expands upon current relationships between the field of somatics and contemporary choreographic practices and scholarship. Through contextualization with discourses

from the field of somatic studies and examples of practices and choreographic thinking which engage significantly with prevailing notions of bodily perception, this research seeks to identify common or differing features in somatics and choreography and to look for elements of analysis, comparison, and gaps. I interviewed, had conversations with, and observed the works of ten dance artists and practitioners in three different countries (see the complete list in Chapter 4.II.B.1) and have undertaken five extended fieldwork sessions with dance companies. From this, as previously mentioned, I focus on the works of three choreographers: British Gaby Agis, Belgian Wim Vandekeybus, and German Isabelle Schad.

The main objectives of this study are:

- To investigate the concept of somatics, studying writings by somatic pioneers and somatic practitioners, and comparing their principles with creative practices that emerge in Dance Theatre from a European perspective;
- To provide an overview of the events of 1980s European choreography, with a comparison between the British and Belgian dance scenes;
- To explore a method of choreographic analysis, where the parameters are focused on perception and where the agency of the dancer (with or without their somatic training) is evaluated as a contribution to the choreography;
- To analyse internationally significant European choreographers who are under-researched such as Wim Vandekeybus and Gaby Agis and to investigate them through the specific perspective of the inter-relationship between dancer and choreographer in the field;
- To make a contribution to the research methodology in dance and somatic knowledge, proposing an approach which combines theoretical perspectives and fieldwork.

I have specifically chosen Britain and Belgium because of their contributions in creating a new kind of theatricality, integrating post-modern dance (for its definition see Chapter 3.I.B) vocabularies into a theatrical scenario, and thus expanding the genre defined as Dance Theatre in the 1980s. In this research I am not focusing on France or Germany, although the 1980s represented a flourishing time for dance in France, because a great variety of dance genres developed due to supportive funding policies. Meanwhile, during these years, the German dance landscape presented established *Tanztheater* pieces (defined in Chapter 3.I.C). Even though German dance artists are still considered to be the most influential in Dance Theatre, significant contributions to the field came from other countries, such as Belgium and Britain. Their inputs affected both the topics and methodologies of preparing the body and its performance on stage.

Nevertheless, in defining Britain and Belgium as my main case studies I should underline the accessibility of resources and my position: when I started my research and I was intrigued by Vandekeybus' work I was living in London, where I could also follow the work of Agis. In this constellation, I placed the work of the German Schad for the relevance of her specific genealogical work: as a former ballerina, she danced for Vandekeybus and later created her choreographic work with influences from somatic practices (specifically Body-Mind Centering) and Zen oriented philosophy. Furthermore, I have met Schad when I was living back in Venice.

Thus, for this investigation, Agis and Vandekeybus represent the main case studies of specific uses of theatrical methodologies and somatics practices from the 1980s, whereas Schad is a choreographer from the 1990s who combines somatics and choreography as a legacy from the previous time. In this light the works of Agis and

Vandekeybus, positioned correspondently in Britain and Belgium, are considered the main research perspectives, and Schad provides a relevant and secondary viewpoint, that shows the continuance of somatic practices in choreography of the 21st century. All three choreographers have been very generous in welcoming me as an inside observer of their work. In the case of Schad I also had the chance to perform in her piece.
This project is primarily based on the interrelations of dance and somatic knowledge within the choreographic field. An historical survey of dance and somatic knowledge considers the 20th century growth and development of the field but with a particular focus on the 1980s. Although this research focuses on the contemporary dance scene in this timeframe, it also examines the process of integration of dance and somatics which emerged earlier in the 20th century, particularly in the 1960s in the American and European contexts in order to establish a model of practice and solid reference study. I also acknowledge that somatics as a theory built in the 1980s diverges from our 21st century understanding of somatics and this difference will be examined in Chapter 2.

The investigation of somatic knowledge within European contemporary choreography in the frame of the 1980s expands on seminal historical accounts and documentation filling gaps in knowledge. Employing primary resources revealed a specific awareness from the dance artists towards their unique and revolutionary creative contribution. Similarly to the dance artists of the 1960s in the U.S., European dance artists, specifically British and Belgian, were not only creating new work but also discussing the contents of dance as a medium. The choreographic approaches that emerged predominantly in the British contemporary dance scene, was the emerging of new understanding of the movement approaches, informed by the introduction of the Release Technique and by a reconsideration of the femininity and queerness on stage. The Belgian scene or better, the Flemish scene, highlighted the arising of new dramaturgical

structures and topic, which saw the body and its non-formerly trained corporeality on stage waived from theatrical narratives, which contributed to the emergence of new strands of the Dance Theatre genre. These new contributions affected the aesthetics of the dance works. In both the cases, difficulties and contrasts emerged from the dance critics to acknowledge the innovations they were carrying. However, especially in the Flanders, in a few years various centres developed to support the work of the young artists.

Case studies focus on two under-researched choreographers who began choreographing in that period, Agis and Vandekeybus, whose works are nowadays very prominent in the field of innovative movement language, in the somatic practices and in their contribution to expand the conception of choreography. They continue to be influential in the European contemporary dance scene: Agis as part of the independent dance field in Britain and Vandekeybus as a leading choreographer who creates also for international dance companies (such as Rambert) besides his own. My third case study, Schad, is under-researched as well and offers a direct connection to somatics into choreography and offers a genealogical connection to Vandekeybus.

The applied research methodology integrates studies of historical sources, texts and journals, analysis of works and fieldwork observation, which is the core of my insight. During weeks of research in the field, I took notes and interviewed choreographers and practitioners. The fieldwork was relevant to investigate these choreographers through direct encounters through which I could reflect on insights into 1980s roots of somatic practices through today's perspective.

As previously mentioned, I witnessed the reconstruction of two historical pieces and a new creation, and as a practitioner myself I gained a specific insight as an observer. Having the possibility to perform in one piece informed the research with insight as a participant. This acknowledges my unique position and perspective as an inside observer and my contribution to the embodied ethnography, proposing an analysis informed by international connections, a focus on somatic practices and choreography through your embodied knowledge. Furthermore, I am writing on works from the 1980s, which are staged. Having had the opportunity to witness their reconstructions gave me a unique point of view to add layers of analysis both historical and contemporary and to see how a choreographer works on the field, which instructions gives, and how is connected to the dancers.

As a contribution to an expanded field, this research places itself, in part, within the field of somatic studies, a relatively new subject in academia, where the topic is 'the body as a subject' (Olsen 2004). This field is concerned with those techniques that work on body-mind connections, drawing on both Western and Eastern cultures. This thesis does not follow a historical lineage of dance and somatic practices through the 20th century; rather, it works on tracing the displacement of events and concepts that shaped the choreographic milieu of the 1980s. Nevertheless, this study embraces the dance studies field, specifically I draw from dance ethnography and ethnographic research, dance history, and dance and movement analysis.

Lastly, my thesis contributes to the open field of inter-subjectivity. The term inter-subjectivity is here assumed generally as a factual sharing that exists within subjects. This term is widely used as a concept in various field such as philosophy, sociology, neuroscience, anthropology. As psychologist Brian Reuther (2014) illustrates, its sense

is already in the etymology and structure of the word: ‘inter’ means ‘in between’ and ‘subject’ is as a singular individual and a first-person entity point of view. Thus, there is the institution of social interaction between different subjects in between diverse individual perspectives. The frame of inter-subjectivity is used as a lens specifically to understand the ethnographic work and interactions between dancers and choreographers interviewed when I am observing the work in the rehearsal space, and between the interviewee and myself when I am in the dialogical process. In this study, inter-subjectivity represents on one level the material interrelation between dancers and choreographers, somatic practitioners and choreographers, and dancers and somatic practitioners. On another level, it can be said to be concerned with the co-constitution of a performance work through the co-presence with an audience. In terms of inter-subjectivity, I focus on the subject area where the relations between people are conceived, in this context specifically dancers and choreographers. This research is shaped especially by the fields of philosophy (phenomenology) and psychology, delving into the concept of intersubjectivity to help conceptualize the psychophysical relations between people in the ethnographic discussion.

The reference to philosophical concepts is developed in this chapter to underpin discussion of kinaesthetic and somatic experiences, understanding of an internal/external focus, perception, and awareness through embodiment. Furthermore, I highlight the extent to which the concept of genealogy, intended in the Foucauldian definition, is employed in this research both in the theoretical section and in the fieldwork.

III. Research Methodology

This study resides in encounters: the direct encounters with choreographers, dancers, and practitioners under the forms of interviews, informal chats and participation in classes and the bibliographic and theoretical work.

Theoretical research went hand to hand with fieldwork informed by current practices in the areas of somatics and dance through a) the study of theoretical works; b) viewings of contemporary dance rehearsal processes and performances, and viewing archival footage of dance works from the 1980s; c) Ethnographic and qualitative research including eight interviews with somatic practitioners, dancers and choreographers; and d) attending practical workshops to better understand the choreographic and perceptive process. The main time frame of my viewings of rehearsals and performances was from 2014 to 2017. I started my viewing of performances, encounters and rehearsals in person during winter 2014 with the reconstruction of *What the Body Does Not Remember* in Belgium. In 2015 I attended the re-staging of *Shouting Out Loud* by Agis at University of Roehampton. In 2016 I interviewed Agis and some dance and somatic practitioners, and in 2017 I spent two weeks with Ultima Vez company in Brussels. I am inserting the detailed information of my fieldwork in Chapter 4.II.B.1. The research for this project was submitted for ethics consideration under the reference DAN/018 in the Department of Dance and was approved under the procedures of the University of Roehampton's Ethics Committee on 08.10.14.

This research has a transnational character: interviewees were based in Britain, Belgium, Italy, Germany, and Spain. The fieldwork was conducted in Belgium, Britain, and Italy. During my travels, I encountered specific different types of somatic, training, and theatrical approaches, including the following: Skinner Releasing Technique, Body-

Mind Centering, Contact Improvisation, hands-on work in pairs, improvisation sessions, the creation of new pieces and the reconstruction of older ones. Each time I positioned myself differently: I have been an external observer, an interviewer, a practitioner in the class, a discussant, and in some cases, I helped the choreographer in playing the music.

The theoretical study draws from the fields of dance history, dance studies, and somatic practices, where I have dealt with the analysis and questioning of publications by somatic practitioners from the pioneers to the present. However, history, philosophy (aesthetics), and sociology have also informed my study. My research models include Foucauldian concepts of genealogy — to trace the development of relationships of the subject through its history — and discursive formations — studying connections instead of using the concepts of linear time, as discussed below. This theoretical approach gives this overall project a way to enter into contact and to deal with the current somatic practitioners' generation. As a model of inquiry, genealogy is not perceived as a search for origins, nor for a linear development or a subsequent time, but for discursive formations (Foucault 1969), through which it is possible to create different categorizations of concepts. Taking as visual starting examples the maps created by somatic practitioner, movement therapist, and physiologist Martha Eddy entitled 'One View: Founders of Somatic Movement Trainings and Their Influences' (2009) (see Appendix A, Figures 1), 'Lineage of Somatic Movement Leaders' (Eddy 2016), 'Founders of Somatic Movement Trainings and Their Influences (Eddy 2016: 2) this study starts from accepting the possibility of drawing different interconnected maps.

IV. Initial Hypothesis and Research Questions

The project addresses some hypotheses and some historical considerations. The first one is that somatic practices started in Europe from the end of the 19th century with the

practitioners such as Frederick M. Alexander, Moshe Feldenkrais, and Elsa Gindler (Eddy 2009), and developed in the U.S. in the 1960s during the blossoming of post-modern dance. Later, somatics returned to Europe and stimulated new dance training and forms of practice. The main hypothesis is that somatic-informed dance practices (Brown 2011) had a major impact on the European choreographic scene in the 1980s. The investigation of this project relates less to the question of whether choreographers consciously use specific somatic approaches to reach their choreographic goals, but rather how their work, together with somatically trained dancers, can influence the construction of choreography, intended as 'the art of composing dance' ('Choreography', Crane and Mackrell 2010).

Throughout this study I investigate the definition of the term somatics (and somatic related terminology) in relation to the European dance scene. I start from my personal awareness and training as a Body-Mind Centering educator in order to look for an expanded definition of somatics that will encompass current physical and philosophical issues. I also investigate the use of mental imagery as a formal tool in the creative processes and in the training of dancers.

My initial research questions are:

- How much has the somatic field contributed to the development of contemporary dance and choreography during the 1980s among some European artists?
- To what extent are the influences of somatic knowledge and mental imagery evident in the training of dancers and performers?
- To what extent are the influences of somatic practices evident in some 1980s European theatrical dance?

- How and in what ways do dance artists use somatic awareness? Are they aware of using it?
- How does the dancer's somatic training affect the inter-relationship between choreographers and dancers?

V. Defining Somatics

A further focus of this chapter is to investigate the substance of somatics. For 'substance' I include those concepts, practices, and historical backgrounds that position the essence of somatics as we know it today. As pointed out by practitioner and founder of Esalen Institute[2] Michael Murphy (Reed 2011), there is not a specific need to categorise somatics but to analyse it, defining its inner nuances and diversities. Somatics is a field in perpetual development. We can note these changes now more than ever, particularly for the ways somatics is being distributed and integrated into already settled movement systems and practices. Furthermore, during the present Covid-19 pandemic, somatic practices have adapted themselves to new modes of dissemination through the technology being mediated by the screens. In a certain sense, the process of categorisation means making somatics clear and definable, with the risk of limiting it within some restricted borders. This could affect the understanding of the intrinsic core of somatics, which is, by its nature, very open to changes and influences.

In my investigation I analysed specific somatic key words, which will be developed in Chapter 2.II.A.1-5. Even though each somatic practice has its particular and specific ways of addressing concepts, somatics could be considered an umbrella category

[2] The Esalen Institute is an educational and research centre based in California and founded around 1960s, devoted to 'exploring and realizing human potential through experience, education, and research' (Esalen, 2021). For further information: https://www.esalen.org.

(similar to what is considered a large set in mathematics), where the inner 'borders', or subsets, are not well-defined. Although somatics has a deep connection with dance pedagogy (see Reed 2011), my analysis is directed towards understanding its influence on the European performance context and not from an educational perspective.

When we speak about somatics we should refer to an extended and impacting web of intergenerational and transnational connections. For instance, Martha Eddy (2016) states that one of the stimuli that implemented her research into somatics history was the curiosity provoked by the influences of Irmgard Bartenieff in Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen's work and to what extent Bartenieff was affected by Rudolph von Laban.

Furthermore, we should evaluate how knowledge is shared in somatic practices: through classes and exercises that often are transmitted 'through learning environments where there is an inter-corporeal encounter' (Brown 2015). This sharing/encounter takes place through specific elements such as imagery, voice/vocalization, touch, recalling to anatomical images, as analysed later in the chapter. Moreover, the places where these practices are experienced are often arranged to create quiet, safe, and comfortable learning settings, seen in examples below. During my training with the school of Body-Mind Centering (BMC) I pursued mainly in Italy, in France and in Germany, there were some identical constants: a nice, big, and bright room, with coloured pillows, gymnastic balls of various dimensions, little mattresses; and a corner with some refreshments, tea, juices water and biscuits. The daily training was around eight hours, but with various pauses in between and you were allowed to take all the breaks you needed. The breaks could be in the form of short walks, of sleeping on the side of the room, or just spending some time within yourself. Thus, the pauses were considered part of the learning, where the nervous system processes the information given and experienced before. Another

example: when I took some Feldenkrais lessons, the environment was similar: very curated with mattresses, pillows, and blankets. Lessons are approximately one hour long, and during this hour of exercises explained only through the voice of the instructor, you are welcome to do nothing if you feel like it.

In addition, the learning environments where these practices are transmitted often are exclusive because the lessons are not shared outside from the training. For example, SRT is organised in a set of lessons shared only by a certified practitioner, and the same occurs with Feldenkrais. Or in BMC during the training, students receive manuals that are not shared outside the BMC schools and are only for insiders. These written texts are not distributed outside, not only for commercial/copyright reasons, but also because the learnings do not occur just by data included in those manuals, rather within inter-corporeal processes and sharing through movement, meditations, verbal exchanges, images and so on, so the texts represent just one section of the educational training. Thus, this chapter is mainly focused on the published literature in the somatic field, but we should acknowledge the 'oral and inter-corporeal process of transmission' (Brown, 2015, personal email to the author) that is continuously happening in the studios, where the perceived experience is considered as the first knowledge. In this way I also position my fieldwork that I return to in Chapters 4 and 5.

Lastly, this consideration points out a shift that occurred in the sharing of knowledge in somatics. The first manuals written for instance by Bess Mensendieck (1906), Todd (1937) and Ida Rolf (1977) included more instructional advice and 'corrective instructional lessons' (Brown 2015). In this way, somatic literature has changed from didactic manuals (open to everyone) to adjuvant written materials to use in the studio, in this sense becoming exclusive. Manuals circulated openly are less didactic but more

experiential (for example, Andrea Olsen's *Body Stories*: *A Guide to Experiential Anatomy*, 1990).

Nevertheless, during the 21st century there has been increased interest in somatics within the academic field, for instance, with the *Journal of Dance and Somatic Practices* (2009). This shows an interest and connection with somatics to diverse fields of knowledge, exploring academically a relationship between these two fields. A further issue is the language used in these manuals and in the live practices. In my experience I found the texts mainly in English and in German, even though some manuals are being translated in Italian, French, and other languages. For this reason, I explore a lineage mainly from United States, Britain, and Germany. In addition, the connections that I am going to establish between somatic practices and dance derive from these countries. Nevertheless, I must specify that, in my experience with BMC training, the somatic lessons in Italy or in France have been translated into Italian or French, with a simultaneous translation in English or vice versa. This is particularly interesting because reveals the necessity of rooting that encompasses firstly the language.

As pointed out by Michael Huxley (2019), dance artists and educators have explored a variety of 'practices, techniques and methods' for many reasons: from a personal 'journey of exploration' to the desire of incrementing and changing 'inadequacies and inequities in the classroom that they have sought to address' (Huxley 2019: 71). Somatic practices and approaches have constructed a culture that in the last thirty years has embraced a substantial field of dance studies.

Moreover, I suggest thinking of somatics also as a 'movement culture' as discussed by American scholar, artist, educator, and choreographer Doran George (2020: 7) in his

posthumously published book, where the dancing body is a paradigm of social circumstances. In this light I am going to explore the broad field of somatics. The choreographic work of George was centred in 'deconstructing socio-political identity categories' (George 2021), which was the methodological research underpinning his doctorate on somatic dance training leading to the book *The Natural Body in Somatics Dance Training* (2020) that proposed a cultural contribution on dance and somatics.

V.A An Investigation of the Definitions of Somatics in Existing Literature

In the 2015 programme of Movement Research in New York City, an organization 'leading laboratories for the investigation of dance and movement-based forms' (Movement Research 2015), an event with the title 'what we talk about when we talk about somatics: a sharing of practices leading into conversation' was focused on the very current and lively question 'what is somatics?':

> What does the term "somatics" even mean? Can we arrive at consensus around this as an idea, a value, a practice? This event will bring together artists/practitioners of various backgrounds and areas of study to lead the group in experiential practices which will evolve into a collective discussion on the term "somatics" and the impact and resonance of this way of learning and being in the world.
>
> (Movement Research 2015)

The conference programme points out at least three significant things. First, still at the end of 2015, there was no universally accepted definition of somatics ('What does the term "somatics" even mean?'). Secondly, somatics is not yet identified in its substance ('…an idea, a value, a practice?'). Thirdly, somatics does not belong only to one sector; it can impact different fields of knowledge ('this event will bring together artists/practitioners of various background and areas of study…'). Moreover, in this text we can have a taste, a preview of some words specific to the somatics field, such as 'resonance, learning and being in the world.'

Lastly, reading and observing the title, ‘what we talk about when we talk about somatics: a sharing of practices leading into conversation’, there is a sense of flow in the construction of the phrase (there is no punctuation in the first part of the phrase). The underlying of the concept of subject/ substance (what) and time (when), both beginning with question words (what and when), seems to delineate the fact that there is a developing process (question marks as a possibility of generating open discourses). Together with the use of words such as ‘sharing’, ‘practices’, and ‘conversation’, a connection with modalities and concepts belonging to the territory of somatic practices is being suggested. Some of these modalities can be understood as ‘sharing, practices and conversation’, where thanks to a sharing of practices (in this case somatic practices), a conversation could start and develop. This brief text is just one significant example of the challenges and difficulties with finding a working definition for somatics; it highlights the point that this field can appear undefinable or as something with more than one explanation.

It may help to consider Italian novelist and partisan Italo Calvino, who, in his *Six Memos for the Next Millennium* (1988), in the first lesson on lightness, writes:

> Whenever humanity seems condemned to heaviness, I think I should fly like Perseus into a different space. I don’t mean escaping into dreams or into the irrational. I mean that I have to change my approach, look at the world from a different perspective, with a different logic and with fresh methods of cognition and verification. The images of lightness that I seek should not fade away like dreams dissolved by the realities of present and future…
>
> (Calvino 1988: 7)

Although Calvino is not involved directly in the movement field, many choreographers have used his texts as inspiration, for instance Belgian Frederic Flamand based his work

Silent Collision (2003) on Calvino's *The Invisibles Cities* and in 2010 created *La Verité 25 X Seconde* on *The Baron in the Threes*. In the above citation, an awareness of necessity for a change of perspective is present: this mobile and shifting attitude also belongs to the somatics field. When he uses terms such as: 'change my approach, look at the world from a different perspective', he is dealing with a different feeling of the present. Somatics as a field is also nourished by concepts of allowing ourselves the possibility of changing our approach to embodiment through a different perspective, in order to be able to participate in the world. Somatic practices could change one person's inner perspective: through specific movement sequences or improvised explorations, with references to images (poetic or anatomical) and/or with hand-on practices, a work develops on physical and emotional patterns which make individuals capable of rethinking their corporeal and mental models. The emerging from the sensing of our emotional and bodily feelings, grounded in our body-mind entity, allows a deeper awareness of our body-mind physicality where mind and body are considered a joined and interdependent organism.

Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen (1993a: 1) gives a useful insight in how the term somatics emerged: Hanna conceived the term 'somatics' in 1976 for its journal *Somatics Magazine - Journal of the Bodily Arts and Sciences*. Later, 'somatics' started to be in use in the 1990s, when Murphy together with somatic practitioners Bainbridge Cohen and Emilie Conrad joined the Somatic Study group initiated by Don Hanlon Johnson, a Rolfing somatic practitioner, scholar, and former editor with Hanna of the journal *Somatics*. During this experience Bainbridge Cohen and Conrad started to use the term 'somatic' and identify themselves with it (Eddy 2016). Since then, with somatics we intend a broad field of research where the body is studied 'through the personal

experiential perspective' (Bainbridge Cohen 1993: 1). Interestingly Johnson (2021) explains the origins of somatics as

> "Somatics" is a fiction constructed by Thomas Hanna in the early 1970s by adding that little "s" onto an adjective that had been variously used before to denote the physical dimension of the self.
>
> (Johnson 2021)

Johnson also stresses the extent to which adding that 'tiny letter' (the 's') contributed to gather together various approaches, in order to 'deepen a collaborative work, with the kinds of dialogue that promote more grounded knowledge and better training of practitioners' (Johnson 2021).

Etymologically the adjective 'somatic' derives from the Greek word *soma*, which means 'living body'; however, the term somatics underpins a particular field constituted by specific body-mind techniques that began to emerge from the beginning of the 20th century. Somatic knowledge, somatic practices, and somatically informed technique/choreography/training demonstrate only a few possible uses of this adjective, but they differentiate the various contexts in which somatics operates. In the article 'Access to Somatic Theory and Applications. Sociopolitical Concerns', Eddy (2000) offers a significant definition of what somatic disciplines are:

> those systems of study that view physical reality and specific bodily or even cellular awareness as a source of knowledge, usually to be gained through touch, movement, and imagery as processes of embodiment.
>
> (Eddy 2000: 1)

Therefore, Eddy enlarges the previous definition of somatics by Hanna, defining three main key concepts in order to evaluate what somatics is: touch, movement and imagery, stressing the concept of embodiment. While for Hanna the predominant approach in explaining the concept of somatics is the body as seen from the 'inside', from the 'first-

person perception', Eddy gives these key concepts the expanded possibility of becoming significant elements of a source of knowledge, so the focus is not only the individual and the body as seen through a first person perspective, but also the relationship between the embodied subject and his/her surroundings through modalities of touch, movement recognized through proprioception, practices with imagery and kinaesthetic sensations. Kinaesthetic derives from 'kinaesthesis' that is 'the sense by which motion, weight, and position of various body parts are perceived' (Kent: 2007). Thus, kinaesthesis is involving the perception of the body both in motion and in stillness.

As Eddy discusses, even though the field of somatic(s) emerges during the 1960s, the

> concept of paying attention to physical sensation in order to bring balance to the body and mind is not new. It has existed through the millennia. What has varied is how this information is delivered, and the extent of its usage. Nor did somatic education of the twentieth century arise in a vacuum.
>
> (Eddy 2016: 85)

Eddy (2016: 85) stresses the extent to which concepts later used by somatic practitioners were already in use, for example, in eastern cultures (for instance the use of the breath in Rolfing derives from Yoga or the reflexive responses of Feldenkrais came from Judo).

Dance artist and scholar Sarah Ashkin (2011) provides clear indications about the use of the words 'soma' and 'somatic', and draws an articulate historical pathway, focused on modern and post-modern dance in the U.S. Drawing on Hanna's theory, Ashkin connects him to the phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty who both 'advocate the importance of cultural recognition of the body as the home of consciousness' (Ashkin 2011: 6). This search for recognition for the body to be reconsidered as a special point

of reference in relation to human development is in line with the discoveries and tendencies started at the beginning of the twentieth century. Ashkin also creates four categories for organising somatics (ceremony, performance, healing, and pedagogy):

> "Somatic culture": 'the total sum of ways of living'; somatic performance: 'the act of performing a ceremony', or dance in which the content of the performance encourages holistic integration of performers and witnesses ('performance'); somatic healing: 'to make healthy, whole, or sound; restore to health'; and somatic pedagogy: 'the principles, or practice of teaching' that impart wellbeing of the full self to students' ('pedagogy').
>
> (Ashkin 2011: 6)

We can add to this list other fields where the presence of somatics is relevant, including, for example, somatics in dance training, somatics and choreography, somatics and psychology, and somatics and aesthetics. Ashkin never mentions the word choreography. It is relevant to notice this gap in her definition, denoting an evident question that opens space for a further analysis in this field, which is the main research direction and contribution of this study (I am introducing the discussion on somatics and choreography in Chapter 2 and in Chapter 3, whereas my findings in the fieldwork are discussed in Chapter 5).

Specifically, Eddy offers the following working definition of somatics: 'somatics is a set of practices and mind-body techniques that focus on integrating different systems of the body', improving its movement functions and efficiency, connecting the individual to the environment, using Feldenkrais, Alexander, and Bartenieff techniques, to name just a few (Eddy, 2009). At this point, I am considering this definition an attempt to clarify the somatics' borders for this research. Furthermore, I am also conscious that this definition does not mention choreography, but it does establish the core of somatics, in order to engage later with other fields of impact (such as choreography).

VI. Research Background: Overview on Philosophical Perspectives

In this section I introduce some philosophical theories regarding dance and choreographic practices that shaped the research, drawing attention to what has been called 'thinking through the body' and more particularly, 'thinking through dance' (Bunker, Pakes and Rowell 2013), acknowledging the relevance of how previous studies have enhanced the possibility to start the journey of creating thinking through movement. Crucially, being in movement also means being in relationship, with one's inner self, with others, and with society. According to sociologist Zygmunt Baumann (2006), humans are attached to the notion of independence, where they could affirm themselves and their space in this world, in accordance with their concept of 'liquid modernity'. With this Baumann outlined during the 1990s those aspects of endless mobility that he found in identities, relationships and economics defining social life as 'liquid', in opposite to the search for order in modern society. The condition in which today's society is called to react is one of interdependence between human beings. It is important to note that the concept of interdependence is intrinsic to the somatic field where, for instance, body and mind are considered connected to each other on a deep level and where the desires and necessities of being in relation, intended as both the body-mind relationship and one to society, are at the basis of human development. In the following section, some philosophical frames will be presented to underline the direction of the overall thesis.

VI.A Grounding Theories and Philosophical Frames

The main frame of the overall research process is developed through the concept of Foucauldian genealogy. This perspective provides an overall research approach to investigate the current generation of somatic practitioners. I am not confronting

concepts of power or sexuality but am using genealogy to open up discourses between diverse moments in history, time and places. In this sense I also integrate Foucault's concept of 'archaeology', especially when I organise specific approaches into shareable knowledge (Chapter 4). 'Archaeology' is used in the Foucauldian understanding to look at history as a method to discern the emergence of discourses and their transformation. Discourses are ways of organising knowledge thanks to the composition of social relations 'through the collective understanding of the discursive logic and the acceptance of the discourse as social fact' (Adams 2017). In this perspective I am using these analytical methods to deal with grouping of concepts and ideas and not only historical facts.

As theoretical approaches, the works of specific philosophers such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty (2002 [1945]), Jean-Luc Nancy (1992), and Richard Shusterman (2008) are significant. In his *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945) philosopher Merleau-Ponty speaks about touch from a point of view where perception defines the essential parameters to enter in contact with the structure of this present world.

> If I touch with my left hand my right hand while it touches an object, the right hand object is not the right hand touching: the first is an intertwining of bones, muscles and flesh bearing down on a point in space, the second traverses space as a rocket in order to discover the exterior object in its place.
>
> (Merleau-Ponty [1945] 2002: 92)

Reflecting on this quote, we can notice that what is being embodied is both the object, and the movement towards the other hand, and in this cognitive process, body and mind become aware of the surroundings, rather than feeling only the inner movements of specific body parts. Crucially, Merleau-Ponty enlarges and expands the possibility of our human body to be a means for understanding this world, as a tool for communication and not only an object present in an actual contingency.

In her doctoral thesis, dance scholar Tuuli Tahko (2016), cites sociologist Stephen Wainwright (2006) to clearly explain the interdependent step that Merleau-Ponty indicated: 'Merleau-Ponty rejected the mind–body dualism of Descartes by contending that thinking, feeling and doing are all practical actions that obligate embodiment' (Wainwright, 2006: 551). Inspired by this trace, dance philosopher Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, in her *Phenomenology of Dance* ([1966] 2009) looks at phenomenology from the dancer's point of view, introducing the concept of kinaesthesia, where the body is analysed from the point of view of the movement. As Tahko (2016) discusses, Maxine Sheets-Johnstone (1966, 2009) acknowledges the work of Merleau-Ponty against Cartesian dualism 'in which the mind was consistently regarded as superior to the body', and refers to 'the corporeal turn', suggesting a relocation of the attention from the mind to the body and, with more consistency, towards 'our existence and experiences as bodies' (Tahko 2016: 51). At the same time, Sheets-Johnstone suggests that embodiment means also to experience the reactions to the situations in which the body is immersed and where new relationships could emerge. Dance scholar Ramsay Burt contributed an explanation of the 'instantaneous cognition of dance' with the critique that 'Thus, although dance is a time-based art, it is often assumed that choreography presents the spectator with a series of tableau-like moments that one takes in at a glance' (Burt 2009: 81). Furthermore, according to dance scholar Leena Rouhiainen (2008) 'We need interaction or dialogical relationships with others in order to gain a wider sense of our own being as well as of the world' (Rouhiainen 2008 in Tahko 2016: 54). Essentially, we can go back to Bauman's words on interdependence, acknowledging the fact that 'embodiment, then, is necessarily intertwined with inter-subjectivity' (Tahko 2016: 54). These theories of embodiment are strictly connected to the work on somatics (Chapter 2), and to the analysis of fieldwork (Chapters 4 and 5).

More recently, the vision of American pragmatist philosopher and somatic practitioner, Richard Shusterman has been developed in *Soma-aesthetics* (2008) and in *Thinking Through the Body* (2012). Shusterman represents a relevant point of reference because he has defined the consistency of the aesthetic as a perceptible and sensitive field to which the body relates. Following his thinking, touch became a parameter for a new kind of aesthetics, discarding the power of the sense of vision and reinforcing that of touch. According to Shusterman (n.d.) soma-esthetics is a

> interdisciplinary field whose roots are in philosophical theory, soma-esthetics offers an integrative conceptual framework and a menu of methodologies not only for better understanding our somatic experience, but also for improving the quality of our bodily perception, performance, and presentation.
>
> Shusterman (n.d.)

Furthermore, soma-esthetics is 'a discipline that puts the body's experience and artful refashioning back into the heart of philosophy as an art of living' (Shusterman 2008: 15). Soma-esthetics is an area of multidisciplinary research which looks at bodily perception as key factor. Coined by Shusterman in 1996, this term is composed by 'soma' (Greek word for body) and 'aesthetics' (from the ancient Greek *αἰσθητικός*: of or relating to sense perception, sensitive, perceptive; later from the Kantian definition of the 'science of sensory perception'). Soma-esthetics sees the body as a subjectivity able to perceive and experience aesthetic /sensory features, namely somatically. In this light, we could consider aesthetics as a branch of philosophy connected to theories on beauty, philosophy on visual arts, theory on perception, and philosophy of experience (D'Angelo 2010; Andina 2012).

A somatic approach also means giving attention and a focus to the environment where human bodies are living, placed, and positioned. The request to shift the gaze from the singular perspective to a plural one, to the outwards, comes from the vital necessity to

enter into relationships with the surroundings, the other people and consequently the political organization of society. In analysing the work of Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible* (2000, 2004), the connection of the body to politics is relevant, enlarging the space of perception. The body's perception is making visible what first was not, meaning that through perception bodies became aware of their presence. According to Rancière, aesthetics is central to politics, seen as a part of the distribution of the sensible (in this instance referring to the senses) and conceived as the togetherness of what constitutes aesthetic practices. Artistic practices occupy a place in society, and they related to the common good. In order to establish the social system, aesthetics as distribution of the sensible makes artistic practices 'represent and re-configure' the landscape of the visible, or making things visible (Rancière [2000], 2004) which is constituted by the capability of making, being, seeing and saying. Or in other words: the possibility to perceive the social body as a performative agent, able to affect the sociality.

In accomplishing the possibility of the body to act, we cannot forget to look at the infrastructures and environmental conditions where the human is living. As Butler explains in a social perspective, these conditions create a vulnerability and a sense of precariousness. Thus, at the same time, this means that it is not possible to speak about the body without speaking about the relationships in which it is involved and the support that it is encountering or not (Butler 2009). Nevertheless, in the actual regime of precariousness, taking the individual body-mind structure as starting point for creating support, requires the 'plural form of performativity' (Butler 2015: 8), where with 'performativity' Butler means that the language has social and political forms, so it is always multiple. In this light, the approaches chosen from philosophy and aesthetics contribute to my methodology in diverse ways. First, these supported placing somatics

as a multi-layered field; secondly, they influenced the way I positioned myself within the fieldwork, for instance regarding the questions I asked and key words used. Finally, these philosophical concepts helped to structure the frames in which I analysed the fieldwork findings. All these theories are connected to the work of somatics as practices of integration and care as further discussed in Chapters 2 and 4.

VI.B Perspectives on the Body, From the Performance Philosophy Point of View

This research keeps in mind Graham McFee's words on embodiment in dance, where it particularly means 'that this embodiment involves these particular dancers on these particular occasions' (McFee 2013: 40) and the works of Susan Leigh Foster on kinaesthetic empathy (2010), by which we mean to experience empathy through looking at others' movement or dances. Moreover, drawing on the words of Anna Pakes on Cartesian dualism (Pakes 2006), I also embrace the work of Erin Manning (2013) in *Always More than One*, which is highly influenced by the concept of absolute movement by Gilles Deleuze. Starting from an analysis of different categories, such as 'life, body, affect', Manning traces and constructs the premises for a kinaesthetically informed understanding of the choreographic process. For Manning, life is relational, happening through bodies capable of changing. She asserts that 'life is relation, propelled by the force of in-formation' (2013: 21), and the body is acting in life as a society in itself (2013: 22), being affected by its milieu. 'The body is a multiphase relation that defines itself through coefficients of transversality expressive in the practice of becoming. (…) The body is infinitely variable, not subject but verb. And as a verb it persists, infinitively' (Manning 2013: 26). In this instance, choreography could be seen as a multilayered system of communication, with the inter-subjectivity between choreographer and dancer, and dancer and audience. These theories are relevant for an

understanding of the concept of choreography and performativity, later developed in Chapters 4 and 5.

VII. Outline of the Thesis

The thesis consists of five chapters and a conclusion. The second and the third chapters position the research specifically in the field of somatics (Chapter 2) and historically in the 1980s with a focus on two choreographers (Chapter 3). Chapters 4 and 5 present the results of the fieldwork, with two specific foci: Chapter 4 introduces the qualitative research and data gathering derived from fieldwork, and Chapter 5 is specifically devoted to interrelations between somatics and choreography. Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 are interconnected and develop the analysis of the fieldwork.

Chapter 2 'Somatics and Choreography: Mapping the Field for a Thematic Landscape' maps the field to trace the emergence of somatic and choreographic interrelationships. A literature review on somatics and choreography starts an investigation into the field of somatics, defining some concepts such as body-mind entity and functions, touch, journey, agency, and imagery. Following this, works on somatics from an historical point of view and by somatics practitioners are reviewed. A further section focuses on writings on somatics in dance education. The section on the concept of release contributes to establish a focus on the 1980s works that I research, and the final section introduces the somatic practices of Body-Mind-Centering and Skinner Releasing Technique, used by two of the choreographers investigated. I conclude by returning to the central questions of the thesis, giving an insight into choreography and somatics. I draw on historical and contemporary scholarship, often written by practitioners who reflect on their practices.

Chapter 3 ‘Choreographing the 1980s: An Overview of the Contemporary Dance Scene’ provides an overview of choreography in the 1980s with an insight on Vandekeybus and Agis. I focus on 1980s Dance Theatre, proposing an overview of the contemporary dance scene, starting with an exploration of the term choreography. Aspects of the field are covered such as Dance Theatre, New Dance, and influences from feminism, introducing theories and works from dance scholars, dance sociologists, dance critics, academics, and essayists from the 1980s. Furthermore, I differentiate between the British and Belgian dance contexts, setting the contextual background for the following fieldwork. Having established the geographical and historical contexts, I introduce my two main case studies: Agis and Vandekeybus, analysing in more depth the inspiration for this thesis, *What the Body Does Not Remember*.

Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 together represent the core of my research. In Chapter 4, ‘Research in the Field: Traces of Choreographers’ and Somatic Practitioners’ Voices From the 1980s Europe’ I present my fieldwork methodology with a frame on ethnography and data gathering. The first section of the fieldwork is introduced, based on an understanding of somatics as a concept directly from practitioners. Here I present the results of the interviews with: Kirsty Alexander, Gaby Agis, Iñaki Azpillaga, Elena Giannotti, German Jauregui, Isabelle Schad. These interviews were conducted live in London (University of Roehampton, Independent Dance / Siobhan Davies Studios, Chisenhale Dance Space and Agis’ home) and in Venice, mainly in the context of Biennale Danza 2015 and 2016 and through Skype. This ethnographic perspective, based on interviews and observation, establishes the participants’ understanding of somatics as a concept. From the qualitative analysis I categorized the results into four branches: on the creation/re-creation of a piece, on the somatically informed education perspective, on the construction of classes (general consideration of the kind of

movement practices proposed), and on the position of the choreographer/practitioner. Furthermore, the thematic investigation introduces four general themes that I explore in the chapter: ‘living understanding of somatics: a comparison of the concepts of somatics’; ‘perception, consciousness, awareness’; ‘encounter’; ‘and tools for an embodied dance practice’. Examples from the fieldwork demonstrate clear associations, for instance, between the definition of somatics explained by my interviewees and how they perceive it in practice, or how in different context the same or similar practices emerged, in particular similarities came up between training consciously defined as somatically informed and training not directly informed by somatics. This chapter engages with the training sessions and warm-ups whereas Chapter 5 involves the focus on choreographic creation

Chapter 5 ‘Choreography and Somatics: Fieldwork Research Analysis’
forms the main body of the thesis as it offers analyses of choreography and somatics in the case studies, from a somatic perspective. Following the ethnographic methodology utilised in Chapter 4, I delve into movement analysis, imagery, and choreographic structures. Four different choreographic pieces and three diverse somatic narratives are presented, tracing similarities and diversities. Returning to the methodology and research questions, I examine the works by Agis *Shouting Out Loud*: *Reconstructed* (1984, 2014) seen at University of Roehampton, and *Close Streams*: *Reconstructed* (1983, 2016) at Chisenhale Dance Space. A new creation by Vandekeybus *Mockumentary of a Contemporary Saviour* (2017) seen at Ultima Vez headquarters in Brussels is examined, and *Collective Jumps* by Schad (2015) at Biennale Danza in Venice, in which I performed.

Chapter 2: Somatics and Choreography: Mapping the Field for a Thematic Landscape

I. Introduction

I.A Perspectives of Analysis

This following chapter delineates specific concepts, history, and practices of somatics in order to focus on issues associated with the multi-disciplinary field of dance and choreography. This chapter provides an historical background and some main features common for the establishing of somatics, conceived as an umbrella of practices, concepts, and approaches, specifically in relation to choreography and movement. First, it is necessary to underline the fact that this developing historical landscape is in progress and cannot be exhaustive, also because somatics is, by its intrinsic nature, a varied field. Some elements for understanding somatics offer specific points of view such as the relation between somatics and choreography, with a focus on the European context.

The chapter sets out an overview of the existing literature, comparing some recent sources with those of the pioneers in the field of somatics. I start with a chrono-historical section (I.B), subsequently, defining concepts specifically of the somatic field: these notions have been extrapolated from practices, research fieldwork and literature (II.A.1-5). The chapter continues with an analysis of works on somatics from an historical point of view (II.B), involving works directly from somatic practitioners and dance educators (II.D), and from choreographers connected to somatics (II.E). A section (III) on the work of Joan Skinner and Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen follows, to create the foundation for analysing the work of Gaby Agis and Isabelle Schad in the following

chapters. Furthermore, taking into consideration the general umbrella of somatics, but distinguishing between Skinner Release Technique (SRT) and Body-Mind Centering (BMC), I conclude presenting the general concept of 'release' (IV). These sections aim to provide firstly an overview of the definition of somatics and an historical frame. Secondly, it sets out references for an understanding of SRT and BMC in relation to Agis' and Schad's work, differentiating them from the general approach of release.

It is relevant to point out that the historical landscape has been investigated as much as possible from a European perspective in order to create a solid background of reference for the main focus of this research, which is the 1980s and European choreography. The 1980s are a starting point for a new understanding of the choreographic perspective, which has developed through dissemination and change over the years. However, the aim here is not to create a comprehensive somatics history but to initiate an understanding of somatics from a European perspective. As discussed in the first chapter, my analytical perspective has been informed and influenced by my personal history as an Italian, a European, a somatic movement educator and performer.

I.B Historical Intersections of Somatics

In this section I am setting some historical context. The defined somatic approach started at the end of 19th century with the work of pioneers such as François Delsarte[3] and developed in the 20th century with the first somatic practitioners who invented specific techniques still used today, such as Ida Rolf[4] and Moshe Feldenkrais.[5] In the middle of the 20th century, somatics also developed in connection with the dance field,

[3] François Delsarte (b. Solesman 1811, d. Paris 1871).
[4] Ida Rolf (b. New York 1896, d. New York 1979).
[5] Moshe Feldenkrais (b. Slavuta 1904, d. Tel Aviv 1984).

thanks to practitioners such as Bainbridge Cohen[6] and Skinner[7]. Therefore, we are dealing with a period of about 140 years.

Spatially, two continents provided fertile environments for somatics: Europe and North America. However, it is important to keep in mind the relevant interchange of concepts and terms coming from the East, such as meditation and union of mind and body. The creators of these techniques descended from various sectors of knowledge: for example, Feldenkrais studied physics, specialising in engineering cybernetics; Rolf earned a PhD in biological chemistry; Cohen was trained as a dancer and as an occupational therapist. The common point is that they often went through injuries or some bodily issues themselves, which caused them to change perspectives on their lives and brought new awareness to their moving habits, thanks to which they were able to re-pattern themselves. Many different examples exist, such as somatic practitioner Skinner, founder of Skinner Releasing Technique. After studying with practitioner and dance teacher Cora Belle Hunter,[8]a graduate student of Mabel Elsworth Todd,[9]and at the modern dance summer school Bennington College[10] in Vermont, Skinner (2016) became a member firstly of the Martha Graham Company, and then of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company, touring extensively between 1951 to 1955. During one of the last tours, she had a very serious spinal injury to a disc, so she started to attend some Alexander Technique classes with Judith Liebowitz,[11] founder of the American Centre for the Alexander Technique (1964) and establisher of the Alexander Technique

[6] Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen (b. Ohio, 1943).
[7] Joan Skinner (b. St. Paul 1924, d.2021).
[8] Cora Belle Hunter (D.o.B and D.o. D unknown).
[9] Mabel Elsworth Todd (NY 1880, California 1956).
[10] Bennington College is a private and liberal art college situated in Bennington, Vermont, USA, where in 1934 a summer dance program was founded by dance artist and teacher Martha Hill and where dance artists such as Martha Graham, Martha Hill, Hanya Holm, Doris Humphrey, and Charles Weidman have taught. Their students included Merce Cunningham, Betty Ford and Josè Limon.
[11] Judith Leibowitz (D.o.B. unknown, d. 2011).

as a method for actors at The Julliard School. During this long process of rehabilitation, she worked out her releasing technique based on the Alexander technique. Similarly, Susan Klein explored and worked out her technique after an injury during dancing in the 1970s. Klein Technique is defined as ‘a process through which the body is analysed and understood to improve and to further our movement potential’ (Klein 2016). Historical pioneer Delsarte recovered from voice loss which had occurred due to ‘poor and conflicting instructions’ (Kuritz 1988: 321) and subsequently created a technique based on differentiating the body into three sectors.

In conversation, dance scholar and choreographer Carol Brown defined the first somatic theorists and practitioners as ‘proto-somatic’ (Brown 2015). Educators and dance artists such as Françoise Delsarte, Isadora Duncan, Rudolf Von Laban were engaged directly or indirectly within the dance world and influenced it. They have not really created a somatic practice that has been continuously transmitted (except for Dalcroze’s Eurhythmics, a method where rhythm, structure, and musical expression are experienced through movement) but offer some methods and movement approaches that have somatic elements, where new enquiry emerged within the body-mind perspective. They were choreographers themselves or have deeply influenced some choreographers, ‘they shaped the culture in which the primary somatic pioneers were working’ (Eddy 2009: 10) (see II.B).

These somatic pioneers developed specific and alternative ways to respond to these physical issues, investigating and proposing new ‘healing’ strategies focused on a deeper connection between the body and the mind, through a re-education of the body-mind system of relation. Their approaches were in response to some dance training systems that were technically highly organised but in which a deep body-mind

relationship was not articulated. Here the mind-body connection between the inner individual structure was not considered for the accomplishment of the technical goals. The pioneers refer to specific practitioners of somatic practices who coined them or only practiced them, namely they self-identify as somatic practitioners, or who started a new way of thinking about the body's perception and new ways of working with the body-mind connection (see II.B and II.C).

In Europe, this shift of focus to a perspective from the inside and towards a concept of a healthy body- mind was fostered by German body culture at the beginning of the 20th century. As scholar Karl Toepfer explains:

> body culture tends to encompass an ever expanding range of activities, including the performing arts, literature, the fine arts, sports, medicine, sex, sexology, fashion, advertising, labor, ergonomics, architecture, leisure activities, music, physiognomic study, and military discipline.
> (Toepfer 1997: 6)

For German body culture, nudity and movement were two essential elements 'bestowing modernity upon the body' (Toepfer 1997: 7). The paradigm of the body changed through dance and gymnastics: movement, dance and nudity became fundamental means and resources to enhance both self-consciousness and artistic and community development. For instance, the work of Bess Mensendieck, an American pedagogue based in Vienna, was focused on instituting body consciousness into the female community in the 1930s: through specific gymnastic movement and nudity, she motivated women to have a body which was 'strong, healthy, and beautiful' (Mensendieck in Toepfer 1997: 39). The search for self-consciousness and experiencing the body from an inner perspective could be considered as precursors of what later developed as somatic work. In addition, the *Lebensreform* (life reform) approach was searching for a new political way to look at the body from the health care perspective.

One example of this was the creation and settlement of Monte Verità in Ascona. Monte Verità was a vegetarian and nudist community established in 1899 by wealthy Dutch citizen Henri Oedenvoken and the Germans Karl and Gustav Graeser (the former was in the army and the latter was a poet and pacifist). The settlement was dedicated to anyone looking for a change of life, to be closer to nature and to a healthier life regime. The social organisation of the community was based on cooperation and on new methods to cultivate the connection between mind and body. It was here where Rudolf Von Laban and Mary Wigman spent their summer teaching sessions. Furthermore, this place attracted very well-known figures such as Carl Jung and Hermann Hesse (Toepfer 1997).

This is a complex description, demonstrating the influences coming from diverse cultural heritages, as seen in the cultural appropriation by Europe and the USA of some Eastern philosophies and culture or ancient European culture. Two well-known examples of this are the use of heritage other than their own which can be clearly seen in the works of American choreographer Ruth St. Denis (see for example *Incense* 1906), and the case of the influence of Greek art in Isadora Duncan's works. The borrowing of diverse cultural identities and aesthetics helped in shaping new dancers' identities as explored in *Modern Bodies* by Julia Foulkes (2002), where the focus is specifically on American bodies.

Since this research focuses more on European choreography, it is beneficial to highlight the works of Jaques-Dalcroze (1903, 1918), Stebbins (1885) on the work of Delsarte, Mensendieck (1906), and Laban (1920, 1950) to provide a background of what was developing in Europe at the beginning of the 20th century. As previously mentioned, they could be defined as 'proto-somatic' (Brown 2015) practitioners, who were

operating at the beginning of the 20th century especially in Germany. There was a context of naturalism, physical gymnastics and expressivity, and research for a functional and free movement (Toepfer 1997) and their research was deeply connected to dance. For instance, Jaques-Dalcroze (1903; 1918) focused one aspect of his research on eurhythmics, from which Mary Wigman in Central Europe and Marie Rambert in England, like many other students, later developed dance patterns/sequences. Rambert worked with the dancer and choreographer Vaslav Nijinsky on his masterpiece *Le Sacre du Printemps* (1913) in order to help his dancers (from *Les Ballets Russes de Serge Diaghilev*) perform some of Nijnsky's very difficult rhythmic sequences. Delsarte's approach to gestures and the significance of movement in relation to human emotional states is a foundation for techniques and studies that firstly considered the individual as the main focus as opposed to those techniques with specific standards to reach. His thinking influenced the work of dance revolutionaries Duncan and St. Denis, in their research for a 'free body'.

Toepfer's *Empire of Ecstasy* (1997) illustrates the *Nacktkultur* (nudism) and the body culture from 1910 to 1935 in Germany, where great attention was paid to the body, considered an important source of knowledge. For example, traces of this kind of work are evident in the choreographic creations of German choreographer Susanne Linke[12], a pupil of Wigman, who greatly influenced European contemporary choreography, specifically for her use of the breath and the pelvis as focus of energy. Wigman was a pupil of Jaques-Dalcroze and Laban. Thus, it is possible to trace a lineage between choreographers and somatic practitioners or proto-somatic (or predecessors) from the very beginning of the century (Toepfer 1997 and Segel 1998). For instance, Delsarte, as

[12] Susanne Linke (b. 1944).

reported in the work and writings of Stebbins'[13] *Delsarte System of Expression* (1885), influenced the work of American choreographers Ted Shawn, St. Denis, and Duncan. Respectively in Europe, his work has deeply informed Laban and Frederick Matthias Alexander. Furthermore, Laban was influenced by Jaques-Dalcroze.

In the second half of the 20th century the dance environment strongly encountered the experience of somatic practices, even though I must underline that the term 'somatics' has been coined only during the 1980s, as explained in Chapter 1. I and V. For example, dance scholar Larraine Nicholas (2007) investigates the experience of Dartington College of Arts. Nicholas delineates how the work initiated by the American Mary Fulkerson with her Anatomical Release Technique (see this chapter IV) during the 1970s was experienced in England and consequently in Europe, influencing the work of dance artists such as Rosemary Butcher, Gaby Agis, Sue MacLennan, and Richard Alston (Nicholas 2007). Fulkerson's influences include Todd's student Barbara Clark and Joan Skinner. Furthermore, it was precisely in this frame that Contact Improvisation was introduced in the U.K. thanks to Fulkerson's invitation to Steve Paxton as teacher (Nicholas 2007). Later, during the 1980s, British choreographer Agis went to New York through a grant to study dance and entered in contact with Skinner.

As will be discussed in Chapter 3, during the 1980s somatics developed as a solid field, because the advances made especially during the 1960s and 1970s became relevant to the dance field, both as an integrated part of dance education, and as tools for choreographic explorations. The substantial difference with the previous historical period of somatically informed practices is that, from the 1980s somatics became more

[13] Genevieve Stebbins (b. San Francisco 1857, d. Monterey 1934).

and more institutionalised inside universities and colleges, and specific somatic training schools were created. For example, in the 1990s, Skinner and Klein established their teacher certification programs, whereas Bainbridge Cohen had already established hers in 1973. In this way, their methods became codified, and the manner in which their practices were transmitted became systematised. Thus, the practices created exclusive learning environments, which were determined to be transmitted to specific groups of students and teachers.

II. Somatics and Choreography in Existing Literature

II.A Main Concepts

In studying the written texts and manuals of the pioneers (see II.B and II.C), situated in the time frame from the end of the 19th to the middle of 20th century, and in my attendance at some practical training sessions, specific words keep recurring among somatic practices such as: embodiment, agency, perception, proprioception, empathy, kinaesthesia, awareness and attention, point of view, patterns, re-patterns, posture, flow, resonance, making connections, breathing, questioning, structure, functions, body-mind and body schema, balance, imagery, resting, time, efficiency, touch, change, alignment, energy, relation, journey, first person perspective, no judgment, and functional anatomy. This list of words refers to concepts and terminology shared across various somatic practices, not only in relation to progenitors such as Delsarte and pioneers like Feldenkrais, but also in more recent practices and systems such as Dynamic Embodiment Somatic Movement Therapy Training Institute of Integrative Bodywork and Movement Therapy, BodyMind Movement Certification programmes, Franklyn Methods, Global Somatics, Somatic Expression. The physiologist, movement therapist and somatic movement therapist Martha Eddy listed over 45 somatic training programmes registered until 2016 (Eddy 2016: 130). Some of these words are concepts

that need verbs to become actions, they are words strictly connected to movement, and suggest motion. Some others are connected to a more anatomical and physical background or to the psychic field.

As noted earlier in this chapter, when speaking of somatics and somatic techniques, we are dealing with some specific and recurring concepts. These concepts are chosen because they are connected to the field research and analysis of choreography and somatics developed in this thesis: 'body-mind entity', 'body schema', 'functions', 'touch', 'journey', 'agency', and 'imagery'. 'Body-mind entity' and 'body schema' delineate the action territory of somatics: not only from the anatomical section (like choosing one part of the body), but the body-mind entity is engaged in the practice, proposing, and developing a specific concept of embodiment where 'mind and body are continuous with each other and non-binary'[14], where 'non-binary' here is intended as non-specifically divided (Brown 2016). 'Function' refers to the way somatics works, not only seeing the body parts anatomically, as dissected body pieces, but for their function, meaning how anatomical components work interdependently or individually. 'Touch' is one of the favoured senses of perception used in somatics, it has different grades of understanding in the different somatic techniques. It is highly relevant because it puts the individual in connection with themselves and others, 'touch and being touched' as, for example, Bainbridge Cohen used to say in the BMC classes that I attended or as a written sentence in 'when we touch someone, they touch us equally' (Bainbridge Cohen 1993: 6). 'Journey' represents one mental and physical strategy to understand the way somatics acts, and it is used in order to highlight that everything is constantly changing.

[14] In this light I must highlight that for instance SRT is using the word 'the whole self'(Agis 2016) to intend the continuity between mind and body as seen as unique organisms, without separation.

I use the term ‘agency’ as the capacity of the individual to make her or his own choices in relation to specific action contexts. In somatics, this could be seen as the capacity of the individual to act in a specific context, as for example in movement investigation, improvisation, movement training, bodywork, and trauma care, looking for a kind of freedom in a regime of boundaries, where identities are already constructed and performed collectively. Agency allows individuality and identity to develop as major contributions to the action process. Regarding this specific case study, ‘agency’ could be seen as the capability of the dancer to act independently inside the choreography. ‘Imagery’ is a specific sense, way and ability used in the somatic learning procedure, in somatically informed dance making and the choreographic research process. It is a two-way process: starting from some images (usually anatomical images), the somatic practitioner guides the group or individual in the exploration of some specific body parts in order to reach specific kinaesthetic feelings and sensations. The use of some images (such as examples from nature or metaphors) is certainly useful to give a specific body-mind psychic state, to prepare the field of work; at the same time the use of images recurs to describe specific sensations and the journey traversed during the somatic process.

These concepts are elaborated below and will be returned to in Chapters 4 and 5. I will now divide the umbrella of somatics into five sections related to these key concepts across different somatic practices.

II.A.1 Body-Mind Entity and Functions

When a somatic practitioner is speaking of a body, they are dealing with the mind-body entity. Furthermore, when the body is considered as a mind, meaning that through physicality it is possible to understand the mental process, ‘the mind is perceived as

existing throughout the body through nervous system connections' (Eddy 2016: 6). This means that the consideration in somatics education given to the body is basically direct to the mind.

Mabel E. Todd (1937) in her founding text *The Thinking Body* wrote:

> Living, the whole body carries its meaning and tells its own story, standing, sitting, walking, awake or asleep. It pulls all the life up into the face of the philosopher, and sends it all down into the legs of the dancer.
>
> Memory likes to recall the whole body. It is not our parent's faces that come back to us, but their bodies, in the accustomed chairs, eating, sewing, smoking, doing all the familiar things. We remember each as a body in action.
>
> (Todd 1937: 1)

The body is evaluated as a complete entity and not as divided and perceived in specific fragments as Western medicine tends to do (for example in the history of Western anatomical medicine as it evolved from the study of a dissected cadaver). In somatic practices the body is investigated as a complete body in action, which means in movement. From a somatic perspective, the body-mind entity is a structure, regulated by the principle that form follows function:

> We now realize that in the physical economy of the individual the many systems should be working in balance and unison and that thinking is a very part of their activity. We realize that function preceded structure, thinking preceded mind, the verb preceded the noun, doing was experienced before the thing done. Everything moves, and in the pattern of movement, Life is objectified.
>
> (Todd 1937: 3)

Moreover:

> The principle that function makes form determines the myriad shapes of life, from the earliest single-celled organism to the latest and most complicated plant or animal.
>
> (Todd 1937: 8)

> There is something in nature that forms pattern; we as part of nature also form patterns.
>
> (Bainbridge Cohen 1993: 1)

Indeed, when the body is thought of as a whole entity and when form follows function, the structural integration looks for a system that pushes for a change from a previous and orderly scheme in order to find a new balance and a new movement system. A relevant example of this could be, for instance, the title of Rolf's text: *Rolfing*: *Reestablishing the Natural Alignment and Structural Integration of the Human Body for Vitality and Well-Being* (1979). The way to reach for this integration is mainly based on perception and modes of perception, which do not depend on the structure (body) itself but on the relationships inside the structure (Rolf 1979). According to Rolf and other somatic practitioners, the human body structure is a unity of functions and systems. Also, in *The Elusive Obvious*, Moshe Feldenkrais (1981: 1) speaks of functional integration and awareness through movement 'to improve the health, mood, and the ability to overcome difficulties, pain and anxiety', stressing the importance of focusing on the 'how', namely on the process. Furthermore, the structure is the result of connections, as Peggy Hackney stresses in *Making Connections*: *Total Body Integration through Bartenieff Fundamentals* (1998). Hackney explains what 'connected' means (or as she wrote 'connectedness' or 'connectivity'):

> To connect is to join or link, to establish communication between or place in relationship, to associate mentally or emotionally
>
> … when we say that an individual is "connected" we are speaking about multiple levels.
>
> …The statement "He/she is connected" might be utilized to refer to … someone whose limbs are moving in relationship to … the central core or trunk of the body and to each other. All parts are in communication.
>
> (Hackney 1998: 233-234)

Within somatic education approaches, there are different ways to ‘establish communication’ and one of the most powerful and efficient is touch.

II.A.2 Touch (Tactile Feedback)

A primary medium through which somatic practitioners facilitate body awareness and functional integration of mind and body is through touch intended as tactile feedback: ‘when I touch someone, that person touches me back’ (Dowd 1981: 78), recalling also the previously cited quote from Bainbridge Cohen (1993a: 6). Through touch, new structural balances emerge in the soft tissue connections of the body, regulating and stabilising the deep organic functions of the body structures (Rolf 1979: 13). Touch is a fundamental element of many somatic practices, and is particularly relevant to Body-Mind Centering, Feldenkrais and Alexander Technique. Touch and tactile feedback are elements of knowing: from these physical responses the practitioners (intended in here both as the expert and the participant) enter a relationship with the person receiving the somatic treatment. In this way, the recipients learn where imbalances are held in their bodies, and at which level (such as tissues, organs, or skeletal components).

Interestingly, in the mission statement of dance artist, movement practitioner and bodyworker Susan Klein (1993), all these key principles are collected:

> … to teach people, dancers and non-dancers, to move properly through connecting their bodies to the floor to the space, and to its many parts to form a formidable whole. We are working with and are interested in deep changes in each individual's movement patterns, which will become integrated into their entire being. Our aim is toward maximum physicality in function and overall health.
>
> In Klein technique we look at a person as a whole, not just as a body. We look at the body as a whole, not just troubled parts. We are interested in analysis and integration, articulation and connection. We are working to integrate each individual’s

> unique structure and movement. It is not enough to look at a person only in terms of structure, or even simply in terms of their structure moving in space. The energetic component, the moving aspect, the vibration within the body, must be considered, analyzed, and understood.
>
> (Klein 1993: 1)

Klein's work has strongly influenced the creative works of choreographers such as Americans Trisha Brown and Stephen Petronio, and the European Sasha Waltz (Klein and choreographer and movement educator Barbara Mahler, Klein's former collaborator, and co-developer of the Klein Technique, are regularly invited to teach at Sasha Waltz & Guests dance company, based in Berlin). Klein's work is particularly significant because she is a specific case of somatic practitioner of American origins who has studied with a European somatic practitioner, Irmgard Bartenieff.

Analysing and experiencing the somatic experience leads to a journey inside the human body-mind inner structure. As Klein articulated in the mission statement, her technique and other somatic techniques looks for the full body intended as an integration of various systems. Touch is an articulated means for achieving this integration. In somatic education we use the term 'tactile feedback', thanks to which 'somatics teachers developed hands-on attention to help the receiver sense what was happening in the body while employing a particular image' (George 2020: 31). This specific way diverges in the use of touch made by ballet and modern dance teachers where touch was meant to be an instrument for reaching codified specific bodily structure paradigms. In somatics touch is a tool to support the individual in his/her personal moving pathway and a way to repattern from pre-existing movement schema. In somatics touch is considered a learning instrument. For example, in a famous photo of Margaret H'Doubler teaching at Mills College in the 1970s, she is asking students to 'locate and feel the actions of the shoulder girdle in relation to a skeleton' (Foster 2010: 46). In the picture H'Doubler is

standing close to a skeleton and surrounded by sitting students. She has the right arm raised and the left arm is bent behind her back, we can notice the left hand gently placed at the basis of the spinal column. The action of the right arm and left are jointly together. The left hand, with this light touch, is supporting in indicating and tracing the movement pattern of the right shoulder girdle. In this example, touch is a way to discover anatomy from within the singular perception. From here, H'Doubler invited the students on to further individual explorations and later into composition. In this sense, a dialogue between the physical/anatomical path, the idea on how this anatomy is built, and the action that this anatomical part could develop, inform the research of the students, sometimes leading to compositions (Foster 2010).

II.A.3 Journey

The next key concept to introduce is that of the journey. Often in somatics classes this word is used to stress the importance of not focusing on the point of arrival but on the process of experiencing some specific situations. Bainbridge Cohen also defines her technique as a journey:

> Body-Mind Centering is an ongoing experiential journey into the alive and changing territory of the body. The explorer is the mind. […] The mind is like the wind and the body is like the sand; if you want to know how the wind is blowing, you can look at the sand.
>
> (Bainbridge Cohen 1993: 1)

In this poetic quote, Bainbridge Cohen highlights the relevance that the journey should be experiential, deriving from the individual direct practice in the concrete doing, without any esoteric implications. Thus, journey could be understood to pass through some specific moments and tasks and stages of body-mind consciousness, with the intent to discover more layers of understanding and perceptions. It is not a judgmental

process but a research one. Dance artist, author, and educator Andrea Olsen suggests also that journey could be perceived and discovered as challenging someone to become aware of habitual movement, and embodied it from another perspective:

> Make a slow journey // between a chair and the floor // from up to down // and returning // Pass through a hundred moments // at any point a stillness // what is the smallest change to make //a familiar position unfamiliar?
>
> (Olsen 1990: 59)

A journey is often seen and conceived as an individual path, where body-mind are going along together but it also represents engagement with a task in the practice.

II.A.4 Agency

Another relevant key concept is that of 'agency'. The perspective of agency proposed by cultural theorist Carrie Noland (2009) privileges the sense of kinaesthesia, the corporeal body in performance and the sensory experience. Her work enlarges the constructivist body metaphor conceived by Michel Foucault and developed later in the dance perspective in the work by Jennifer Roche (2009), especially through her concept of 'moving identity'. In Roche's opinion we can consider as 'moving identity' the specific contribution of a dancer within the choreography, which can alter and modify specific choreographic tasks. From the wider point of view of somatics, agency is the active possibility of the individual to experience, understand and act by him/herself in a specific context, taking into account the relationships with the surroundings. Here the individual human body-mind entity is seen in all their potential of emancipation from the circumstances, or in other words: in emancipating themself, the individual can act in the environment with a clearer focus. In this way, the previous concepts (touch, journey…) are essentially means for expressing and implementing the concept of agency.

French Philosopher Pierre Bourdieu (1980) speaks of agency in a dichotomous relationship with structure in a habitus, namely a social structure that determines specific rules in a community context and that, at the same time, predetermines them. As a social context, the habitus also impacts upon the postures, the gestures of the individuals of a social community. Through somatic practices, individual agency is reinforced and perceived in an ongoing dialogical relation within the community structure.

II.A.5 Imagery

The significance of imagery in the somatically informed dance process is both on the level of the training during a class or a body-work session, and in the creation of a dance. Somatic practitioner and dance artist Linda Hartley gives a clear statement on how mind-body systems work:

> ...the process of using body imagery is not a mystery but a natural functioning of the mind and body systems, often resulting in unnatural and inefficient use of the body …the image is a guide to the physical sensations …for this visualization to become physical thought, a feeling state, requires a way of seeing where the seeing and the thing seen become as one.
>
> (Hartley 1978: 10)

Different sources on how imagery works are those where dance artists integrate somatic strategies into their creative process. A meaningful example is the book by Andrea Olsen, *Body Stories: A Guide to Experiential Anatomy* (1990). The author guides the reader into a journey through an experiential anatomy, illustrating and explaining this through different practical exercises. Miranda Tufnell and Chris Crickmay in their book *Body, Space, Image* (1990), offer significant perspectives on how images are relevant

not only in the somatic process but also in the creative process, relating and linking the creative and somatic processes to each other. Interestingly the Table of Contents of their book is divided into four chapters, entitled:

1. Mapping the body (a preparation of working - anatomical images)
2. Improvisation (exploring the body and its surroundings in movement, …, use of language and narrative)
3. Landscapes (making contexts for improvisation)
4. Towards performance (developing a whole performance from improvisation)

(Tufnell and Crickmay 1990: Table of Contents)

This book structure is significant because it shows the creative process from the preparation to the choreographic outcome. Tufnell's approach offers an inspiration for a performance journey, and it clarifies how a somatic journey can start from images and later develop into performance. Tufnell and Crickmay are also particularly helpful in understanding what could be considered an image in somatics:

> Take an image, let it hang in the mind, let the sensation of the thought dissolve through the body. Let the movement inside of the body — of breaths, of thoughts — move the outside.
>
> (Tufnell and Crickmay 1990: 1)

Thus, the role of the image is variable but at the same time a very precise point of reference thanks to which the individual could reach and connect the mind and the body, since the image furnishes a kinaesthetic sensation. For example, Eric Franklin (1996) speaks of kinaesthetic imagery when there is the physical 'feel' of a movement, like for example imagine, thinking a jump before doing.

A pertinent note should be made on the use of a specific lexicon in somatics, where there is a fusion, a mix of specific terms from anatomy and use of images, or poems, sometimes as for instance in Skinner Releasing Technique, transforming the anatomical

system within the frame of a gentler pattern of understanding the body schema. For example, ‘rib cage’ is transformed into ‘rib basket’ to stress more the aspect of containment and not only the concept of enclosure brought by the term cage. The somatics lexicon furnishes a very precise content into a specific context.

In order to try again to find a more complete working definition of somatics, incorporating this previous discussion, it is possible once more to define somatics as a set of mind-body shared practices and techniques that focus on integrating different systems of the body, improving its movement functions, efficiency and embodiment. These practices can impact on different fields of knowledge, and their main value is to enable the practitioner (intended here as the person practicing a specific technique) to learn how to express themselves fully and resonate within the outer world, exploring the idea of allowing the possibilities for changing perspectives during their process of discovery. The main focus of somatics is the body-mind entity, which is a structure regulated by the principle that form follows functions, integrating through different bodily systems, awareness and touch in an ongoing journey, conducted by the personal agency of each human being and embodiment, being in relationship with the environment. During somatic processes some already existing and fixed movement and mind patterns in the person will unfold, so there are possibilities that new unique patterns will develop.

To summarise, this section articulates a possible definition of somatics, examining the work of acknowledged practitioners and theorists such as Hanna, Eddy, and Ashkin. Specific terminology has been explored which is later integrated into the research process. To continue the investigation on the concept of somatics, it is relevant to divide the literature on somatics into four categories: literature on somatics as seen from an

historical point of view; works on somatics by somatic practitioners; works on somatics in dance education training; and works on choreography. This division acknowledges that somatics is an expanded field whose parameters encompass general body education and dance.

II.B Works on Somatics from an Historical Point of View

> … what is important is that we acknowledge the history of the practice…we need to acknowledge the seeds of this work, even though it may not have been labelled and described as somatics. It is only recently in the UK that we have started to discuss it in those terms. We need to map the influences of those people.
>
> (Whatley 2010 in Reed 2011: 26)

In this quotation, dance scholar Sarah Whatley (2010) highlights that a significant issue with creating a definition of somatics and a historical somatic path is that when this process started, it was not defined as 'pure' somatics, and there was no specific time and space of reference to define a specific 'day and place of birth of somatics'. She stresses the point that it is not possible to establish a chronological order, but it is more convenient to map practitioners' works in time and space, keeping in mind that these works, thoughts, and practices were influencing each other from different places and times. The *Journal of Dance & Somatic Practices*, published from 2009, is the first European publication entirely devoted to analysis and enquiry on the topic of somatics and dance, demonstrating that academic interest in studying the relationship between dance practice and somatic knowledge has grown in recent years. Prior to this, somatic knowledge was mainly the field meant for specific practitioners, dance and theatre artists and persons with specific injuries, and it was essentially perceived in its practical engagement, namely somatic knowledge was defined mostly between insiders and in specific 'somatic' hubs or connected to dance. In the 21st century somatic knowledge has become a topic of increasing academic interest because of its wider cultural

implications. Due to its specific engagement with the entire body-mind, somatic knowledge is coming into dialogue with the fields of arts studies, psychology, sociology, philosophy, and cognitive sciences. As pointed out by Eddy (2016) neuroscience entered in connection to somatics for action of healing; a wider field has developed under the name of 'social somatics' and somatics and environmental activism. A fundamental chart is presented by Eddy (2009: 24), with the title *One View*: *Founders of Somatic Movement Trainings*. As illustrated in Figure 1 in Appendix A, the path looks like a spider web, denoting a highly intense intersection of histories and training movements, but dates and places are lacking. While the chart *Lineage of Somatic Movement Leaders* (Eddy 2016: 102) is constructed in a linear way, the birth dates of somatic and movement figures, are inserted distinguishing in bold typeface somatic training systems that are still operating.

In mapping the field today, it is revealing to consider the first published attempt to connect somatic practices together with dance from an historical point of view through a tracing of genealogy made by Eddy. In her article, 'A Brief History of Somatic Practices and Dance: Historical Development of the Field of Somatic Education and its Relationship to Dance' (2009), Eddy compiled a detailed summary of historical connections between somatic education and the dance field. Eddy is writing from a North American perspective, focusing her point of view and genealogy from this location; this fact elicits the question: how would the field be mapped if using a European point of view? In the European continent many somatics practice seeds were planted and her article provides fundamental traces of history in this direction. Following Michele Mangione (1993), Eddy traces the history of somatics, organising the genealogy by identifying predecessors that I will later name: 'proto-somatic'

practitioners (e.g. François Delsarte, Émile Jacques-Dalcroze,[15] Rudolf von Laban,[16] Isadora Duncan,[17] Mary Wigman,[18] Margaret H'Doubler[19]), pioneers (e.g. Elsa Gindler,[20]Bess Mensedieck,[21]Ilse Middendorf,[22] and first generation (e.g. Frederick Matthias Alexander,[23] Moshe Feldenkrais, Mabel Todd,[24] Irmgard Bartenieff,[25]Ida Rolf, Charlotte Selver,[26] Milton Trager,[27]Gerda Alexander[28]). Eddy names a new generation of somatic practitioners or leaders (Elaine Summers,[29]Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, Sondra Horton Fraleigh,[30]Anna Halprin,[31] Joan Skinner, Nancy Topf,[32]Judith Aston[33]) (Eddy 2009: 13-16), including the late 20th century somatic practitioners such as Susan Klein, Eric Franklin,[34]and Linda Hartley.[35]

In the chart *One View*: *Founders of Somatic Movement Trainings*, reproduced in Appendix A, Figure 1, it is significant to notice the classification of time periods. It is visible that there is not a real temporal division, the time gaps are floating, the generations are sometimes linked, and the genealogical approach intersects with complex influences. Sara Reed's PhD analyses (2011) somatics and dance in the U.K. higher education. Chapter 4, 'Understanding Somatics', traces historical somatic

[15] Émile Jaques-Dalcroze (b. Vienna 1865, d. Geneva 1950).
[16] Rudolf von Laban (b. Bratislava 1879, d. Weybridge 1958).
[17] Isadora Duncan (b. San Francisco 1878, d. Nice 1927).
[18] Mary Wigman (b. Hannover1886, d. West Berlin 1973).
[19] Margaret H'Doubler (b. Beloit 1889, d. Springfield1982).
[20] Elsa Gindler (Berlin b. 1885, d.1961).
[21] Bess M. Mensendieck (b. 1864, d. 1959).
[22] Ilse Middendorf (b. Frankenberg 1910, d. Berlin 2009).
[23] Frederick Matthias Alexander (b. Wynyard, 1869, d. London 1955).
[24] Mabel Elsworth Todd (b. 1880, d. 1956).
[25] Irmgard Bartenieff (b. Berlin 1900, d. New York 1981).
[26] Charlotte Selver (b. Ruhrort 1901, d. Muir Beach 2003).
[27] Milton Trager (b. 1909, d. 1997).
[28] Gerda Alexander (b. 1908, d. 1994).
[29] Lillian Elaine Summers (b. 1925, d. 2014).
[30] Sondra Horton Fraleigh (To be inserted later).
[31] Anna Halprin (b. 1920).
[32] Nancy Topf (1942, 1998).
[33] Judith Aston (D.o.B unknown).
[34] Eric N. Franklin (1957).
[35] Linda Hartley (D.o.B unknown).

lineages, taking into account texts by scholar Don Hanlon Johnson (1995) and somatic practitioner Thomas Hanna (1988). The work edited by Johnson (1995) is significant because he collected writing excerpts from 17 somatic practitioners, some preceded by an interview with them. To my understanding this text represents the first anthology dedicated to practices on embodiment, with contributions (all in English) from practitioners from Europe and North America. Even though Reed's thesis provides a perspective more focused on the U.K., Reed notes that 'Thomas Hanna discusses the development of the field of somatics during the 1960s and cites a host of practices ranging from transactional analysis and bioenergetics to Rolfing' (Reed 2011: 69). In doing so, Reed emphasises how much Hanna was focused on a specific period without providing any historical lineage, but she remains more centred on the 'what' of somatics than on 'when' somatics started. Furthermore, she stresses that the work of Johnson highlights that somatics is 'nothing new', but it is something coming back and repeating itself from the beginning of the 20th century and this is in line with the trajectory by Hanna's label and the consequent use of the term somatic by Conrad and Bainbridge Cohen previously mentioned. In this way the varied field of somatics has a long history and various narratives offer 'a longer clinical history than psychoanalysis, any of the younger psychotherapies, or physical medicine' (Johnson 1995: xii in Reed 2011: 73) but all with a shared focus and perspective that is 'the relationships between the body and cognition, emotion, volition, and other dimensions of the self' (Reed 2011: 71).

In 2016 Eddy edited the book *Mindful Movement*: *The Evolution of Somatic Arts* cited above and in which she traces connections from pioneers to contemporary somatic leaders and training systems. She stresses the relevance of the spread of somatics, for example, in some institutions like the University of Illinois Urbana, and in higher education in the

U.K. Furthermore, Eddy discusses the current trends in somatics, highlighting a wide range of somatic integration within neurosciences, environments, and social issues.

Another fundamental source published almost at the end of my writing is the one by Doran George (2020*)*. In this detailed and updated research and thanks to almost ten years of dialogues and interviews with professional in the field, George establishes somatic trainings and practices as a movement culture with specific aesthetic and social values. George's work informs my analysis on various levels. Firstly, it gives a general perspective because it sets somatics clearly as a social and cultural practice that has changed during the years with a focus on the theatrical settings in the 1970s. Secondly, it provides genealogical connections regarding specific practitioners with details on their lives and practices. For instance, I found valuable information for my research about Agis, Skinner Releasing Technique and Body-Mind Centering.

To conclude, this section evaluates the legacy of somatic practitioners, in line with the works of Eddy and Reed, to construct a historical chart that considers the importance of starting a European perspective. It establishes the first connections between Europe and America and the role of German culture at the beginning of the 20th century determining the conceptual foundations of the somatic practices, such as touch/tactile feedback, imagery, kinaesthetic perception. I will look more deeply at specific European perspectives and at the impact of somatics on dance and choreography during the 1980s in Chapter 3.

II.C Works on Somatics by Somatic Practitioners

This section offers a literature review of texts on somatics written by somatic practitioners. The contribution of co-edited books is significant, as discussed above with

Bainbridge Cohen's *Sensing, Feeling and Action* (1993). Bainbridge Cohen's edited anthology of writings throughout her career as founding developer of Body-Mind Centering in collaboration with curator Nancy Stark Smith. These writings are mainly interviews by Stark Smith with Bainbridge Cohen, where Bainbridge Cohen introduces her own approach based on embodiment of imagery and on 'somatization' (see III) in a didactic way through drawings, exercises, sharing her experiences, making some aspects of her technique accessible. Following the works of Eddy (2009) and Reed (2011), I refer to Figure 2 in Appendix A to trace the five different time periods helpful for the analysis of the evolution of the history of somatics techniques. It is interesting to note that somatic practitioners have been connected to writing since the origins of somatics, with the clear aim of putting into words their thinking and practice in order to divulge their techniques and concepts. One of the main characteristics of these writings is that the terminology is always carefully chosen to manifest a specific practice and its concepts thanks to the words and a precise vocabulary. This is significant because somatic practitioners were (and are) making available their techniques which need a personal study and deep body-mind understanding through the written word. It appears they were putting into words an awareness that needed to pass first through the body. They were highlighting the strict connection between thinking, theorising, and verbalising using specific terminology. Some of those books are like 'somatic manuals', guides for the reader to open at some specific techniques. Some fascinating examples of somatic manuals are, for instance, the book by Feldenkrais (1981), on the principles of his technique; the one by Rolf (1977), on the Rolfing technique; the text by the therapist Ilse Middendorf *The Perceptible Breath* (1990) and the one by the teacher Gerda Alexander, founder of eutony, *Eutony*: *The Holistic Discovery of The Total Person* (1981). Particularly relevant for my research is movement analyst Bartenieff's *Body Movement*: *Coping with the Environment* (1980), which derives from Laban Movement

Analysis and writings by the founder of Body-Mind Centering Bainbridge Cohen, or the more recent book by Klein (1993). Laban Movement Analysis (LMA) is a method and a language to use in visually describing, interpreting, and documenting human movement in general and is especially used in dance. These texts offer specific exercises and practices deeply connected and grounded in dance training and practices open to everybody, but this concept will be deepened in Chapter 4.

These books, together with other well-known anatomy handbooks such as *Albinus on Anatomy* (Hale and Coyle 1979) or *Gray's Anatomy* (1858-1901) remain major sources of inspiration today, especially for movement classes based on release informed techniques (see below in the section on the dance training). Often during the release-based movement lessons, usually at the very beginning, there is a phase of observations of some specific body parts identified in the anatomical atlases, combined with some basic but detailed notions of physiology. This initial observation is not done in order to learn anatomical notions but to encourage specific body awareness and kinaesthetic sensations, to strengthen body-mind capability/possibilities. For example, dance artists and educators Mahler and Klein often use in their teachings and in some classes I attended some images of the skeleton taken from the atlas *Albinus on Anatomy* (1979). The illustrations give a sense and a visual image of the structure of the femur where the hamstrings are connected, and to focus students' attention on the anatomical form and structure of human body. Another widely used manual is by Blandine Calais-Germain (1998), *Anatomie pour le Mouvement* which explains movement mechanisms connected to anatomy. These books on somatic literature are, on one side, clear statements of specific studies from somatic practitioners, while also providing practical guides to their methodology and ethical motivations: they are substantial texts where practice meets philosophical thinking. Bainbridge Cohen's book (1993) is particularly relevant for

dance because it is about perception and integration of different bodily systems in order to learn a deep awareness and efficiency in the dancer's movements.

Another kind of source on somatic practices are anthologies, such as the one compiled by Johnson, *Bone, Breath, and Gesture: Practices of Embodiment* (1995). Johnson has collected a wide range of writings on techniques and theories by the pioneers of somatic disciplines, creating a significant historical documentation of the subject of somatics, perceived from a North American perspective.

Johnson introduces the works of established practitioners such as Frederick Matthias Alexander, Moshe Feldenkrais, Ida Rolf, Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, Irmgard Bartenieff, Emile Conrad Da'Oud, T. Hanna,[36]as well as introducing others less familiar on an international scale such as Elsa Gindler, Charlotte Selver,[37]Carola Speads,[38] Marion Rosen,[39]Ilse Middenhorf, Judith Aston, Mary Whitehouse,[40]Gerda Alexander,[41] Elisabeth A. Behnke,[42]Deane Juhan,[43]giving a taste of their work. Furthermore, all these different authors from different continents are collected in the same text, so it is easy to find information about them and to confront their ideas, concepts, and techniques in relation to each other. For instance, the work of the Berliner Gindler is focused on creating a 'radically simple way of working the experience' (Johnson 1995: 3), pursuing exercises based on mundane actions like walking, sitting, and developing a new form of gymnastics for ordinary people based on simple exercises of breathing and meditation against anxiety. The use of common movements from everyday life is reminiscent of

[36] Thomas Hanna (b. 1928, d.1990).
[37] Charlotte Selver (b. 1901, d. 2003).
[38] Carola Speads (D.o.B. unknown, 1999).
[39] Marion Rosen (b. Nürnberg 1914, d. Berkeley 2012).
[40] Mary Whitehouse (b. 1911, d. 1979).
[41] Emile Conrad Da'Oud (b. 1934, d. 2014).
[42] Elisabeth A. Behnke (D.o.B. and D.o.D. unknown).
[43] Deane Juhan (b.1945).

what the 1960s dance avant-garde achieved in creating improvisation and movement scores based on ordinary life. German immigrant Charlotte Selver, Gindler's student, decided to not structure her own training school and method because in her opinion 'it's always meeting new whatever reality brings' (Selver in Johnson 1995: 17) and developed Gindler's method at the Esalen Institute (during the 1960s). This is an example of European influence of somatic practices in the North American one. Bartenieff, a German pupil and collaborator of Laban, was one of the first who promoted his work in the United States.

Moreover, it is relevant to note that some somatic practitioners were writing and thinking about concepts that were later used in dance. For example, Todd's seminal book *The Thinking Body* (1937), theorises several principles of body-mind connections, which Nancy Topf and Mary Fulkerson[44] developed into Release Technique in the 1960s-1970s (see IV), using concepts such as 'efficiency, structure or embodiment'. Todd constructs her thinking on the correlation with architecture and analyses the body as a developmental process, where 'postural changes are deriving from mental imagery' (Rolland 1979: 7). In 2011 Fulkerson spoke with some members of X6 New Dance Collective, an independent British dance group that from 1976 until 1980 actively worked on creating performances, teaching, and directing a space (see Chapter 3.III). As explored in Chapter 3, their creations and publications stimulated new ways of thinking and practicing dance (MacPherson 2011). Fulkerson explains:

> I have three major concerns, one is anatomical, that is the study of the body itself, through sensation rather than intellect alone, a matter of body and mind unity, thinking of the whole body moving. The second concern is kinetic. … Then I'm interested in choreography, what kinds of imaginative thoughts can be communicated, what kind of questions might be posed between

[44] Mary Fulkerson (1940-2020).

performers and audience.

(Fulkerson et al 1978: 12)

In this quote, the choreographic work is intended as a transmission of concepts derived from imagery. In Fulkerson's words the concern for choreography is seen in relation to the study of anatomy, and the kinetic.

In analysing the body-mind entity, somatics, like other techniques (mainly from the East), deals with a complexity of layers. The physical body, the mind, the 'spirit', and each different level has its own sublevels, emphasising the internal focus as in some Eastern theories and practices like yoga or tai chi. For instance, speaking about the layering of the body in her articles and book, Klein develops the concept of 'body, mind, spirit':

> A dancer is a whole human being who must be looked at as a complex of body, mind, and spirit. Each one of these levels can be broken down into a body, mind, and spirit as well. So you have body, mind, spirit on the level of the body, you have body, mind, spirit on the level of the mind; and you have body, mind, spirit on the level of the spirit.
>
> (Klein 1993: 15)

For Klein, spirit refers to the 'deep and crucial qualities of a person such as consciousness, ideation, inspiration, will power, and hope' (1993). This text highlights the deep relation with the interior aspect typical of the somatic approach. Still speaking about layers, Bainbridge Cohen writes in her article 'The Dancer's Warm Up' (1988, 1993) about the warm-up of the dancer, and how each body system interacts with the movement, highlighting how the visual anatomical imagery, connected to a personal, creative, discovery process, could develop new forms of bodily dance preparation. For example:

> The blood circulatory system functions in nurturing, embracing, gentleness and the flowing towards and away from ourselves and the other selves. It establishes presentness and the flow between restful self and action.
>
> (Bainbridge Cohen 1993: 15)

Bainbridge Cohen makes explicit the connection between the physiology of the body and the individual notions and qualities of the self, from quietness to activity. These texts provide interesting pathways with the somatic experience in its wholeness: practices are deeply connected and interlaced with theory, creating ways of thinking through the practices, and vice versa. This enhances the processes of analysing the connection between somatic practices using a specific lexicon, highlighting the question about the significance of certain terminology in particular somatic contexts instead of others and underlines the concept of 'choice making', which is strictly connected to choreographic making and creating, where the language is specifically enquiring through tasks.

Somatic literature conveys philosophical principles about the body-mind relationship through the choice of specific language. The same way philosophy uses unique terminology to describe concepts and ideas, the somatic practices are supported by theoretical discourse which reinforces their individual agency. Specific lexicons evolve linked to the emerging somatic and choreographic practices, for example the use of words such as 'structure', 'resonance', 'rest', 'allowing', 'change', 'agency', 'embodiment'.

As previously noted, the case of somatic practitioner Hanna (1988) is particularly significant because he provided one of the first definitions of somatics, applied to existing techniques. Today this definition could seem restricted because there are many

compound labels such as somatic practices and somatic training, which are enlarging this field. It is significant to reflect on the relevance of this term: the field is now so broad that confusion exists at times.

In this section, I have highlighted the relevance of the connection between the somatic practitioners and their writings, where there is a transmission in linguistic terms of corporeal events and practices. Different kinds of somatics texts are analysed, such as somatic manuals, anthologies, and anatomical books. Some key texts by somatic practitioners were identified as relevant references, notably those by Todd, Fulkerson, and Bainbridge Cohen, which clearly connect a somatic approach to dance and movement.

II.D Writings on Somatics in Dance Education

In observing current programmes of study in many dance colleges and universities (for example at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, SNDO [School for New Dance Development Amsterdam], P.A.R.T.S. [Performing Arts Research and Training Studios], Brussels) we can see that somatics has a relevant place. For instance, the curriculum at P.A.R.T.S. offers release informed technique, SNDO includes Alexander technique and release. Many of the teachers have been writing about their experiences or on specific educational contents from the point of view of somatics. In his article 'The Anatomy of Change: A Model for Somatic Education', the education studies scholar Richard K. Heckler states:

> What we learn is how we learn.
>
> There are thoughts. There is the environment and others. The body is a feedback system. Everything is in a state of continuous change.

> … the soma uses the challenges as a way to integrate the senses
> We begin to work with the energy of the change.
>
> (Heckler 1979: 15-16)

Heckler stresses the main characteristics of somatic approaches in education. Interestingly these characteristics are the same as the ones used in somatic dance training contexts, where somatic education is, sometimes, deeply influencing dance training. Education and training are complementary in their diversity. Education is founded on theories about learning and understanding, while training is constituted by sets of practical exercises. The notion of dance education encompasses knowledge development beyond the physical act of learning skills. The somatic practices approach to dance education delineates some specific features such as the use of visual imagery that is capable to change the energetic condition of the dancing body, as clearly manifested by Patricia Bardi:

> All this placing of the image of the organic structure into my body, and its visual imagery, releases in my dances movement that is tuned into the subtle energy that sustains my body, and my being.
>
> (Bardi 1981: 5)

During the 20th century, some relevant examples of writing on somatics in dance education literature include Erick Hawkins'[45] *The Body is a Clear Space* (1992). He was a highly recognized dance artist and dance teacher who, during the development of his technique, investigated somatic work and approaches, enlarging the vision of his contemporary modern dance colleagues such as Martha Graham. Hawkins was also the first dance teacher of somatic practitioner Bainbridge Cohen.

[45] Erick Hawkins (b.1909 - d. 1994).

In the collection of writings, *The Body Eclectic*: *Evolving Practices in Dance Training* by editors Melanie Bales and Rebecca Nettl-Fiol (2008), dance training and the personal training process are analysed through a method where dancers and choreographers have the agency 'to determine his or her dance training' (Bales and Nettl-Fiol 2008: 1). Their work is specifically focused on post-modern dance, and on the role of somatic practices in dancer training. Similarly, authors and dance artists Julie Brodie and Elizabeth Lobel (2012), in *Dance and Somatics: Mind–Body Principles of Teaching and Performance*, investigate the way of teaching body-mind techniques, tracing a summary of the teaching of somatic work starting in the 1960s. Brodie and Lobel analyse some recurring connections between somatic technique principles such as breath, kinaesthesia, connectivity to the self and how these have been developed in some somatic practices such as Body-Mind Centering and Feldenkrais.

In the field of dance and somatics training, the studies of Sylvie Fortin (2002, 2009), professor at Quebec University, are particularly relevant. In her article 'The Experience of Discourses in Dance and Somatics' (2009), Fortin explores how somatics entered and contributed to stimulation in dance classes, by creating, for example, the possibility to perceive the body in a more accurate way before and during the turning movements. Similarly, dance professor and dance educator Jill Green, in 'Choreographing a Postmodern Turn: The Creative Process and Somatics' (1996) illustrates some examples of integration of principles regarding the 'soma' in dance teaching.

Nettl-Fiol and Luc Vanier in their article 'Dance and the Alexander Technique: Exploring the Missing Link' (2011) draw attention to the Alexander technique, explaining in an exhaustive way how this specific technique could improve the performance of a dancer, but focusing more on healthcare. Examining an ethical

perspective, Lena Rouhiainen, in her article ‘Somatic Dance as a Means of Cultivating Ethically Embodied Subjects’ (2008), focuses on a specific discourse on embodiment in teaching dance through a somatic approach to Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. She writes about the embodiment of the self in relation to perception of the other, particularly in the case of the dancer and dancer’s group.

To summarise this section, I have considered some useful articles and collections of writings that contribute to expand the relation of dance and somatics into the education. These writings are specifically interesting for my research because they pursue common paths and strategies inside various somatic practices, focusing on recurring elements in the techniques and on how these elements pursue towards a creative process, showing the extent to which somatic tools could be considered as actions also for movement compositions. I return to these concepts in the analysis of the fieldwork analysis in Chapter 4 and 5.

II.E Choreography and Somatics: A First Insight

This last section addresses the early influences of somatics and education, and consequently how somatics on a deep, and sometimes subconscious, level influences choreography by the contribution of the dancers. Somatics has an impact on choreography in different layers of comprehension, creating new conditions of learning, addressing attention to polysensory images, stimulating actively to notice the influences of perception and touch. American choreographer Deborah Hay (Movement Research 2016), in the description of her workshop ‘the prepared body’, says ‘questions will be applied to our bodies to alter the harmonics of movement through choreography.’ In this perspective, choreography could be seen as a way of modifying or altering bodily perception. For an understanding of what perception is and in order to set up some

parameters to define how choreography could cross somatic practices, seminal choreographer Steve Paxton pointed out

> Every discipline begins with perception. States of mind are caused by perceptions and/or states of mind determine perceptions.
>
> (Paxton 1995a: 68)

Bainbridge Cohen, clarified that movement is perception, because:

> movement helps to establish the process of how we perceive; and how we perceive movement becomes an integral part of how we perceive through other senses.
>
> (Bainbridge Cohen 1993: 114)

Interestingly she developed these words in an interview with Simone Forti and Nancy Stark Smith, co-founder of Contact Improvisation, acknowledging again how much BMC and movement are intertwined (Bainbridge Cohen 1993: 114-118).

Cohen goes further in specifying the difference between the act of sensing and perceiving, where sensing is a 'mechanical aspect, involving the stimulation of the sensory receptors and the sensory nerves' and perceiving is about 'one's personal relationship to the incoming information' (Bainbridge Cohen 1993a: 195). In Bainbridge Cohen's opinion our sense organs are similar to other individuals, but our perceptions are unique, because 'Perception is about how we relate to what we are sensing' (Bainbridge Cohen 1993a: 195).

As discussed in section II.A.2, touch can intensify perception. Professor and dance artist Erin Manning (2007) sets out a theory where touch is seen as different from the tactile sense, because it implies the individuality of the person in the action of touching. There is a process of evaluating the importance of the pre-movement, as that phase where the

movement is perceived from a neural level and the touch is seen as part of it. Differentiating touch from the tactile sense is a profound feature for many choreographers, dance teachers and improvisers. A relevant example of this is found in Contact Improvisation, a movement practice based on an improvisation started by a point of contact between two people, initiated in the 1970s by Steve Paxton in New York. During this practice the two movers follow some laws such as the effect gravity, momentum, friction, and inertia have on their movement (Crane and Mackrell 2010). Paxton explained:

> This system is based in the senses of touch and balance. The partners in the duet touch each other a lot, and it is through touching that the information about each other's movement is transmitted.
>
> (Paxton 1975: 40)

Thus, Contact Improvisation is exploring communication techniques through touch. In this way touch represents for dancers a source of awareness and knowledge similar to what represents touch to babies, where 'touch is essential to development of the infant's health, nurture, mental development (…) (Paxton 1995a: 68).

For dance artist and teacher Irene Dowd (1994), 'touching by its nature, is simultaneously both a means of action, although my conscious attention may be focused primarily on one or another at any one time'. Another example which helps to understand the meaning of perception in movement is that of choreographer Hay; as Diane Smith explains:

> the goal is for dancers to develop "new organs of perception", and the tool Deborah [Hay] uses toward achieving this is imagination. The dancers' mental images motivate the movement — imaginations are translated into physical reality — and this becomes the visual experience of the dance.
>
> (Smith 1980: 11)

For Hay consciousness is based ‘on the accumulation of cellular awareness’ (Smith 1980: 11), and she passes on this state to her dancers thanks to the use of imagery. Cellular awareness could be understood as the specific capability of every single cell to have its memory and possibility to choose and to react to certain circumstances.

Links between choreographic practices and body-mind approaches are established by dance artists Scott DeLahunta, Gill Clarke, and Phil Barnard in *A Conversation about Choreographic Thinking Tools* (2012), where they worked in a team to develop new understandings of the choreographic process. Specifically, the concept of ‘polysensory imaging’ is interesting (Root-Bernstein and Root-Bernstein 1999), differentiating the use of imagery focused ‘on visualization and images constructed in response to verbal stimuli’ (Lutz and Lutz, quoted in Barnard, Clarke, and DeLahunta 2012: 245). In this regard, British dance artist Gill Clarke devoted herself to lifelong research into how somatic approaches could be integrated into dance, stressing the importance of language in stimulating such perception, a language where words are carefully chosen and which is ‘conditional, that asks questions of the individual’s experience, and suggests rather than states’ (Barnard, Clarke, and DeLahunta 2012: 248). Differentiating the verbs ‘to suggest’ and ‘to state’ is a feature of a somatics understanding, where ‘suggest’ gives the possibility to not impose but to stay open to different opportunities and choices. The emphasis in the differentiation of the lexicon between the two verbs derives directly from Clarke’s words, and it is strictly connected to the vocabulary definition. For instance, in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, ‘to suggest’ has the meaning of ‘to put forward an idea or a plan for to other people to think about’ and ‘to state’ ‘to express something definitely or clearly in speech or writing’ (Oxford English Dictionary 2019). Dance artist Sue Hawksley (2012) also provides useful points of connection between choreography and practice, including how some body-mind principles facilitate some

processes of embodiment. For my research it is useful to understand how the performer could handle multisensory requirements as such in embodying a specific performance.

Dance artist, Feldenkrais practitioner and dance scholar Thomas Kampe (2013) is pursuing connections between the Feldenkrais method and the artistic process; arguing that the Feldenkrais method uses choreographic means 'to empower the participant to question habitual behaviour':

> Through embodied processes of de-patterning and re-patterning it offers the learner tools for self-reflection and criticality. It provides conditions for a learning of 'fundamentally different existential relations' between multi-dimensional individuals and world.
>
> (Kampe 2013: 2)

In this way, the Feldenkrais method is offering the individual learning tools to register and analyse information from the outside environment.

Another choreographer who has significantly spoken on the importance of somatic work for the quality of dance work is Trisha Brown on Klein Technique:

> using a movement system which involves working with energy flow and a system of levering movement through the use of small muscles close to the bone rather than the bulk muscle.
>
> (Brown and Adair 1996: 51)

In this quote is evident the extent to which Klein and Mahler's work, thanks to its action on a subtle level of a postural bones structure (inner layer), differentiates the impact on the whole movement system because it does not start from the outer layer of muscles.[46]

[46] In anatomy the muscles are organised on different layers, from the most superficial till the deep ones.

In his article ‘Injury as Opportunity’, when choreographer Stephen Petronio (2011) says ‘anatomical information became integral to my investigation of dance’, he is speaking of the importance of improvisation, which included an ‘association with body awareness and alternative approaches to how the body functions’. Furthermore, through Petronio’s words, we can see how somatic practices interact within choreography from the point of view of mental imagery, strictly connected to the search for a bodily efficient way of moving. Petronio affirms that anatomical information and imagery enhanced his research in dance and in how he could take care of his body. ‘My craft and art would never be as rich without this ongoing maintenance, research, and repair (Petronio 2011). For Petronio, somatic attention to how the movement is executed makes the body work efficiently, because these techniques are not working only on a mechanical level but on that of the ‘energy’, which in this case could be seen as a balance between nervous system and internal muscles. During this first analysis, it emerged that the writing on the connections between somatics and choreography is very recent and still very sparse, but it is a field in continuous expansion.

To conclude, this section established the first parameters to analyse choreography in the frame of somatics, and these parameters are: perception before the movement, touch, polysensory image, and new conditions of learning.

III. An Insight into Skinner Realising Technique and Body-Mind Centering

Now the focus shifts to the two somatic regimes used by two of the three choreographers who are subjects of my fieldwork research: Skinner Releasing Technique (SRT) — in relation to Agis — and Body-Mind Centering (BMC) — connected to Schad.

Skinner Releasing Technique is one of the major somatic regimes that Agis uses in her choreographic practice, especially from the 1990s. Agis was the first who brought this technique to England after she experienced it in New York (George 2020). Nevertheless, Fulkerson contributed earlier to the indirect dissemination of the work of Skinner through her residency at Dartington College of Arts. As discussed in Chapter 3, when Agis started her career as a choreographer in the 1980s, she was more influenced by release as proposed by Fulkerson, with an intertwined approach of Fulkerson's Anatomical Release Technique and SRT, improvisation and the work of Rosemary Butcher. In the 1990s Agis revaluated and reconceptualised her use of somatics due to exhaustion from substantial career success in the 1980s (George 2020: 202); in a conversation with me she used the term 'burn out' (Agis 2016), that clearly give the sense of consumption that she encountered during her early career. Therefore, she became a SRT practitioner and later a leading teacher trainer in the programme (see Chapter 3.V.A).

Skinner Releasing Technique and Anatomical Release Technique: both 'made their debut at the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign' (George 2020: 73), Fulkerson was a student with Skinner meanwhile developing her own practices of Anatomical Release Technique, called also Release Technique or just Release.

Later, in the 1980s, Fulkerson exported her and Skinner's ideas, to Europe, first at the Dartington College of Arts in Britain and after at the School for New Dance Development (SNDO) in the Netherlands. Skinner Releasing Technique (SRT) is the methodological exploration inquiry developed by Joan Skinner in the early 1960s (Skinner Releasing Institute 2009) based in part on her experience with Alexander Technique and later conceived into a training program. Anatomical Release Technique

was developed by Fulkerson drawing on the lineage of Todd, Topf and the programme in Illinois (with colleagues Marsha Paludan and John Rolland), and as well as Skinner. This is an example of when positioning one technique in relation to others, consideration is needed of the lineage, genealogy and transnational interconnections that constitute and develop from it.

Speaking of these two somatic regimes, as we can name them today, means dealing with the biographical histories of two women: Joan Skinner and Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen. Skinner was a former member of the Martha Graham and Merce Cunningham Dance Companies, after having attended Bennington College as an undergraduate student. According to Eddy (2016: 122), in 1949 she worked in musical theatre and for Merce Cunningham. During a tour in 1949 in Mary Hunter's *Musical Americana,* she experienced a ruptured disc. In order to recover, she started to take Alexander Technique lessons with Judith Leibowitz. After a couple of years, she was able to return to dance professionally again. Skinner found in the Alexander Technique profound contradictions with the conventional dance techniques in regards to the way of moving. In 1961 she was hired at the University of Illinois, where besides her teaching in a variety of dance techniques and theories, she started to develop her own method. According to George (2020: 29) 'Skinner recounts that while dancing for Cunningham, she discovered underlying natural forces that contrasted with the kind of volitional staging of a predetermined theme that defined her experience with Graham'. Thus, we can consider the results of her technique a mix of Alexander's and Todd's influences. Her technique became well-known only in the 1980s when it was initiated in New York (George 2020).

According to dance practitioner Kirsty Alexander (1999: 8) ‘Skinner Releasing Technique is an approach to movement concerned with the integration of the whole self to foster a deeper kinaesthetic experience of movement.’ It clearly identified its somatic approach: a movement practice where the result is engaging in the personal proprioceptive and corporeal experience. The method or practice is mainly based on images, poetic images, and the relationship that each one could have with them. As Alexander (1999: 9) explains, we not only imagine the images, but we ‘merge with them, they become another reality’. In proposing this path, Skinner is making our unconscious level active.

Alexander also makes explicit the approach of this technique as seen in this long quotation that gives a full sense of SRT:

> Releasing is aesthetic, poetic and holographic and it has the power to reveal what it is to experience dancing - or rather to experience being danced. In Eastern philosophy an alignment with universal forces has been a concern for many centuries. Here in the West we have embraced the Cartesian perspective of *I think therefore I am* and the mind / body split that it implies. As dancers we are artists and therefore perhaps we ought to trust poetry a little more. Perhaps it is time for those of us with a cynical nature and a habit of deductive reasoning to embrace a new approach - *I experience therefore I dance* [italics as in original].
>
> (Alexander 1999: 9)

Thus, on one side we have a poetic use of images, and on the other the use of the verb ‘releasing’: the ‘-ing’ form of the verb ‘to release’ makes explicit the ongoing action that is meant to be happening as ‘an ongoing, continual process; never fixed or released. It aims, not to relax the body, rather to prepare the body to be available to any image or creative idea - releasing imagination’ (Agis and Moran 2002: 21). Practices of SRT could be briefly summarised into guided improvisations following specific poetic images and ‘partner graphic’ sessions in pairs where one person is tracing an anatomical

path on the body of the other, with the intent to improve awareness and release of muscle/bodily tension. During this writing, at the end of September 2021 (a few months after the death of Skinner) a book devoted to SRT was published: *Skinner Releasing Technique. A Movement and A Dance Practice*, edited by Manny A. Emslie. It comprises 21 contributions from SRT practitioners, included Agis. This text represents a useful resource because it gives insights into historical and biographical details, it shows experience with various groups of students in the SRT practice and proposes practical exercises for the reader and it narrates how the practices are influencing the life of its practitioners.

The history of Bainbridge Cohen started in the circus (for a comprehensive biography see Eddy 2016). Her parents were two famous circus workers and thanks to the support of her mother, she enrolled in the dance program of Ohio State University. During her long career Bainbridge Cohen worked with Irmgard Bartenieef and with Erik Hawkins. Moreover, her research has been always in contact with and inspired by Asian influences, such as Aikido and Yoga. She considers BMC as a student-centered inquiry-based form of education (Eddy 2016: 115). The student focus is clearly noticeable in how the entire system and the singular class or session is organised: the perception, the intuition and the individual creative approach to the matter is evaluated as a relevant and collective source of common knowledge.

BMC is a somatic practice, where the 'somatization' is conceived to

> … engage the kinesthetic experience directly, in contrast to "visualization" which utilizes visual imagery to evoke a kinesthetic experience. Through somatization the body cells are informing the brain as well as the brain informing the cells. I derived this word "somatization" from Thomas Hanna's use of the word "soma" to designate the experienced body in contrast to the objectified body.
>
> (Bainbridge Cohen 1993:1)

Bainbridge Cohen also uses the word ‘approach’ which means also taking into consideration the multiple possibilities to understand her practice:

> [The BMC approach] is an ongoing, experiential journey into the alive and changing territory of the body. The explorer is the mind -- our thoughts, feelings, energy, soul, and spirit. Through this journey we are led to an understanding of how the mind is expressed through the body in movement.
> (Bainbridge Cohen 1993: 1)

BMC involves diverse layers of exploration: an integration of the diverse bodily systems (muscular, skeletal, ligamentous, lymphatic, organs, endocrine, nervous, fluid, fascial, fat, skin) with the developmental movement pattern (from cellular breathing to navel radiation, to pre-spinal and spinal movement…) in order to activate the listening of our internal environment (ourselves) and the outside environment, namely others and the world. She and her teachers guide the class through diverse movement explorations and hand-on sessions. BMC is the first Western somatic system that embraces the study and the embodiment of the organs as a means of movement discovery/exploration, considering organs as ‘primary habitats for emotions, aspirations, and memories’, which connect practitioners to ‘universal symbols and myths’ (Bainbridge Cohen quoted in George 2020: 38). There are many ways of working toward this alignment such as through touch, through movement, visualization, somatization, voice, art, music, meditation, through verbal dialogue, through open awareness, or by any other means. (Bainbridge Cohen 1993: 1). Her current work is dedicated to the study of embryology (the branch of science devoted at the study of the development of the embryo) and how this process affects our life and movement patterns in the future. As explored in Chapter 5, choreographer Schad is taking inspiration from Bainbridge Cohen’s studies on embryology to develop her choreographic work.

Skinner's and Bainbridge Cohen's pedagogies developed into the experience raised from 'unconscious bodily capacity' (George 2020: 32). They never considered their pedagogies 'as unconnected to various forms of dance technique' (George 2020: 28), instead in the 1970s, their works, together with Klein and Anatomical Release, rethought the rebellion against modern dance conventions (such as Graham) that started in the 1960s, developing training system detached from specific movement aesthetics (George 2020).

IV. A 'Released Body' – An Introduction of the Origins of the Practice and Concept of Release

When we think about some specific strands of choreographic and training works of the 1980s, as this research shows, we engage with the broad concept of 'release'. What does it mean? In which circumstances has it been used? According to dance artist Daniel Lepkoff, who studied with Fulkerson, 'release work attempts to bring consciousness to bear on the subtle process of how we bring ourselves into motion' (Lepkoff 1999).

In the choreographic landscapes explored in this research, speaking of a released body has a clear direct connection with and roots in the 1960s/1970s when specific choreographers, teachers and dance artists started to define and shape new corporealities to express new and different performative aims. This specific term means a distinction between the muscular and skeletal systems, focusing on moving from the skeleton — from the bones — rather than leading the movements from the muscles (Todd 1937). Having a released body generally means to be able to use the body without engaging the muscular force and tensions, feeling the full movement potential of the joints, with the result of a body free of any strains.

Dancing or moving with and from a released body means also to be able to let go of all the tensions and stay focused on the flow, intended both as flow of movement and of energy. Historically it is possible to trace this term back to the work of Mabel Elsworth Todd during the 1930s, the former founder of Ideokinesis, that is an approach to improving posture through guided imagery. Todd speaks of 'relaxation' starting from the movement contraction and relaxation of the heartbeat to connection of the breathing and diaphragm muscles. She explained, 'relaxation is the equilibrium of the rest and activity phases in the rhythms of living, rest being the passive phase between the active phase of these rhythms, as for example in the rhythms of the heart, diaphragm and reciprocal muscle action. *Relaxation is not negation, it is not passivity*' (Todd 1937: 293, italics in the original). Here we see an example of the extent to which Todd based her relaxation of the human anatomy.

In Todd's seminal work *The Thinking Body: A Study of the Balancing Forces of Dynamic Man* (1937), the focus is a full understanding of the human body's range of structural activities. The Contents (Todd 1937: xxi, xxii) indicate how the chapters interlaced a variety of topics such as: 'Function and Form in Human Dynamics' on the habits and balancing forces, explaining that form allows functions and the psychophysical basis of posture; 'The working Skeleton' reinforces attention on anatomic structures especially of the spinal column and the pelvis. 'Balancing Forces to Stand Erect' and the chapter on walking focus on everyday activities, as well as 'Breathing', which brings an autonomic system into consciousness. 'Reacting Mechanism' is a chapter based on the study of the mechanics of nervous reflexes, nerves and muscles tones and how much those influence postural reflexes and

psychological reactions and posture. Therefore, concepts later used by somatic and ‘release’ practitioners are already present in Todd’s research.

Whereas release is nowadays an umbrella of practices used both in the U.S. and in the U.K., (where also Skinner Release Technique is part of it), I must clarify that the term Release Technique or Anatomical Release Technique was coined by Mary Fulkerson, founder of the Release Technique during the 1970s.

As Lepkoff explains:

> An important aim of the technical work in Mary's [Fulkerson] Release classes was to draw the body closer to channeling its action along these pathways. This would both re-align the body so that weight was supported through the center of the bones as well as re-pattern the flow of energy so that action was initiated by the muscles closest to the body’s center. This shift would release the outer muscles of the body from holding weight and free them for what they were meant to do, namely move the body. This was one reason the work is called "Release Technique.”
>
> Releasing is not simply release of excess muscular tension but releasing deep physical pre-conceptions as well.
>
> (Lepkoff 1999)

In this quote Lepkoff clarifies how Fulkerson’s work impacts not only the muscular system, but also the psychophysical one: working on the relaxation of the muscular tension helps in changing pre-constituted postural patterns and habits.

Choreographers from different backgrounds and continents used or are using Release Technique, including Trisha Brown, Stephen Petronio, John Jasperse, Frederic Flamand, Wayne Mc Gregor, and William Forsythe. Certainly, they have very different backgrounds and creative approaches also in the use of the body. The Americans Brown, Petronio, Jasperse could be considered as examples of post-modern dance

(defined in Chapter 3.I.B) with a direct influence from Judson Church's experience, which were a collective or artists based at the Judson Church New York, who worked on questioning dance during the 1960s. The Belgian Flamand, a director interested in mixed media production, was integrating dancers with a strong release-based training in his former company Charleroi/Danses. The British McGregor and American Forsythe melt the vocabulary of ballet together with release-based movements. Even though the approach to release should be considered different for each one of the choreographers named above, their work on concepts and ideas such as images, joints, and space in between the joints offers common ground.

As previously mentioned, Release Technique or Anatomical Release Technique, or just Release, which is distinguished from Skinner Releasing Technique (SRT) especially for the use of imagery and the specific order of exercises proposed, is a specific method introduced in Britain by Fulkerson. According to Roche:

> it is relevant to notice to what extent the introduction of Release Technique does not employ a specific movement vocabulary, but rather requires that the dancer employ an attitude of introspection and sensitivity towards the body's physiological structures.
>
> (Roche 2009: 19)

As explained by dance scholar and historian Nicholas (2007) and discussed above, Fulkerson introduced her method as Anatomical Release Technique at Dartington during the 1970s. This method influenced both the dancers' training practice and the making of choreography. For instance, Nicholas explains further how Fulkerson introduces into the movement practices of Richard Alston and the dance company Strider 'her anatomical alignment work' (Nicholas 2007: 188). Nicholas (2007) illustrates further that Fulkerson initiates them to 'her own practices of imagery and

improvisation' (Nicholas 2007: 188) into choreographic practices. Alston used the term 'liberation' speaking of the influences of Fulkerson's work (Nicholas 2008: 188).

In Release, as in many somatic practices, the work on imagery (II.A.4) is important as 'a process of exploration and investigation to allow choreographic material to emerge from the body', where 'Fulkerson's initial images are simple forms to enable thinking about the internal structures of the body's anatomy, their reaction to movement and thus to the world' (Nicholas 2007: 192).

In a 1978 interview, somatic practitioner and dancer Linda Hartley, former student of Fulkerson, clarified one of the Release principles:

> In release work this principle is used to correct bad postural habits so that movement and stillness can happen economically, without unnecessary strain and activity — easy, comfortable movement has a beauty and an availability to both the person watching and the person doing.
>
> (Hartley 1978: 3)

As she explains, this search for ease affects two different perspectives, both the viewer and the performer; in this light, Release could be considered also as a possibility for changing attitudes on both sides, namely the dancer/mover and the audience. It is also thanks to release practice that the focus from inside-out, previously mentioned, developed into a systematic way of perceiving. According to Karczag:

> Release Work is a way of finding out about internal structure and function and then allowing you to find your own connections. So that you find out how your body would move ideally and work to release the tensions that are preventing that ideal kind of movement. But then you fill it with your form.
>
> (Crow 1985: 34)

During the 1990s release practices became well known. Kirsty Alexander, a Skinner Releasing practitioner herself, recalls:

> I spent 10 years and thousands of pounds on two classes a day, Pilates, the gym, sports science diplomas, Feldenkrais and Alexander lessons. I even let myself be hypnotized once in an attempt to improve my pirouettes. But I don't think I really experienced dancing until I came across Joan Skinner's work.
>
> Skinner Releasing Technique is an approach to movement concerned with the integration of the whole self to foster a deeper kinesthetic experience of movement. It is called releasing rather than release as this better describes the process nature of the work, a work which understands learning to be holographic rather than linear.
>
> (Alexander 1999: 8)

Whereas Alexander is specifically speaking of SRT, and defining it as an 'approach' more than a technique, Susan Klein explains that the definition of release is also to be considered as:

> an umbrella term for all sorts of alternative dance training techniques, bodywork/movement techniques, and even choreography. In general these techniques believe in working more efficiently by using less muscle tension. In general these techniques take into account that there is more to dancing and dance training than the body, and for the most part they include some belief in the body/mind complex and even engage the spirit. In this sense Klein Technique™ surely falls into this umbrella category.
>
> (Klein 1998: 9)

Klein is critiquing what is considered release, preferring to define her own practice as a 'technique of connection. Klein Technique TM is a technique of relationship' (Klein, 1998: 9).

This section summarises some experiences which merged dance and somatic practices together, specifically clarifying some connections with somatic practices, Release Technique and British dance of the 1970s which are relevant to later case studies.

V. Conclusion: Making the Point and Problematics in the Research Process

This chapter starts an analysis of somatics, traced through its origins and genealogy (I.A.-B), defining some useful parameters (II.A.1-5) and analysing some literature from an historical perspective (II.B), from the somatic practitioners' point of view (II.C), from an educational perspective (II.D) and on the relationship between choreography and somatics (II.E). Two of the major somatic practices in use from my case studies, SRT and BMC (III) were introduced, and I concluded with an insight of the concept of Release, highlighting the works of Fulkerson (IV).

During this investigation process, some interesting gaps and problematics emerged. Firstly, it is relevant to notice how sometimes in dance studies, when historians and practitioners write about the practices the practitioners reflected upon, they do not fully acknowledge the influences of somatics and do not speak directly of the influences that somatic practices had on the dance field, even though they are using somatic concepts related to dance. Furthermore, they often use specific terminology deriving from somatics or that has been created through the impact of somatic processes, without clearly acknowledging somatic influences. It is important to spell out these connections to understand more deeply and carefully specific interrelations and gaps in dance history and dance critical theory and practices. For example, the term 'agency' means something specific in somatics rather than a general terminology which is about dancers owning the material they perform.

Following this, I find there is a lack in connecting specific qualities and processes in dance and dance training to specific somatically informed practices, which are fundamental in leading to a specific quality in the dance and movement. Until a few years ago, it seems that dance critical theorists did not generally acknowledge the impacts somatically informed practices had on dance, even where there is a common understanding and mutual relationships between them (for instance the rolling on the ground from the X position as deriving from Bartenieff). However, making more explicit the connections between dance and somatics helps gain more critical evaluation points. I suggest that this lack of recognition is due to dance studies being a relatively recent discipline and, because somatics was not considered in academia until the mid-1980s, approximately thirty years ago. During the last stages of my writing, the new book by Doran (2020) definitively enlarges somatics as a social practice, becoming a relevant resource because it is filling some gaps between dance and somatics historically and conceptually.

Moreover, it is relevant to note that from the beginning of the 20th century until the second decade of the 21st century, most of the literature on somatic practices has been written by practitioners themselves (II.C), without any specific support from academics or dance scholars. There are also two interesting time gaps in placing somatics in history: the pre and post Second World War era, the end of 1930s to the late 1940s and the 1980s. The first could be determined by the fact that many people, including a great number of somatic practitioners, dancers, and artists such as Bartenieff and Charlotte Selver fled Europe for North America because of the Second World War. The second gap could be related to the economic crisis of the 1980s with some massive global political changes such as the Cold War and the fall of the Berlin Wall, processes whose effects continued in the 1990s.

Another point is that the main language used in somatics is English, and most of the contributions come from North America. The other main language used in somatic texts is German, which remains a less prominent language in the dance studies field. The language issue leads back to the question of transmission of somatics: how are somatic practices diffused nowadays? To what extent are the influences of virtual media evident in the cultural transmission of somatics? These questions trace back to the fact that somatics is still an open and expanding field.

In tracing the roots of somatics, I struggled to find sources on choreography and somatics in Europe, while the connections from a North American perspective are more clearly traced. On the other side, the richness of materials and perspectives that are available regarding somatics, in many different forms, will certainly open the field to a deeper analysis and critical evaluation.

In the forthcoming chapters I continue to explore the various manifestations of somatics and the dance field, through the introduction of more historical perspectives and my fieldwork research. Specifically, in the next chapter, 'Choreographing the 1980s: An Overview of the Contemporary Dance Scene', the argument is extended to provide specific examples of choreography in the 1980s and to introduce two of my fieldwork cases studies, Gaby Agis, and Wim Vandekeybus. There is specific focus on the concept of the released informed body and its influences derived from somatics, on the New Dance movement in Britain and the New Flemish Wave in Belgium. A further focal point is the integration of the concept of body in the development of the new dramaturgy during the 1980s. The experiences of feminism are examined in relation to new choreography, with glimpses from experiences at Dartington College of Arts and the London festival series Dance Umbrella in order to give an extensive picture of the

1980s. The chapter starts with an exploration of the term choreography to position this research historically and thematically.

Chapter 3: Choreographing the 1980s: An Overview of the Contemporary Dance Scene

I. Introduction

In the previous chapter I discussed somatics in relation to the existing literature, extrapolating some main concepts such as body-mind entity, functions, touch, journey, agency, imagery. Subsequently, after having proposed an investigation of the somatic concepts both from an historical point of view and from the dance education perspective through an investigation of works by somatic practitioners, I focused on connections between choreography and somatics, establishing some parameters such as perception before the movement, touch, polysensory imagery, and new conditions of learning that somatics creates. These parameters will be useful to analyse the fieldwork in Chapters 4 and 5. Furthermore, I have introduced the somatic practices Skinner Releasing Technique (SRT) and Body-Mind Centering (BMC), as the two main official practices used by two of the choreographers who are the focus of my fieldwork research.

This chapter provides some examples of 1980s North American and European choreography and introduces two European choreographers from the fieldwork. The decade of the 1980s is the period when my two main case studies — Gaby Agis and Wim Vandekeybus — are positioned historically. The central focus of investigation in this chapter is on post-modern, contemporary, and experimental dance.

The object of this chapter is to introduce the timeframe of the 1980s, and then my two main case studies. The chapter starts with an introduction to the 1980s and the years before (I, I.A), with a focus on the movements of post-modern dance (I.B) and *Tanztheater* (I.C) and their correlations to the 1980s. I proceed with an overview on the

term choreography (I.D) for an understanding of its continuous evolution conceiving it as a historically situated concept. Therefore, I delve into the 1980s (II, II.A, II.B), framing the concepts of new dramaturgy (II.C) and new movement (II.D) and an introduction to dance and feminism (II.E) with a focus on Britain (III) and on Belgium (IV), before introducing my main case studies (V.A.-B). Therefore, I am presenting the work *What the Body Does Not Remember* as one of the starting points of my enquiry (V.B.1). As I will later explain, Britain and Belgium are at the center of my focus for two specific features: Britain for the integration of somatic practices into the dance field, and Belgium for transforming the concept of Dance Theatre (for its definition see Chapter 1.I).

I.A Mapping the Field Historically

In mapping the practices of modern and post-modern choreography (for its definition I.B. in this chapter) from a western perspective prior to the 1980s, two continents, North America, and Europe, are major areas of interest. From the end of nineteenth century, modern dance pioneers such as Isadora Duncan, Ruth St. Denis, and Ted Shawn started to expand the perspectives on the body, traveling between the two continents. From their grounding experiences derived the American modern dance schools during the 1920s developed by Martha Graham and Doris Humphrey, José Limon, and others. Simultaneously, in Europe, Rudolf von Laban and Mary Wigman, were among those who developed the *Ausdruckstanz* (see Chapter 2). For the pioneers of the beginning of the 1900s and in modern dance and *Ausdrucktanz* the focus on the body in choreography and training brought about a substantial change of paradigm in the perspectives applied in the consideration of the body itself: this viewpoint developed from the inside out. This concept, the ‘inside out perspective’, became a fundamental legacy connected to somatics, engaged both in the training and in daily life. Often dance

artists were living together in a community (for example Monte Verità, as discussed in Chapter 2.II.A.) and movement became a lifestyle. Movement was not just a prerogative of dancers but developed into an expanded variety of self-care instruments. Through practices such as self-conscious movement practices, vegetarianism, sunbathing, meditations, people started to listen to themselves and to their bodily needs. Movement practices were used to recover from physical and from mental disorders. Furthermore, movement expressed in groups was considered a social mean as for instance in the movement choirs by Laban during the 1920s and 1930s in Europe where the focus was not the choreography *per se* but the process of experiencing the movement by a variety of people together, including professional and non-professional dancers (Toepfer 1997, Segel 1998, Karina and Kant 1996)[47]. As well movement was an element for protesting and political agency as in the left-wing dance movement in the U.S. (Prickett 2013).

This change was against the body-mind dichotomy not only regarding movement but various aspect of everyday life.

As dance scholar Cynthia Novack explains:

> Culture is embodied. A primary means of understanding, knowing, making sense of the world comes through shared conceptions of our bodies and selves and through the movement experiences society offers us. Movement constitutes an ever-present reality in which we constantly participate.
>
> (Novack 1990: 8)

In this light the shift happening in movement culture in the beginning of 20th century, was a research in which philosophers, mystics, dancers, and artists went hand in hand (see Chapter 2). From this turmoil, developed the modern dance movement in the U.S. and the *Ausdruckstanz* in Germany/Europe. For these two movements, generally dance was considered an expression of the individual and a form of healing and not a purely

[47] The movement choirs were also politically instrumentalized by the Nazis before Laban left Germany in 1937.

aesthetic experience (Toepfer 1997). In the U.S. the decades from 1940s-1950s could be considered as a period of establishment and consolidation of the previous movement, whereas in Europe with the break constituted by the Second World War, the 1940s represented on one side the re-establishing of the ballet tradition and on the other implicated the emigration of dance artists and practitioners from Germany and Europe to the U.S.

The 1960s represented a time of requestioning predeterminate issues mainly regarding the substance of dance and choreography. The post-modern movement developed in the U.S. reconsidered the medium of dance and choreography (see I.B). In Europe it moved into theatre, giving birth to such specific experiences as the *Tanztheater* (see II.C) during the 1970s and a diverse use of dramaturgy in dance in the 1980s. In parallel, many somatic systems became established, and created their own training schools (such as, for instance, the ones by Moshe Feldenkrais, Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen).

I.B Defining 'Post-Modern Dance' for the Scope of This Research

In short, post-modern dance was a movement started in the U.S., specifically in New York. *The Oxford Dictionary of Dance* curated by Craine and Mackrell presents this definition:

> Initially the term was most associated with work pioneered by the Judson Dance Theater New York, in which choreographers like Rainer, Steve Paxton, and Trisha Brown explored the possibilities of non-theatrical dance productions, new forms of structure and pedestrian or minimalist dance vocabularies".
> (Craine and Mackrell 2010: Post-Modern, 376-377)

According to Sally Banes (1987: xiii) the term 'post-modern' was used first by American choreographer Rainer in the early 1960s to classify the work she was doing

with her fellows of the Judson Dance Theatre. For her it had firstly a chronological sense to highlight that they were the generation that came after the modern dance.

The movement of post-modern dance in the U.S. was rejecting modern dance paradigms and hierarchies. With influences from non-Western movement philosophies, it focused on researching for collective movement practices and exploring ways to move the body without shaping it into a predetermined technique (Banes 1987). Post-modern dance movement saw the emergence of the collective, where various choreographers and dancers were working collectively such as the previously mentioned Judson Dance Theatre, Grand Union, and choreographers such as Rainer, Paxton, Brown, Deborah Hay, Simone Forti. Paxton was one of the first post-modern artists to be invited to Europe (Britain) for teaching and performing (see this chapter III, III.A, V.B).

As discussed by dance critic and scholar André Lepecki (2012) the post-modern choreographers expanded the reconsiderations of the medium. Instead of 'serving as an instrument for expressive metaphors' (Banes 1987: 20), the body itself became the subject of the dance. Significantly, choreographers at that time shifted the specific definition of a dance: a dance is a dance in relation to the frame and the context where is proposed rather than the specific movement patterns and quality. 'Games, sports, contests, the simple acts of walking and running, the gestures involved in playing music and giving a lecture, and even the motion of film and the mental action of language were presented as dances' (Banes 1987: xix). This means that a variety of topics and range of actions become the contents of a dance because they were framed as such.

With the focus on debating about the function of theatrical dance, issues such as the social meanings of the body, 'political themes of participation, democracy, cooperation,

and ecology' (Banes 1987: 20) were investigated through the medium of performance. As dance developed into more political concerns, 'the political movements of the late sixties-—-anti-war, black power, student, feminist, and gay groups— used theatrical means to stage their battles' (Banes 1987: 20). The research for rendering the audience engaged not only in the performance, but also to make the viewers 'politically responsible citizens' (Kolb 2013: 47), is somehow reacting in the collaborative, participatory work being produced in the first two decades of the 21st century (Kolb 2013: 47). This leads us to consider post-modern dance as a movement that generated an understanding of democratization both in the production of dance and in its reception (Kolb 2013: 33). This need for a collaboration in choreography has become prevalent since the 1980s (Foster 2008). I will discuss this further in section II.

In Europe many research and experimental dance projects in the 1980s were somehow connected with the American post-modern. As we will see later (III.B, IV.B), thanks to festivals and educational institutions, independent groups that brought to Europe many American choreographers and teachers such as Paxton (III, III.A, I.B. V.B), young choreographers have been influenced by this (such as the case of Dartington College of Arts at the end of the 1970s, or the dance artists who went to New York and brought back teachings and experiences from there). I have now to highlight that during the end of the 1970s and the 1980s the development of German *Tanztheater* took place.

I.C Defining 'Tanztheater' Through Its Main Features

Tanztheater is a specific genre which was born in West Germany during the 1960s and which developed in the 1970s, with strong connections to German *Ausdruckstanz*, especially in the figure of Kurt Jooss. Jooss was a choreographer, former student, and assistant of Laban, who based his school and company at the Folkwangschule in Essen

from 1927. His masterpiece *Die Grüne Tisch* (The Green Table, 1932) exposed the realities of warfare in a series of scenes focused on characters. In this and other works he was redirecting the communal and experimental aspects of *Ausdruckstanz* towards reconnection with dance in the theatre. He was one of those artists who left Germany with the rising of Nazism, and his company, Ballets Jooss, and the Jooss-Leeder School of Dance were resident at Dartington Hall in England from 1934 until the early years of the Second World War (Nicholas 2007: 100). In 1949 he was invited to return to the Folkwangschule in Essen. *Tanztheater*'s main exponents are Pina Bausch, Reinhild Hoffman, Susanne Linke, Hans Kresnik, and Gerhard Bohner. Taking into account that they produced diverse strands of *Tanztheater* that I am not exploring further here, I think is relevant to my research to mention at least Bausch's work. During the 1980s, Bausch work was defined as 'Theater of Experience' (Servos 1982: 57) for its questioning of realism on the stage. 'This "Theater of Experience" changes not only the conditions of critical reception; the translation of dance from the level of aesthetic abstraction to everyday physical comportment means changes in both form and content' (Servos 1982: 57).

Further, Servos shows how much, at the time he was writing (beginning of the 1980s), Bausch's work could also be perceived as irritating because of the attention required to follow the work. In Servos' words

> The irritatingly new element in Pina Bausch's works demands a new understanding of dance that formally transcends the limiting divisions into theater of dance, or voice, or music, and investigates the specific dimensions of dance.
>
> (Servos 1982: 57)

To do so, Bausch used the principle of the montage 'the associative linking of scenic material as structural principle for the dramatic form and the content' (Servos 1982: 57), where the scenic components are dance and gesture sequences, videos, songs, theatrical texts and effects, that somehow we can also find in the work of the New Flemish Wave, explored in section IV.C of this chapter.

Bausch developed a choreographic method where each dancer was evaluated for their individual type of movement, physical characteristic, and talents. There was a search for individual history, feeling and gestures that represented the main source of creative inspiration. This merged with a move towards creating dance pieces that focused on the human social condition. In Bausch's *Tanztheater*, movement and gestures are developed by the choreographer together with each dancer following individual research on gestures. The dance vocabulary she created is disconnected from ballet techniques and narrative structures and it is part of a dramaturgical construction together with use of texts which are non-naturalistic, non-descriptive and non-didactic. These texts are played by the dancers themselves; these are written sometimes by the choreographer, the dramaturg, or dancers themselves, or even they could be actual theatrical texts or have reference to them (Bentivoglio 1985). Furthermore, the topics of the first Bausch works were predominantly acts of violence of men on women as seen in *Café Müller* (Acocella 2013) stressing the extent to which '[D]ance Theatre and physical theatre articulated a certain wounding in the nature of sexual (and social) relation' (Heathfield 2006: 189 in Claid 2021: 50). This genre, as we will see later in the chapter (II.C), influenced the works of some choreographers of the 1980s who contributed to redefining the Dance Theatre genre.

I.D Defining 'Choreography'

Before further proceeding, an investigation of the term choreography is useful, discussed through examples from various choreographers and periods.

In 2019 in a lecture for the College de France, Belgian choreographer Anne Theresa De Keersmaeker at the question 'what is choreography' she replied: 'after a forty-year long career, I have realised that I have at least five answers to this question. And I don't want to choose just one answer' (De Keersmaeker 2020: 1). And then she proceeds in investigating these five answers in relation to specific example of her dance pieces.[48] I started this section with Keersmaeker's statement to introduce the argument that the word 'choreography' has multiple meanings, and I am going now to explore some of them.

Some general definitions of the term choreography are provided, passing through changes of its meaning, setting up some historical considerations and focusing on the 1980s in general, and later on the European theatrical frame, which is the object of my research.

[48] The definition of choreography that De Keersmaeker gives are '*choreographing is embodying an abstraction or (...) a choreography is a calligraphy of embodiment*' (De Keersmaeker 2019: 4*);* '*Choreographing is organising movement in time and space*' (De Keersmaeker 2019: 8); '*Choreography means defying gravity'* (De Keersmaeker 2019: 12); '*Choreography is spinning and jumping'* (De Keersmaeker 2019: 14); *'Choreography means celebrating our humanity'* (De Keersmaeker 2019: 16).

Choreography is a word

> Derived from the Greek for dance and writing. Although the term originally referred to the actual writing down of the steps of a dance (which today is called dance notation), ever since the late 18th century it has meant the art of composing dance.
>
> (Craine and Mackrell 2010: Choreography, 104)

Even though the term is no longer used to refer to the practice of notating already existing dances and providing scores for the artistic process, choreography defines etymologically the action of 'writing' through the body in space and the creation of dance pieces with specific instruments and parameters (such as specific concepts and ideas, time, space, spatial constructions, gestures).

According to sociologist and cultural theorist Rudi Laermans, choreography is considered as an object in time:

> A choreographed dance work is also a totalizing temporal object that condensed longer sequences of singular movements made in successive now-moments into a singular performance that, over a certain period of time, is repeatedly re-performed.
>
> (Laermans 2015: 88-89)

The actions of 'rationalizing, or selecting and fixing the most efficient means' (Laermans, 2015: 90) are considered relevant to construct the choreographic object. Furthermore, Laermans defines the choreographic as that which

> *delineates precisely the writing space in which movements and non-movements are simultaneously fixed and rationalized, meticulously recorded and efficiently ordered* [italics as in original].
>
> (Laermans 2015: 91)

British choreographer Jonathan Burrows defined choreography as 'a negotiation with the patterns your body is thinking' (Burrows 2010: 27). In this, the focus comes back to the individual practitioner's boundaries, re-establishing the direct connection between the individual's thinking and how it emerges in the patterning of movement in space

and time. These three examples of what could be intended by choreography represent the fact that the choreographic field is an open, changing, expanding, and developing territory. In her PhD thesis, sociologist Gurur Ertem (2016) explains:

> Choreography today denotes specific structures and strategies, disconnected from subjectivist bodily expression, style and representation. The meaning of choreography transformed from referring to a set of protocols or tools used in order to produce something predetermined, i.e. dance, to an open cluster of tools that can be used as a generic capacity both for analysis and production.
>
> (Ertem 2016: 41)

Choreography is not only intended as a summary of steps, or ideas, but specific systems and devices of thinking, which generate other systems and ways of constructing. Choreography is practice connected to theory. As choreographer Forsythe argues:

> Choreography is a curious and deceptive term. The word itself, like the processes it describes, is elusive, agile, and maddeningly unmanageable. To reduce choreography to a single definition is not to understand the most crucial of its mechanisms: to resist and reform previous conceptions of its definition.
>
> (Forsythe 2019)

Choreography is intended as an expanding and constantly evolving field, as explored below, which encompasses multiple creative philosophies, projects, and structures. For this, it is not possible to have one definition, but multiple conceptualisation of this term that transforms as the social, political and historical contexts changes. Furthermore, within choreography coexist various approaches that do not involve only bodily movement composition but that are more focused on the structure of the dance event *per se*, taking into accounts dramaturgy, concepts, structured and semi structured scores, improvisation etc.

I am proceeding with some more general examples that will establish the context of my research. Back in the 1980s, a ground-breaking case of how choreography could be

conceived is seen in the work of British choreographer Rosemary Butcher — which as will be seen in section V.A was the first influencing dance teacher of my case study Agis — marked by 'her use of cross arts collaboration in music, visual arts, film and architecture within the choreographic process and her frequent choice of non-theatrical spaces to present her work' (Butcher 2019). Other instances are the Italian collective Sosta Palmizi, created in 1984, which was proposing works based on theatrical connotations, with a mix of words, sounds and movements (Pedroni 2002). Sosta Palmizi was the first Italian company presented at London's Dance Umbrella festival in 1987, an important event discussed below. In the work of British group DV8 Physical Theatre a resourceful dramaturgy based on social and psychological issues and theatrical settings was sometimes combined with the use of video (from which their company name DV8, a specific type of cassette player, derived). In a complete diverse background, which differs from the European one, other examples could include the choreographic works of the Americans Merce Cunningham, Trisha Brown, and Stephen Petronio which maintained a theatrical setting, and with specific light design and props, proposing a non-narrative approach and sometimes using new technology. These three examples could belong to the post-modern category, although postmodern is a contested term. Their legacy is Cunningham's technique and composition. Cunningham influences reached also Europe, both through European dance students that went to study with his company and thanks to its performances in Europe from the 1960s (Nicholas 2007: 166-167) and they were extensively invited to European festivals mainly during the end of 1970s and the 1980s (for some examples see section III.B, IV.B).

Considering that this list gathers choreographers or collectives with very different choreographic languages and creative process approaches, they represent diverse

instances of what choreography could be. Within the work of William Forsythe the enlarged definition of choreography includes the concept of it as a tangible object. In 1997, in collaboration with dancer Dana Caspersen and sound artist Joel Ryan, Forsythe created his first choreographic object which is not to be confused with Laermans' definition above that refers to a 'choreographed dance work'. Forsythe's *White Bouncy Castle* commissioned by Artangel in London converted 'the various states of physical-spatial organization, which choreography is concerned with, into a state of autonomy' (Forsythe in Riezt 2010). This giant object was an inflatable white castle, like an enormous children's game, where the audience actively 'performed' movement, engaging in personal experiences of jumps, walks, falls, or doing nothing. This object creates new possibilities of movements and choreography, a 'choreographic space where there are no spectators, only participants' (Forsythe 2019). Choreography and choreographic objects are two instruments which position the body in relation to space, gravity, and time. They present specific differences. Choreography concerns organising movement in a space, and it expects a formal or informal outcome but for an audience. A choreographic object is created to be used and inhabited directly by the participants, who are not usually professional performers, and at the same time, those participants become the audience. As Forsythe explains:

> The objects instigate processes in the body that instrumentalise the body´s readiness to provide input for our heuristically driven, predictive faculties, which work incessantly to secure for us a higher probability of preferred physical and mental outcomes. A principal feature of the choreographic object is that the preferred outcome is a form of knowledge production for whoever engages with it, engendering an acute awareness of the self within specific action schemata.
>
> (Forsythe n.d.)

Choreographic objects also furnish an example of choreography relating to an audience. Furthermore, the *White Bouncy Castle* is an example of creating an alternative relationship between the viewer and the dance piece, as it looks for breaking the

dichotomy of performer-audience because ‘arguably, people are choreographers (producers), dancers, and spectators all at once’ (Kolb 2013: 34).

To sum up, in this section I went from the etymological definition of choreography referring to the ancient Greek, where the main meaning was of dance and writing, to the later use of the term as writing through the body in space. Choreography is also defined as a temporal object, and it could comprehend movements and non-movement patterns. It is an interdisciplinary and collaborative field, and it could be developed with or without theatrical means. Furthermore, choreography refers not just to human movement, but it exists also in the forms of tangible and physical objects that elicit specific movement from participants.

After this general introduction that set up a larger contextualisation on the term ‘choreography’ that, as we have seen, is a constantly evolving field, I will focus historical paths towards contextualising the 1980s.

II. Choreography in the 1980s: Repositioning the Dance Field

Dance critic Lisa Brunel in ‘Experimental Dance. Diverse Trends and Spheres of Influence’ written for the German dance periodical *Ballett International* in 1982, pointed out that in those years ‘a strong tendency to question the body has spread among the circles of experimental dance’ (Brunel 1982: 29). In the article she later proceeds with a focus on the American artist Meredith Monk, a topic outside my research, but still relevant to underline that the process of questioning the body was a central focus in those years in the field of contemporary dance. Brunel later proceeds affirming:

> Scientific discoveries concerning the body and human biology have brought dance a great step forward. The dancer now has a whole spectrum of new methods at his or her disposal which are also used in therapy. One can also name the Gerda Alexander method in Scandinavia or that of Mary Fulcherson [Fulkerson] in England, which tend to restore to the body its profound unity and to permit the dancer to reach the necessary level of balance.
> (Brunel 1982: 29)

Brunel is highlighting the extent to which at the beginning of the 1980s there was already a general understanding from the dance field of these 'new methods' that could be considered somatically informed, even though she discusses an example of their use in therapy. Nevertheless, it is clear that these approaches are for the dancer. This paragraph is also interesting because Fulkerson's method is stressed as a system of awareness, based in Britain where she brought seeds for a new conception of dance and movement.

The decade of the 1980s represented a turning point for Western dance culture because some choreographers moved from the post-modern dance vocabulary of the 1960s/1970s to a new type of theatricality. The 1980s see a somehow inverted process both in the U.S. and in Europe. Sally Banes (1987: xxiv) argued that in the U.S. in the 1980s there was a 'rebirth of (the) content' with some choreographers going back to 'theatricality', using a fully equipped set and theatrical components. Even though Banes refers to the North American dance scene, with a specific focus on the city of New York, we can re-position this statement to the European context. European dance companies did not experience the post-modern dance directly but as an imported dance form, with an indirect influence by the works of American choreographers and teachers invited to Europe (III.A, III.B, IV.B), as for instance in Britain (see experiences such as Dartington College of Arts and Dance Umbrella festival described in III.A and III.C) or in Belgium (with the festival Klapstuck for instance, see IV.C).

In the European context, particularly Britain, according to Jordan (1992) this process of a reappropriation of theatricality was slightly different. Firstly, taking a step back during the 1960s/70s in Europe, even though many experimental dances happened out of the theatres[49], generally speaking dance had not left the theatrical stage so drastically as did experimental dance in the U.S. in the same years. As a continuation with the interrupted research in *Ausdruckstanz* (due to Second World War), the Dance Theatre emerged in those years with contents that were both as critiques on politics and as a moment of showing personal and individualistic memory, feeling, and so on. For example, in some working notes of X6 collective (see III.B) you can find that artist's research comprehends not only observations regarding the pieces but also 'essays on various aspects of personal consciousness that arose during rehearsal and performance' (Jordan 1992: 69). These notes regard both social and political perspectives and the personal awareness of them. The 1980s recycled this methodology: in looking for a dance concept and structure, an important role was given to the individual dancer/performer's reflections and considered to be part of the artistic process, and in this way contributing to create this new theatricality, not based on a theatrical fictional role, but on the individualities of the dancers on scene. For instance, from the very beginning of Ultima Vez company (founded in 1986), Vandekeybus used to credit a dance work with: 'created with and performed by' (Vandekeybus 2021), highlighting each artistic contribution by the dancers.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, this research focuses on Britain and Belgium, because in the 1980s these countries were in the forefront for the introduction of new elements into

[49] To give an example that could be explicative of these years, dance artists Simone Forti was resident at the Galleria L'Attico by Fabio Sargentini in Rome between 1968-1972 (Sargentini 2021). Even though this is a case of an American artist working in Europe for a few years, it indicates the relevance of art galleries in spreading new dance languages.

choreography. Furthermore, as I am going to deepen later (see II.D and III.C) that during the 1980s, there was an evidential change in choreographic practices associated with the dissemination of somatic knowledge within the field.

Even though I am aware that also German choreographers such as Bausch, Hoffman, Linke were influential for the research in Dance Theatre, however these works have been already extensively researched. Furthermore, there are two specific aspects that somehow are exclusive features of these two countries during the 1980s: Britain for the initiation of somatic practices into the dance field, and Belgium for the creation of new concepts of Dance Theatre, that differs from the *Tanztheater* because it highlighted the corporeality of the body on stage (see sections II.A, II.B), meaning that it focuses on the corporeal nature of the body, thus its bodily feature and not proposing on scene a sublimation of the dancer's body (Bleeker, De Belder, Debo, Van den Dries, Vanhoutte 2002).

II.A Why the 1980s

Two sentences highlight in a few eloquent words what sparked my interest in the 1980s. The first one is by the dance critic and scholar Joan White (1985) who, referring to all the dance classes and the different kind of dance events happening in London, wrote:

> In the 1980s there is what is often described as a dance explosion.
>
> (White 1985: 11)

The second one is by American choreographer and performer Robert Dunn:

> For me, the earliest '80s, were a period of deep despair at not being able to meet basic economic needs, though continuously involved with significant teachings.
>
> (Dunn 1989: 9)

These two very different points of view of the same field, although in different countries, represent the criticality the 1980s brought: these were years when the dance system, even though it was growing, was not always able to sustain the contemporary dance artists, due to neo-liberal strategies of production as explored below. Of course, every European nation went through diverse economic situations and political planning in arts policies. To receive government funding a dance company must fulfil specific production parameters and fit funding criteria, that may impact on the freedoms of creating, imposing restrictions concerning both timings and thematics. For instance, Dance scholar Alexandra Kolb questions the extent to which starting from the 1980s creating participatory or collaborative works depends on artistic and social choices (as was in the 1960s-1970s) or more an economic necessity to fit into a capitalistic system where the precarious nature of the artistic work is considered as a company business.

> The production of interactive experiences, the immersion of the "guest" in or within the product, the individuation and personalization of affects tailored toward the participant (consumer), the emphasis on process rather than product, the highlighting of physicality, the engagement of the senses, the creation of themes or multiple spaces—all are objectives shared both by recent performance practices and developments in corporate marketing and post-Fordist economics.
> (Kolb 2013: 40-41)

Nevertheless, the 1980s represented a focal point in the correlations between somatics and dance. From the 1970s somatics 'reframed the mid-century rejection of modern dance by claiming to train dancers in a way that was unencumbered by aesthetics' (George 2020: 29), and to conceive somatics as reinforcing and positioning the dancer's identity and its role in the artistic process (George 2020: 38). While in modern dance schools the teaching is focused on codified, organised techniques which follow predetermined structures and precepts matching a specific aesthetics, instead a somatic influenced training is looking for various practices that have in common an

understanding of the individual body-mind connection. This new pedagogy happened in some universities or specific dance colleges such as Dartington College of Arts (U.K.), School of New Dance Development (Amsterdam), Laban Centre (now Trinity Laban Conservatoire for Music and Dance, U.K.) or for instance at the University of Illinois at Urbana in the U.S. It was also organised by specific independent places and organisations/collectives such as X6 in Britain or Movement Research in New York. The institutionalisation of post-modern techniques in higher education was helpful both to spread these techniques into curricula of study, consolidating them, but also to create salaries for the teachers and practitioners.

Choreographer, dancer, somatic practitioner, and teacher Fulkerson outlined the concepts of 'explosion' and 'economic issue' as common challenges across the dance world. In 1996 she wrote:

> there was a rush to legitimacy within the whole of the dance world. In fact, all the arts felt pressure to legitimize their existence within a field of shrinking resources, which meant greater competition for funding, venues and actual survival.
>
> (Fulkerson 1996: 41)

Even though she is particularly referring to 'shrinking in the US government arts funding in the 1980s' (Fulkerson 1996: 41), this view can be applied to experimental dance in Europe as well, where the birth of festivals devoted to New Dance (III.B) languages such as the case of the Dance Umbrella festival in London, and some of the economic operations of the French government in financing French companies in national festivals and abroad, reinforced the establishment of dance festivals as a financial legitimatization of dance (see further III.C on Dance Umbrella). France is also representing a case, that is not a focus of my research, where the socialist government of Françoise Mittérrand, in the figure of the Minister of Arts and Culture Jack Lang

established the Division de la Danse in 1982, the first autonomous section devoted only to sustain dance (Gore, Louppe and Piollet 2000). With this the state became very present, on one side financing companies and schools, on the other creating a regime where the dance research was very connected to theatre and cinema, in line with the overall dance culture.

My research interest in the 1980s contemporary dance scene basically derives from three aspects: the first is the change of paradigm that some European choreographers have imprinted in the choreographic field, implementing the use of the theatrical setting. On the one hand, they returned to use the theatre as a privileged site — whereas for instance the 1960s experimental dance was mostly happening outside the theatre, in non-theatrical spaces. On the other hand, the dancer embraced a mix of abstract and theatrical uses of the body, but with a focus on corporeality that looked 'real'. This search for reality in the body (that for instance was a characteristic of the New Flemish Wave as seen in IV.C) or for a body non formalised in previous dance rules (as in the British New Dance, see III.C) went through practices that encompasses somatics and physical theatre (for its definition see Chapter 1.I). As I was previously writing in Chapter 1, the work that strongly took my attention back in time, was *What the Body Does Not Remember* (1987) by Vandekeybus. I was interested in how the dancers were responding physically in real time to choreographic actions that requested a fast response from stimuli (as for instance when they throw bricks to each other, see the description of the piece in V.B.1). Furthermore, they expanded the concept of theatre dance by multi-media forms.

The second aspect is how much the political climate of that time influenced in a radical way the founding and stabilization of the dance economy. The third is my long-time

appreciation of some Italian choreographers who started their choreographic career in those years and whose works stimulated a regeneration of Dance Theatre language through the introduction also of methodologies for a more perceptive use of the body.

I am now starting from the latest point of interest, and I am now introducing the work of the Italian choreographer Enzo Cosimi. I am aware that this is an Italian example and is out from the direct scope of this thesis, but it is an eloquent example in how his experience encompasses a mix of studies in Belgium and in the U.S., in developing later a choreographic language close to the Dance Theatre genre. The work of Cosimi offers a lateral case study to introduce the main theme of this chapter, dance in the 1980s. After leaving Mudra in Belgium, the school founded and directed by Maurice Béjart, Cosimi went to study with the Merce Cunningham Company in New York at the very beginning of the 1980s, where he practiced ballet, Klein technique, yoga, and release-based techniques. The political context he faced when he came back to Italy in 1982 was the end of *anni di piombo* ('the years of lead', era of terrorist outrages) years of terrorism which undermined the political stability of moderate Italian politics (Lazar 2010). In his works, physical and emotional sensations are interconnected and developed in a theatrical body and actions, as examined below.

His 1982-piece *Calore* in the reconstructed version of 2012 (Cosimi 2012) is a dance about youth and the energy, beauty, and the struggle of adolescence, created for the stage and fully equipped with theatrical props and settings. In Italian *calore* means heat/hot and its pronunciation and sound already indicate the temperature of the piece. Furthermore, we can also understand *calore* or heat as in contrast to cold. This a piece on youth and transformation, as the original programme states in Cosimi's words:

> When the reality is devastated by cold atmospheres, we think we want to 'smell', to 'sense' a new air, a new wind in which the energy could have as primary qualities sensations of profound serenity, warmth, and calm, before going back to nothing and, remaining without any illusion [translation by author].
>
> (Cosimi 1982, 2012, 2018)

Four young dancers represent the essence of being teenagers confronted with the discovery of love, sex, and parties. They are initially dressed in fancy clothes and high heels but the more the action increases, the more clothes they take off until eventually they remain in white underwear. They kiss each other, they throw confetti in the air, they drink champagne… they start in a quiet, almost dreamy atmosphere with a focus on themselves, but as the action increases, and the musical rhythm, their focus moves directly to reach towards the public. In watching this piece, the performers' attitude and gestures drive the overall attention. This is an example of how the performers assume a focus which is always from inside out, constantly reaching to embody the energy, and looking to establish a strong contact with the audience. The choreographic mechanism, developed in a complex theatricality due to both the use of theatre props and the dramaturgical structure, encourages the high awareness of the dancers, thanks to which they are always responding to the choreography through the gestures and impulses in a feedback system.

II.B Moving Towards a European Perspective

As previously mentioned, the 1980s could be considered as a turning point in the contemporary dance culture for the reuse of theatrical means as a common thread in different scenarios where the use of hybrid forms of media gave a further element of renovation. Elements of this rebirth included the use of multimedia and the use of theatrical dramaturgy, such as the development of the Dance Theatre genre. From a start in the U.S. in the 1960s there was a breaking down of hierarchies in creating a dance

piece (as previously seen in the definition of post-modern dance in I.B). This happens with the birth of collectives where the rules of the choreographer and dancers became strongly interconnected thanks also to the use of somatic practices that informed the dancers bodies through Release Technique (see Chapter 2.IV), that changed the paradigms of the movement trainings and forms. Furthermore, the emergence of female choreographers — Brown in U.S. and for instance Emilyn Claid, De Keersmaeker in Europe — determined a shift in the thematics proposed and methodology used. The advent of female choreographers is not at all new (thinking of the modern dance pioneers), but the perspective in which they acted namely within the feminist perspective (as for instance speaking of maternity on stage or lesbian love) was new (as discussed below in II.E). Another sign of innovation in the field is the new conceptualisation of body corporeality as could be seen in the works of Belgian choreographer Alain Platel, and the British Rosemary Butcher, where besides the dramaturgy, the body emerged with a specific physical approach maintaining a reaction to stimuli inside a set and organised choreographic structure.

Another preeminent aspect is that it could be considered that during the 1980s, the legitimization of contemporary dance in Europe started, and it was mainly a self-legitimation before the innovation was considered a key funding criterion from the governments. Example of this are choreographers from the New Flemish Wave, which started their first productions with self-funding and thanks to co-funding with some institutions not only Flemish (see IV.B-C) and the British New Dance that began as a collective with very little money (see III.B). Only later, when they gained international recognition, as in the case of the Flemish, or when their impact in the country became stronger, as for the British, the governments started new policy of funding where the innovation was a key criterion.

According to Gurum Ertem (2016) and Andrè Lepecki (2004), European contemporary dance radically redefines the 'formal and ontological parameters set by modern dance in the beginning of the twentieth century: intensifying the relationship between dance and movement and the emphasis on dance's autonomy (Lepecki 2004 in Ertem 2016: 4). At the very beginning of the 1980s, experimental (here interpreted as 'contemporary dance') dance and its distribution was marginal in the dance scene compared to ballet (Ertem 2016: 5). This changed thanks to the developments in France (with the choreographers of the *Nouvelle Danse Française*) and Flanders (the New Flemish Wave) in the 1980s and 1990s, which 'constitute the prototype of the repositioning of dance as a field of knowledge production at an international level in Europe' (Ertem 2016: 36). Specifically, I am investigating the New Flemish Wave in section IV.C.

The next sections focus on the search for a new dramaturgy in Dance Theatre, and the search for a new movement thanks to the development of somatic practices and technique.

II.C Theatre Dance in an Interdisciplinary Context: a 'New' Dramaturgy

Before proceeding I need to clarify the use of the term 'theatricality'. In a broad spectrum I consider both the stage with its theatrical settings and props, and a specific use of dramaturgy, where there is no storytelling, but a theatrically inspired dramaturgy (Lepecki 2004, 2015) to be the essence of the theatricality that entered the choreography and the dance world.

Having said that, in speaking of theatricality in the U.S. and Europe during the 1980s, two different narratives developed. The U.S.'s theatricality is focused to the set, the stage, the props, and some research of re-contextualisation of everyday gestures into

dance movement patterns, as the works of Twyla Tharp, where her movement language shifted from the minimalistic post-modern to a theatrical one, with a sort of characterisation of the dancers as in *The Catherine Wheel* 1981. In this work, as dance critic Marcia Siegel highlighted there was a search for narrative

> The Catherine Wheel is disruptive, jarring. The story doesn't proceed in consecutive episodes or even intelligibly sequential ones. For an intermissionless hour and twenty minutes it attacks us in bouts of interrupted, overlapping narrative.
> (Siegel 1982: 103)

Siegel stressed also the possible references of this work to some European authors closer to theatricality:

> You don't want to get to love these dancers, she seems to suggest. But instead of making them "objective" or "neutral," she makes them so over-expressive that we have to keep them at a distance or be flattened by their power.
>
> *The Catherine Wheel* (…) is a very firm statement of nonrealism, a new kind of expressionism perhaps. Certainly, the piece is more allied to Brecht, Kurt Jooss or George Grosz than to Dickens or Antony Tudor or even Jiri Kylian.
> (Siegel 1982: 104)

Examples of European dramaturgy developed in the 1980s, as in the works of Alain Platel and Jan Fabre (see II.C) show the extent to which the performers are not considered as actors but there is a search for the 'true/real body person' as explored below with some similarities to a somatic point of view. The concept of theatricality goes hand in hand with the one of dramaturgy (intended as the art of composing theatre or dance pieces from the point of view of the narrative), whereas theatricality is evoking more the full context of a performance and dramaturgy the 'plot'. Even though the origins of dramaturgy in dance are outside the scope of my thesis, the works by Pil Hansen and Darcey Callison *Dance Dramaturgy*: *Modes of Agency*, *Awareness and Engagement* (2015) and by Katherine Profeta, *Dramaturgy in Motion*: *at Work*

on Dance and Movement Performance (2015) are useful in understanding the rise of the figure of the dramaturg and role of dramaturgy in relation to dance. In particular Hansen and Callison provide an historical excursus on the figure of the dramaturg, with a specificity of this role in the twentieth century for instance explaining its function within Pina Bausch's work (Hansen and Callison 2015: 8-9) and considering Raimund Hoghe (Bausch's dramaturg) the first dance dramaturg (Hansen and Callison 2015: 24). In Profeta's text dance researcher André Lepecki's chapter 'Errancy as Work: Seven Strewn Notes for Dance Dramaturgy' narrates how he became a dance dramaturg, first working for friends during the 1980s, and then for Meg Stuart and Damaged Goods. Lepecki furthermore highlights the development of the dance dramaturgy during the 1980s as I am going to explain a few sentences below.

As I was previously mentioning the scope of my research is not looking at the choreographic works from a dramaturgical perspective, rather, investigating to what extent somatics and somatically informed practices influence the choreographic construction of a work. This involves understanding the extent to which the somatic body was introduced into the new theatrical context. For instance, in Vandekeybus' early works there is a consistent use of the theatrical stage, everyday props and the construction of the psychological characters. In Agis' works we can see the introduction of specific social themes, such as the new social image of the woman and stage costumes and lights explicitly inspired by everyday life.

As I was previously mentioning, Lepecki devises a specific connotation of dance dramaturgy, which claimed its specificity since the 1980s (Lepecki 2015: 58), in this way he goes further explaining that

> the moment dance received the suffix theatre to qualify a specific genre booming throughout the 1980s – dance-theatre (which is also a genre attached to a specific mode of producing and creating dance where the dance-dramaturg first finds a welcoming place) – is also the moment dance becomes postdramatic. Theatre enters into the name of dance when theatre is setting aside the problem of drama. Which means, when it is setting aside a kind of understanding of the theatrical function of writing.
>
> (Lepecki 2015: 58)

And he goes further

> dance becomes *dance-theatre* [sic] highly problematising, and indeed debunking, the unifying and sovereign function of *writing* as one of the main tensors of and in *dramaturgy*. Dance becomes dance-theatre by bypassing drama in theatre. But this bypassing coincides with the arrival of dance dramaturgs in dance studios. The dramaturg arrives to find drama out of the picture.
>
> (Lepecki 2015: 59)

I find this lengthy quote of Lepecki helpful to understand one of the main features of the Dance Theatre genre: it does not have a direct connection with a theatrical written text, furthermore this genre has changed the predominance of the role of the text, making it no more the glue element. It does not mean that drama does not exist anymore, on the contrary: drama is not being created by a unique text but by a togetherness of other agents (dance, movement, texts, multimedia, light design…) and in this light the role of dramaturgy as one of the 'work of daily interacting in the studio with dancers, choreographer, designers, technicians, producers, managers, all engaged in the creation' (Lepecki 2015: 53).

Furthermore, Lepecki had previously explained the relevance of the dance movement in the 1980s in the context of theatre:

> In the 1980s European avant-garde dance reinvented itself by means of the theatre. The groundbreaking works of the Flemish choreographers Ann Teresa de Keersmaecker, Win [sic] Vandekeybus, and Jan Fabre; the monumental choreography of French Jean-Claude Gallotta, and the epic work of another

> French choreographer, Caterine Divérrés; and the physical-theatre of British group DV-8, are a few who have explored and subverted the paths opened by tanztheater pioneers Johann Kresnik and Pina Bausch.
>
> (Lepecki 1998: 131)

Even though Lepecki's research focuses on the later generation of choreographers of the 1990s such as Boris Charmatz, or Jérôme Bel, he notes that the spirit of the reconstruction of a European contemporary dance scene started from the 1980s.

Thus, the dance critic and scholar Ramsay Burt states:

> Interdisciplinary approaches that have developed in the 1980s and 1990s have problematized normative assumptions about the way spectators perceive dance performances. The strongly interdisciplinary character of much experimental theater dance over the last fifty or so years has also disrupted ideas about spectatorship.
>
> (Burt 2009: 6)

and moreover:

> Theater dance is an interdisciplinary form, and some of the most interesting advances in progressive and experimental dance work in recent years have been interdisciplinary in nature.
>
> (Burt 2009: 3)

As eloquently explained by Lepecki and Burt, the new-born Dance Theatre was on one side derived from the work of the preceding *Tanztheater* form, using some of its specific means, such as the use of words together with movement, and on the other, integrating new technical modalities such as video, or approaches to using the body in a non-codified way, which is one of the main subjects of this research.

Often, the dancers' practices were informed by somatics, in this way the dance artists were introducing consciously or not in a theatrical setting not only to a somatically conceived body, but also a body-mind strategy, where the focus was not to construct specific characters, but to give autonomy to the performer's identity. By a somatically

conceived body, I mean the body of a person trained with somatic practices or elements. These interdisciplinary approaches affected the overall dance genre system, from the way dance was taught to the dance creation, the performance and reception of the works from the audience.

Another example of the need for theatricality during the 1980s is reported in the words of choreographer and dance scholar Claid when she was working as artistic director of the British company Extemporary Dance Company (from 1981 until 1990). Extemporary was constituted by graduates from London School of Contemporary Dance and disbanded in 1991.

> Another reason I have gone towards a theatrical approach is because I think it's easier to change dancers in terms of ideas and performing than it is to change their bodies' movement. Until their physical movement has been fully explored and changed (and it is changing) I feel that I can't take on another pure dance piece.
>
> (Jeck and Claid 1983: 13)

This change in the physical movement desired by Claid (2006) emerged because of three developments: the construction of a different body physicality due to the introduction of Release Technique, feminist perspectives on the reconfiguration of their roles starting from a rethinking of their bodies, critiquing the male gaze, and in the re-shaping of what could be conceived within the term of choreography.

Lepecki speaks about this changing in perspective as:

> …creating a dancing body as a historically dense body (Foucault 1977). It is within this reconfiguration of the boundaries of choreography, where choreography is recast as a theorization of embodiment, that one can start to understand the contours and aims of a radical innovation in contemporary theatrical dance.
>
> (Lepecki 1998: 130)

Here Lepecki highlights the extent to which the action of choreography is rethought in relation to the action of embodiment, which is a strong requirement also of somatic practices. In a certain sense, it seems that direct or indirect influences of somatic practices are noticeable not just in the physical exercises, movements, and practices, but are also present in the choreographic action of thinking.

Through the empowerment of the dancing body, derived from theories of thinking through the body, choreography started to embrace different perspectives. Dance critic Lesley-Anne Sayers (1989) gave us a specific and relevant critique on the term Dance Theatre:

> ‘Dance theatre’ is a vague and inadequate term; if it meant what its title implies, theatrical dance, we would be talking about everything from [Fredrick] Ashton to The Cholmondeleys [Lea Anderson’s all-female company]. What it has specifically come to refer to is a growing body of work from the Eighties that represents a rediscovery of theatrical traditions after the dominance of anti-expression, anti-narrative Sixties and post-Sixties dance.
>
> (Sayers 1989: 28)

Curiously, we can notice the switch of the terms Dance Theatre instead of the previous Theatre Dance, almost to stress the relevance of dance to theatre as a sign of the innovation which emerged in those years compared to the previous ones.

> ‘Dance Theatre’of the Eighties has combined some of the vitality and style of several major movements in theatre and art. (…) Where there is ‘angst’ it is in a very 1980s style, not so much an expression of the repressed unconscious as a preoccupation with the alienation of consciousness itself. Alienation is perhaps a key word in understanding ‘dance theatre’, embracing as it does some predominant concerns in terms of content but also, importantly, in terms of form.
>
> (Sayers 1989: 28)

Sayers goes on increasing the perspective on the disaffection brought into theatre especially by a critique of the neo-liberal way of life. The term neoliberalism is used

here to refer to an ‘economy that promotes entrepreneurial freedoms through competition, deregulation, and privatization’ (Assche 2018: 16). Quoting David Harvey’s *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (2007), neoliberalism is a

> theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can be best advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices.
> (Harvey in Assche 2018: 17)

From the 1970s, neoliberalism became a ‘hegemonic mode of discourse in political-economic thinking in favour of deregulation, privatization, and a withdrawal of the state from many areas of social provision’ (Assche 2018: 17). In this scenario of ‘maximizing market liberty and entrepreneurial freedom through deregulation and privatization’ (Assche 2018: 17), even dance artists became psychopathogenically affected by this open mechanism of competition, where emotions such as depression and burnout must not be taken into consideration as they slow ‘an efficient system of production’ (Assche 2018: 297). As previously mentioned, the neoliberalist regime requires specific parameters, and in order to be able to survive dance artists were forced to frequently create. On one side this continuous push could be seen as a resource, but at the same time a danger for the physical and mental health of artists, who were not always following a creative impulse but more a bureaucratic necessity.

Nevertheless, the 1980s theatricality was reintroduced by a re-appropriation of the stage and setting as spaces where occasionally more abstract dance language could find a way to present and perform itself. Dance critic and scholar Stacey Prickett wrote in 1991 that Miranda Tuffnell’s *Landlight* presented at the Place

> …was more theatrically oriented, and exploration in light and movement along the same lines as her solo. Dancers clothed in white became moving screens for projected slides; hanging sheets subdivided the stage as the dancers rolled, walked, and intertwined with a subdued energy level.
>
> (Prickett 1991: 35)

This review excerpt highlights at least three issues: theatrical lights were combined with abstract movement; interdisciplinarity was represented by the use of videos projected on the white-clothed bodies; different pedestrian actions were integrated to the more abstract concept of the work (‘walked’). These three elements — use of stage/light, videos/interdisciplinarity, pedestrian movement — contain the keywords to understand the new 1980s Dance Theatre era. To these three key elements, we should add that of dramaturgy. According to Lepecki, '[Dramaturgy is] the task of imaginative organization in order to communicate; the ensuring that after a long process there is a visible and cohesive “something”'. (Lepecki in Van Imschoot 2003: 59). Myriam Van Imschoot (2003) explains that:

> Notions such as 'new dramaturgy' and 'open dramaturgy' first surfaced in Europe in the mid to late 1980s. They were descriptive tools for the emergence of a new 'methodology' or praxiology and for a new resulting aesthetic that often revolved around multidisciplinarity, a highly physicalized presence/absence of the performer, and polysemy.
>
> (Van Imschoot 2003: 58)

‘New dramaturgy’ is considered less a predominance of the text and of the concept intended as ‘prefixed interpretational frame’, towards a ‘more process oriented, explorative investigation of all sorts of materials and questions, from which the performance gradually emerged’ (Van Imschoot 2003: 58). A key role in defining this new trend developed in Belgium from the 1980s with artists such as De Keersmaeker, Fabre, Vandekeybus, Jan De Corte, and Jan Lauwer. Their work was followed by the creation of ‘new art organizations such as production houses, dance festivals, art

centers, and theatre and dance companies' and sustained by a governmental regulation introduced in 1993 (Van Imschhot 2003: 58). In this way the government funding facilitates different types of production in a neo-liberalistic perspective that without this kind of support would have not been possible, as seen in section II.C and IV.II below.

Some specific characteristics of the new Dance Theatre genre in the 1980s were similar to the German *Tanztheather* developed by Pina Bausch and Susanne Linke such as 'the development of movement scenes into almost cinematographic tableaux; a juxtaposition of individual scenes with the concomitant preference for an associative rather than a narrative or linear dramaturgy; and the keen use of mostly anecdotal text material' (Laermans 2010: 411). Nevertheless, some consistent differentiations emerge with this new wave of Dance Theatre, especially in the Flemish one (explored in section IV) as seen in the work of Platel, Vandekeybus, and Fabre who considered the human body as a site and 'as the prime communication channel', and who were sceptical 'concerning language; it consequently privileges the human body as facilitator of communication.' (Laermans 2010: 411). If we consider Dance Theatre as 'dance plus theatre', we give to the performers and their bodies a new kind of agency: their physicality as performing bodies and their 'expressive articulation in relation to a viewer. 'Physicality becomes expressive but does not yet fully represent something' (Laermans 2010: 412). In this search for an expressive abstraction, somatically informed practices constituted specific devices to prepare the performers' bodies, not to represent something but to stay ready in the present of the performance action.

II.D Finding New Movement

As explained in Chapter 2 different body movement techniques and somatic approaches influenced 1980s dance culture, in particular the emergent Dance Theatre culture. In an

article appearing in the *New Dance* journal in 1978, dance artist and scholar Anna Furse defined Dance Theatre as

> one of several current labels for live performance that uses a hybrid of theatrical forms. Dissidence from the limitations of pure dance or empty verbal theatre can, as was seen here, result in any number of variations on a common theme: experimentation with a cross-fertilization.
>
> (Furse 1978: 7)

Part of this 'cross-fertilization' could be classified in two pathways: the augmented dancer's training and the way the works are received and perceived and sensed by the audience.

British dancer Gill Clarke explained how the new trainings affected her performative approach:

> But awareness of what your body is actually doing was a door which was opened much, much wider for me with release techniques, with Alexander and with Feldenkrais. So, although it might seem like a continuity [after her study with Matt Mattox jazz], this was like a whole new world, which took me a while to make sense of it in my own body.
>
> (Clarke in Rubidge 1993: 53)

Clarke underlines two specific points: first, that these new approaches represented a new integration of her preceding training approach, in Matt Mattox's jazz dance style, and second, these new ways needed time to respond within her body. We take her unique and personal experience as example to understand two relevant issues which distinguished 1980s dance training: somatic practices were major inputs to develop new approaches to the moving body and to become embodied in the body history.

The New Flemish Wave which exploded in the 1980s in Belgium represents a similar but different approach, presenting dancing bodies with an urgent reach for body limits: a constant search for danger in movement, through complex jumps, leaps towards open

spaces, running, very quick partnering work, rolling over on the ground and in the air, and the throwing and catching of objects, defined as ‘eurocrash’ (Brennan 1997, Mackrell 2007).

Dance scholar Valerie Briginshaw defined this term as a style of dancing which

> consists of recurrent patterns of often violent ‘in your face’, confrontational gestures and actions, usually performed by young athletic dancers, often clad in Dr Martens boots. It became known through the work of Dutch and Belgian choreographers such as Wim Vandekeybus and Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker (…) in the mid-eighties.
>
> (Briginshaw 2009: 209)

Even though I find this definition too restrictive towards the work of these choreographers, labelling them into a predetermined a style, it is interesting because it highlights some aspects such as the athletic and physical aspect of these dances. According to dance critic Alena Alexandrova, ‘A central ambition of Vandekeybus' work with the dance company Ultima Vez is to explore the body and its reality through taking it out of its usual physical confidence and exposing it to its own limits’ (Alexandrova 2003: 21). These intense extreme states of the body should come from the inside, from ‘the inner state of being' of the dancers, as he puts it’ (Ultima Vez 1999: 3). As Alexandrova explained (2003: 22), ‘it should remain close to natural movement, to the body's usual language, as far as movement can be natural in states of intense, almost tangible emotion’.

> That movement from within not only stands in sharp contrast with conventional dance clichés, but also at moments exceeds even the human way of moving and transforms itself into animal-like movement. The extraordinary also emerges in this dance vocabulary through the body's initial surprise at its coming to be in the world, a surprise which is always suspended and always present, the surprise of awakening or of overwhelming emotion.
>
> (Alexandrova 2003: 23)

Artist and critic Chris Crickmay comments on gaps in different ways to perceive dance of the 1980s. In a review of a work by dance artist and somatic practitioner Eva Karczag, he explained:

> The gap between this view and the views of the critics is certainly remarkable. So where does the gap in perception reside? Perhaps it is that these dancers (through their work) are always confronting the unknown. They deliberately seek out situations they themselves do not recognize. The work differs from traditional dance forms in seeking continually to overturn habits of response and perception.
>
> (Crickmay 1981: 8)

Some critics could not critically engage with these New Dance works because they did not conform to dance performance conventions, and they were detached from a traditional way to construct dance.

> The problem is that the work is often invisible to the critics. They cannot see it! They say, 'this is not dance', which is as if to say, this is not happening.
>
> (Crickmay 1981: 7)

This gap in the perception is due to the critics not acknowledging the specific genre of work. Crickmay advises that in order to examine and later to write about it, the critics, as well as the audience, should 'look closely at the developing work itself; at the intentions of the dancers; and at the context in which they see themselves' (Crickmay 1981: 8). Crickmay is advocating for a dance criticism open to the understanding that the new works need different parameters to evaluate them. The gap between the reception of the same work by critics and dancers is intensified if we read in the same article how Paxton, who was also in the audience, responded to the same performance. Crickmay conveys how Paxton had a lot of fun watching Karczag's work, and really enjoyed it. Clearly Karczag's choreography was speaking a dance language closer to the one spoken by Paxton. Nevertheless, she was probably also saying something new, with

the result that some critics did not fully understand or accept her artistic proposal. In Claid's (2006) opinion this is because the audience was requested to participate in a piece in absence of traditional narratives, 'they had to open their eyes and minds to one esoteric and kinaesthetic understanding' (Claid 2006: 116).

Following Crickmay, in a later article Michael Huxley argues that 'other dance ideologies go unrecognised when viewed from a traditional perspective' (Huxley 1983: 16), as they are invisible. This invisibility is the result of a lack of acknowledged and shared identity within the New Dance field. Huxley continues, 'dancemakers and dance writers have not always clearly stated their case' (Huxley 1983: 16). And to consolidate this identity it is necessary to acknowledge that New Dance derives from a variety of movement and theatrical material, not exclusively deriving only from one. Furthermore, this impenetrability of everyday criticism is also due to a common acceptance of specific rules and hegemony parameters requested from the standard policy to get funding. In this light, the challenges in understanding New Dance performances were due not only to New Dance movement *per se*, but also to the need for looking for a legitimisation of this new wave, not only artistically but also critically and economically.

II.E The Influence of Feminism

In the 1980s, Dance Theatre was a prolific field for rethinking and questioning feminism in dance. We should consider three perspectives: the introduction of female subjects on stage; the increase in the number of female choreographers; and a problematising of the representation of femininity in society and arts. Female choreographers in of the 1970s and 1980s are representative of the second wave of feminism. In short, whereas the first wave of feminism (from approximately the middle of the nineteenth century until the first half of the twentieth century) was a movement

concerned with fighting for women's political and civil rights, like gaining suffrage, education rights, paid salary, the second wave (from the 1960s till the 1990s approx.), focused on gender and sexuality, and subjects as such as equal rights in the workplace, critiquing the patriarchy and the male-dominant perspective in cultural institutions, working sites and in the family (Scott 1996).

Later in Chapter 5 I will speak more extensively on Agis' work based on female subjects. Other choreographers worked with the theme on stage, as dance scholar Carol Brown writes about Claid's *Virginia Minx at Play* (1993):

> The autoeroticism in her work is made for and addressed primarily to women; in this sense it departs from the gendered, hierarchical ordering of space with traditional theatre which associates the scopic drive with masculinity.
>
> (Brown 1993: 43)

Although commenting on a work from the 1990s, it follows on from earlier shifts. Stephanie Jordan (1992: 87) explained that in the 1980s 'a new range of presentation of women in dance was opened up; some women found new confidence to make their own work' and this was made possible also by the fact that the dance collective 'X6 brought dance firmly in touch with the women's movement, the most significant social movement of the 1970s and 1980s' (Jordan 1992: 87). I will explain the importance of X6 in section III.B of this chapter.

In an article published in *New Dance* with the title 'Bodyimage: Some Thoughts on The Links Between Feminism and Dance', Christy Adair argued

> For me, now, feminism and dance are inextricably linked and I feel relief to know that this is also true of some other women. This is one of the very important changes that we have begun to initiate.
>
> (Adair 1980: 4)

These changes could have started because, referencing Naomi Maier (1980), at that time women were able to find the way to a 'bigger self', thus increasing their confidence. Female choreographers were looking for funding to create independent works, criticizing the patriarchal objectification of women and using dance tools to make political statements (Adair, Briginshaw and Lynn 1989: 28-30). Further, they challenged the extent to which the female aesthetic was presented at that time in the mainstream dance performance.

According to Burt, feminist scholars

> in the late 1980s and 1990s drew a direct comparison between ballet and modern dance, arguing that whereas ballet reinforced oppressive representations of femininity, modern and postmodern dance was an area in which women choreographers had been able to create strong, positive representations.
>
> (Burt 2009: 11)

In this light, Burt's critique reinforces what the female artists were saying of their work and the way it was conceived. The feminist perspective was critiquing not only the male gaze on the performance, but also hierarchies in the making of dance, in the thematic chosen and on the general role of woman in society and dance. Claid (2006: 76) speaks of 'a translation of feminist anger to our bodies as a positive, androgynous force full of robust dynamic energy'. Claid goes further explaining the extent to which the link with the second-wave feminism encouraged women choreographers and dancers to 'make fools of themselves' (Claid 2021: 158) through caricature of the women as objects in order to contrast the male patriarchy through deriding its constructed female stereotypes. She claims:

> Female dancers, myself included, committed ourselves, through feminism, to contest our roles as objects by establishing our subjectivity and identity as 'women'. Enlivening and enhancing that commitment to change, however, was our use of humour

> (Claid 2006). UK artists such as Jacky Lansley, Rose English, Sally Potter, Blood Group (directed by Anna Furse), Liz Aggiss and myself often used a humorous feminist strategy of install and subvert. That is, by installing stereotypes of sexual objectification, we could then subvert those images through excessive parody.
>
> (Claid 2021: 158)

Furthermore, most of the dance artists and critics, particularly, in the first five years of *New Dance* magazine were women. As we can see in the X6 collective, or in Dartington College of Arts, the position of the woman as dance artists became relevant not only in the choreography but also in all those aspects that were part of developing the New Dance movement, like writings, organizing, and teaching.

III. Focus on British Dance From the 1980s

In an article for Dance Theatre Journal, dance critic Sandra Hockey speaking on the first editions of Dance Umbrella (III.C), claimed that the programme at that time, namely from 1978 till 1983 approximately 'reveals two discernible strands in British work: that of the Place trained, Graham-based artists and Cunningham derived work with a focus on technique, and the softer, more diffuse style introduced largely from Dartington' (Hockey 1988: 27). In this section I am tracing some connections with the New Dance movement.

Accordingly, to Jordan 'The original term 'modern dance' was changed to 'contemporary dance' in Britain in the mid1960s' (Jordan 1992: 1). The Graham oriented modern dance became institutionalised as the main dance technique of the London School of Contemporary Dance (LSCD) founded in 1966 and the twin dance company London Contemporary Dance Theatre (LCDT) founded in 1967. Also in 1966,

Ballet Rambert, a former classical ballet company, became the first 'contemporary dance company' (Jordan 1992: 1 and Rowell 2000: 6).

Interestingly, as pointed out by Jordan (1992: 2) and Rowell (2000: 4), the British dance encountered the American post-modernism in some specific events. For instance, in 1964 and 1966 the Merce Cunningham Dance Company visited London, and then other post-modern dance groups visited. Yvonne Rainer appeared at the Commonwealth Institute in 1965; Twyla Tharp, Sarah Rudner and Margaret Jenkins all appeared at the Royal College of Art in 1967. In the 1970s Rainer, Lucinda Childs and Brown all visited (Rowell 2000: 2). As Rowell points out, their influences became evident because 'Some of our own emergent choreographers, however, were more than willing to take these new ideas and run with them' (Rowell 2000: 2).

During the 1970s in Britain, the New Dance movement, and experiences such as the foundation of The London School of Contemporary Dance, X6 Dance Collective (1976-1980) and the magazine *New Dance* (from 1977 to 1988) meant that the vision of dance and performance was enlarged, opening up to influences, new languages and new movement approaches, such as Contact Improvisation (CI) and Release Technique. Steve Paxton, founder of CI together with Lisa Nelson and Fulkerson, one of the major thinkers of the Release Technique, were resident teachers at Dartington College of Arts.[50]Somatics was also a subject of studies there (Nicholas 2007). Sarah Reed (2015: 214-215) explained: 'The range of practices included Body Mind Centering, Alexander Technique, Feldenkrais, Yoga and Pilates'.

[50] Fulkerson from 1973 to 1987; Paxton was first a guest teacher from 1974, and later resident from 1978 to 1980 (Nicholas 2007: 205, 206).

This makes evident the importance of somatic practices in the curricula. During their studies at Dartington College of Arts, some of the students, including Agis, went to New York and established connections with many local artists. Furthermore, according to Roche:

> British dance artists re-evaluated codified dance styles and incorporated into dance the perspectives of somatic techniques, such as Body-Mind Centering and Alexander Technique as well as martial arts forms such as Aikido and Tai Chi.
>
> (Roche 2009: 18)

Three major experiences marked the history and methodology of British contemporary dance: the Dartington College of Arts and its dance festival; the Dance Umbrella Festival and the magazine *New Dance* (a term that was also used for the new wave in dance).

III.A Dartington Experience

I have written on the specific influence of Dartington in Chapter 2.I.B - III but it is useful to explain that thanks to this college many American teachers and performers had the possibility to bring their experiences to Europe. Dartington College of Arts became a focal point of encounter and knowledge regarding new approaches to dance, thanks to the arrival of American Fulkerson in 1973. Later on, she invited many dance artists connected to the New York and New England dance scenes. The following two quotes provide a glimpse of the teachers at Dartington in the late 1970s:

> Classes and workshops were taught by the Americans Mary Fulkerson (teaching her own release work) and Steve Paxton (contact improvisation) - and these two also organized the whole event - Lisa Kraus (improvisation and Trisha Brown repertory), Barbare Dilley (improvisation) and Marsha Paludan (alignment); the English guest teachers were ex-Dartington student Rosemary Butcher, Richard Alston (Cunningham techniques) and Gerda Geddes (T'ai Chi Chuan). From Holland came Pauline de Groot.

> Performances were given by Miranda Tufnell, Nancy and Mike Udow, The Rosemary Butcher Dance Company, Lisa Kraus, Richard Alson and dancers, Barbara Dilley, Mary Fulkerson, Pauline de Groot, Pat Bardi, Marsha Paludan, Steve Paxton, Laurie Booth, Kenny Macpherson (both these last also ex-Dartington students), Emilyn Claid, Joan Davis, and students of Dartington.
>
> (Anonymous, 'Dance at Dartington', 1979: 9)

According to Jordan (1992), in the 1970s Dartington was a point of reference for the British dance scene that later became the independent dance scene. In the words of somatic practitioner and former student at Dartington Linda Hartley,

> The dance department at Dartington, under Fulkerson's lead, was critical to the evolution of New Dance in the UK during the 1970s and 1980s, and more widely across Europe. She brought Steve Paxton, Nancy Topf and Nancy Udow from the USA; their first European visits were to Dartington College and I was fortunate to be among their first students there. Renowned teachers from Merce Cunningham's studio,Valda Setterfield and Albert Reid, came as guest tutors.
>
> (Hartley 2018: 365)

Hartley proceeds further also mentioning Daniel Lepkoff, a well-known Contact Improvisation teacher and performer. She highlights again that most of the guest teachers in the department at that time were American. Hartley recalls her experience as a student at the Dance and Theatre Department of Dartington College of Arts (DCA) from 1974 to 1976 as 'a wholly absorbing and trans- formative experience' (Hartley 2018: 358). She proceeds further to explain what Dartington represented for her education:

> I could not have developed the inner resources for the work I have gone on to make, and to maintain a creative life that is guided from within. The Dartington experience has enabled me to be self-directive; I *learnt how to learn*, as well as how to create, and this has enabled me to develop my own work over a career of more than 40 years.
>
> (Hartley 2018: 359)

In other words, Hartley is saying that there she investigated a 'a radical new approach to education', where 'there was no such criteria as 'getting it right'; only moving closer to the source of each person's creative *genius*' (Hartley 2018: 359). Furthermore, as last but not least key point, she stresses that the landscape and the environment where the college was situated 'played an important part in the opening of body and soul, the uplifting of spirit' (Hartley 2018: 361), she further explains that at that time the Higher Education 'was free and no more academic work was required than one written paper throughout the course' (Hartley 2018: 361).

Students of Fulkerson (who was directing the school from 1973) were finishing their studies, mainly in Release Technique principles and different post-modern approaches (thanks to visiting U.S. teachers) and entering in the dance world professionally. In such a way, the release-based work disseminated in the country. As well as being independent from existing dance company structures, they were 'independent' also from previous traditions of teachers and dancers, such as the American tradition.

> The 1970s was the decade in which British contemporary dance gradually established its own identity (or identities), independent of the American tradition.
>
> (Jowitt 1982: 3)

In Britain, thanks to dance educational places and training and institutional support, British contemporary dance was able to develop along new lines which also included release-based methodologies. This could happen thanks also to the development of New Dance for which I will now give detailed consideration.

III.B New Dance

According to Jordan, New Dance is a term which combines both a new publication and new dance works. She explains:

> ‘New Dance’: the power of a label is strong. The term was coined with the publication of the first issue of *New Dance* magazine in New Year, 1977. This was one of the projects to be initiated by a group of dancers who called themselves the X6 Collective, after their working base X6 Dance Space in the Bermondsey Docklands in London: Emilyn Claid, Maedée Duprès, Fergus Early, Jacky Lansley and Mary Prestidge. With the advent of the magazine, the term ‘New Dance’ was immediately applied to the work of these artists, to that of many others covered in the pages of the magazine and later, as we have seen, retrospectively.
>
> (Jordan 1992: 58)

Interestingly X6 dance collective was

> running a radical and innovative programme of workshops and performances, enabling a cross-fertilisation of forms; visual and performance art, expanded film, experimental theatre and music, site-specific events all contributed to a growing movement that became known as New Dance.
>
> (Lansley and Early 2018: 382)

This group were all students of the LSCD (Lansley and Early 2018: 382), that at that time was directed by Pat Hutchinson Mackenzie that gave an extraordinary freedom in using spaces for experimentation and free choice on which technique chosen. However

> by 1975, those of us already familiar with the restrictions of a traditional ballet training, where students are often chosen on the basis of body shape rather than their creative and individual qualities, could observe some similar traits creeping into the ethos of the LSCD. Orthodoxies of taste had established themselves and the radical political energy of the first years had waned
>
> (Lansley and Early 2018: 382)

The late 1970s was a time of considerable growth in the number of dance groups functioning independently of the large contemporary companies, in both London and the regions. As Rubidge claims:

> The spirit of the new developments was experiment and the testing of traditional definitions of dance as a performing art. As dancers and people they questioned received values concerning the nature of dance – its vocabulary, its form, its subject matter, its function as an art form and as a human activity, the concept of 'dancer' – in fact they embarked on no less than a reexamination of the very concept of dance itself
> (Rubidge 1988: 6)

In the words of Rubidge we understand that in those years dance was questioned as a concept.

Thanks to ADMA (Association of Dance and Mime Artists) from the very beginning in 1978 'a New Dance and Mime Sub-Committee of the Dance Advisory Committee was established at the Arts Council' with a membership knowledgeable and supportive of experimental dance work (Jordan 2000: 60). This was relevant in acquiring more capability to request funding. The role of ADMA according to Rubidge (1998) was relevant in helping the consolidating of a new 'emerging consciousness' regards the new needs in dance.

> The ADMA festivals were, in one sense, forerunners of the Dance Umbrella Festival (although the inspiration for the latter came from festivals of small-scale dance which had been held in New York and not from the ADMA events). However, although both were 'umbrella' festivals of dance, there were significant differences in their underlying purposes and organizational structures. The effects of these differences led to a certain amount of unhappiness, even bitterness, on the part of the ADMA artists in the early days of Dance Umbrella.
> (Rubidge 1988: 6)

ADMA festival was directed and organised by artists for artists, in order to have a 'forum, not only for performances but also for focused attention on the new forms of dance they were trying to introduce into the British dance scene' (Rubidge 1988: 6). Rubidge highlights further that these festivals had a key role both for 'the challenge they presented their audience concerning ideas of and about dance' and 'the important role they played in initiating the changes in attitudes, and approaches to dance which took place over the ensuing years' (Rubidge 1988: 6). According to Rubidge 'what was most impressive about the ADMA Festivals was the extraordinary spirit of community they generated' (Rubidge 1988: 7). This community feeling encouraged also 'interaction between audience and performer' and this was something unique that, accordingly to Rubidge, the Dance Umbrella festival never succeeded in emulating (Rubidge 1988: 7).

The *New Dance* magazine, which lasted from 1977 till 1988, initiated by X6 Collective, was a 'forum for the critical and reflective thinking and writing whose lack we bemoaned' (Lansley and Early 2018: 382). Where 'issues concerning the nature and the function of dance were hotly disputed' (Rowell 2000: 8). X6 organised 'alternative classes and workshops', a 'unique programme of presentations much of it work that was never shown anywhere else' (Jordan, 2000: 62) involving the local community. In their workshops they also invited American teachers such as Fulkerson, Nelson, and Patricia Bardi (Jordan, 2000: 71). As Hartley (2018: 365) mentions and Lansley and Early (2018) claim, through these workshops a link between Dartington and New Dance was born, I am quoting:

> We decided to invite Mary to run a weekend workshop at X6, as our first guest teacher in 1977 and, by doing so, established the beginnings of the Dartington–X6 relationship.

> Later that year, Steve Paxton and Lisa Nelson led London's first ever Contact Improvisation workshop at X6, launching some on a lifetime's exploration of the form and offering others a broadening of physical possibilities and a new perception of partnering that was democratic, non-sexist and inclusive.
>
> (Lansley and Early 2018: 383)

X6 Dance Collective started the magazine because

> The emergence of new dance activity in this country during the last few years demands and hopefully will produce a new language of writing and criticism which is as progressive and vigorous as the work from which it extends. (…) New dance needs a new language, it is time that we began to define ourselves and our work'.
>
> (Lansley 1977: 3)

According to Lansley and Early, X6 wanted to explore the main themes of the politics of the 1970s through the practice of dance as 'feminism, gay liberation, anti-racism, collective organisation and a clear sense of the many oppressions that obstruct our way to a healthy society' (Lansley and Early 2018: 382).

New Dance, both the journal and the New Dance movement, was part of the community, not only organizing workshops and dance classes open to everyone but also addressing questions and raising issues on the 'relationship between artists and audience' as well as 'new questions about how choreographers and dancers train and make work, how dancers' bodies are used, and what representations dancers are expected to comply with in their work and surrounding activity' (Jordan 2000: 67).

Before introducing the manifesto on the impact of the journal into the community at that time, I should mention that X6 is a movement whose influence is still being evaluated. For instance, the Cell Project Space gallery dedicated to the collective the exhibition *X6*

Dance Space (1976-80): *Liberation Notes* in 2020, with unseen archival material, including photographs, footage, and selected *New Dance* magazines.[51] Interestingly the focus of this exhibition was to reconsider the legacy of X6 in current frameworks, 'rethinking strategies of collectivity, resistance and opposition to oppressive politics within current art practices' (Cell Project Space 2020).

In the issue number 24, Winter-Spring 1983, the *New Dance* editorial listed the major point of impacts of the magazine in the first six years of activities. It sets out a manifesto of their aims and actions:

> 1. To encourage new writing about dance and thus develop a new language for the discussion and analysis of dance.
> 2. To review and document new work, particularly that which breaks new ground, takes risks, explores new dimensions.
> 3. To consider dance in its widest sense — mass culture, esoteric art, historical phenomenon, political act, anthropological and social study and such issues.
> 4. To support campaigns to better the lot of dancers, choreographers and all related artists.
> 5. To interrupt oppression as it affects dance, in particular by focusing on dance in relation to people commonly oppressed within our society, or example: the disabled, people of non-European origin, women and others who are treated as minority groups.
> 6. To document important historical influences on the development of the present British dance scene and its international role.
>
> (Editorial, *New Dance* 24, 1983: 2)

This manifesto was written to defend the work done up that point in time, because in 1983 *New Dance* almost stopped for a lack of financial resources. In reading it, it is interesting to see the affirmative tendencies, as opposite to the previous Yvonne

[51] On this topic in 2013 Chisenhale Dance Space hosted the round table *Now & Then X6 & Friends* with Jacky Lansley, Fergus Early, Mary Prestidge and Emilyn Claid to celebrate the CDS thirtieth birthday. CDS was the second home for X6 (being founded by some of them and others dance artists) after they had to leave their headquarters at Butler's Wharf in the Docklands in 1980.

Rainer's *No Manifesto* (1965), where she defines specific features of the dance work such as dance as 'factual, objective, non stylized and non illusionistic' (Banes 1994: 29). The manifesto was intended to be itself a gesture, and 'and not a prescription for inert, affectless performance' (Walsh 2019: 4). Instead, the *New Dance* editorial is a manifesto whose message is not directed to choreographers or dance makers, it does not give instructions in how to make a new work but wants to acknowledge the work done and points out what is still necessary to be made for the further development of the New Dance.

According to dance critic Claire Hayes, as the title of her article indicates:

'New Dance is part of the social process' (1987) where:

> Collectivism, the presentation of work outside the formal company structure, the questioning of traditional settings, ideology, choreography and format, the use of improvisation, the humanness and accessibility of the dancers - these were some concerns that arose with the birth of what could identifiable be called 'new dance' in England in the mid-seventies.
>
> (Hayes 1987: 14)

In this context of dance in the 1980s, Britain plays a dominant role in the introduction and creation of new kinds of works, derived from the use of improvisation, collective methods of creating a theatrical set, in using specific somatic practices as proposed in the works of Fulkerson and Bardi, and in valuing the dancers as collectively responsible for bringing change into society. In the quotation above, Hayes speaks clearly of concerns such as 'the humanness and accessibility of the dancers': these characteristics are also part of body training which differ from codified modern dance techniques and ballet preparation, changing the focus both of the training and of the body.

Experimenting with different kinds of training and practices makes bodies and minds ready to respond and create new social and artistic contents as well as contexts.

III.C Dance Umbrella

The Dance Umbrella festival was founded in 1978 by Val Bourne and 'emerged out of the British New Dance movement. Designed as a showcase of independent performance, Dance Umbrella initially centred on the Riverside Studio, a single, small-scale venue' (O'Shea 2016: 86) at that time direct by Peter Gill (Rowell 2000: 16). This festival offered an alternative to the established venues such as Royal Opera House and Sadler's Wells Theatre because it was focused, at least in its beginning, on showing experimental works of New Dance in small venues. From the very beginning, its programme mission was on three levels: to show experimental and national dance, European and other overseas companies.

As reported by Rowell, the intents of the first festival were:

> - to give British artists an opportunity to present their work to its best advantage in established arts centres with proper technical facilities and staff;
> - to focus public attention on an area of work thought to be important and worthy support;
> - to prove that there was an interested public for these artists when presented as part of a festival, with the kind of attendant publicity, promotion and press coverage that they could not command independently.
>
> (*Dance Umbrella Festivals*: *a paper for discussion*, 7 June 1982 in Rowell 2000: 14-16)

Rowell proceeds in explaining the extent to which from the very beginning of the festival is emerging 'an educational dimension' (Rowell 2000: 18), with programmes dedicated to school children through 'Ludus dance-in-education company and East Anglian Dance Theatre' (Rowell 2000: 18) and through organising seminars, debates,

films with a critical engagement of the audience.[52] As we have seen also within the New Dance movement (III.B), the education of the audience was considered as a key factor of those years. Furthermore the 'emerging consciousness in dance' (Rubidge 1988: 6), namely the detachment from a classic tradition toward a more experimental perspective have been already taken forward by ADMA (as previously seen in III.B).

After the first edition in 1978 it became clear that there was a lack of professional support for the British groups for increasing their work. In this light a Management Service[53] was organised in order:

- to provide a shared administrative service for small London-based dance companies and solo artists;
- to organise conferences and seminars concerned with dance;
- to develop a central information service for such groups and for those wishing to promote dance events.

(Rowell 2000: 21-22)

On the relevance of the management service, Sarah Rubidge was writing in 1988 that it was 'an important part of Dance Umbrella's activities, promoted young new dance artists such as Maedée Duprés, The Ian Spink Group, and later Laurie Booth, Second Stride Dance Company and Yolande Snaith' (Rubidge 1998: 7).

The Dance Umbrella festival first brought many American artists into the U.K., and later introduced European artists, as eloquently explained by Bonnie Rowell (2000): 'it is

[52] I have also to mention that from in 1980 and during some years after DU had various spinoff as for instance Bristol Arts Centre presented together with Arnolfini 'a joint season of dance' (Rowell 2000: 20) or during 1981 there were various associated events throughout the U.K. (Rowell 2000: 20).
[53] In December 1980 the Office launched also *Dance and Mime Newsheet*, a journal dedicated to spread information on the work of the Management Service (Rowell 2000: 23).

generally agreed that the American visitors artistically dominated the early years of the Dance Umbrella festival' (Rowell 2000: 29) 'but from 1985 to 1989 the Europeans dominated' (Rowell 2000: 63) with for instance Daniel Larrieu, Charles Cré-Ange and Angelin Preljocaj, Sosta Palmizi, and Rosas. Post-modern dance companies such as the Trisha Brown Company and Merce Cunningham Company were invited, even though without giving the exclusivity to post-modern works, and keeping a prevailing focus on experimental work and a more 'flexible format' (Rowell 2000: 39). Dance Umbrella represented not only a showcase of dance works from outside Britain, but also a relevant centre for the new European trends. Interestingly, according to Sandra Hockey, in 1983:

> the austerity of presentation which had characterised much new work gave way to concern with the theatrical. The interplay between dance, music and visual design was explored with each retaining its own integrity but, unlike Cunningham/Cage and other derived collaborations with each contributing to a homogeneous whole. Narrative was a significant element, both in dance and in speech.
>
> (Hockey 1983: 26)

Hockey explained the extent to which the different media in Dance Theatre were used to create a collaborative entirety.

The first programmes of Dance Umbrella were seeing most American dance artists, as pointed out by Rowell 'largely from the post-Cunningham stable' (Rowell 2000: 18); further these companies had already at that time 'several years with other mainstream or well-established avant-garde companies before embarking with their own careers' (Rowell 2000: 18). On the contrary, the British companies were young and often showing their early works and as Rowell points out 'in some cases their dances lacked professional experience', with one of the exceptions in Richard Alston.

Even though since from its very beginning Dance Umbrella was organised to always host several British dance artists, a number from Continental Europe (like De Keersmaeker, Springplan, Angelin Preljocaj, Pauline De Groot, Hamilton, Keijser and Kirstie Simson, Katie Duck and Alessandro Certini) and some internationally, during the 1980s, the festival went through various critiques. Editors in some issues of *New Dance* magazine, made negative comments about the augmented cost of the tickets, and the numerous presences of dance companies from abroad in as opposed to the national ones (Green, 'Dance Umbrella' 1980; 'New Dance Editorial', 1986).

On the other side, we read also from dance critics such as Michael Huxley that ballet dance critics in general preferred to go to well-known ballet, where a few cast changes have been made, rather than trying to write about something where hardly anything was familiar (Huxley 1983: 30).

The relevance of Dance Umbrella during the 1980s was firstly to give the possibility to British artists to present their works, in particular the young artists as for instance in the Made in Britain series of 1984 (where also Gaby Agis took part). It also encouraged the increase in funding for 'home-grown' choreographers from 1985 till 1989 (Rowell 2000: 68). Secondly, by presenting a variety of international dance works (from continental Europe and mainly from the U.S.) it encouraged the dissemination of new ideas in choreography.

However, in the very first edition there was an absence of British New Dance artists because they could not fulfil the criteria of the committee members (Rubidge 1988: 8), whereas with the previously mentioned ADMA festivals there was not a formal selection, but more an 'open' policy (Rubidge 1988: 8). This intention was to 'provide

the audiences and the dance community with access to the process of re-examination of the ideas (…) rather than simply with the polished results (…) (Rubidge 1988: 8). Dance Umbrella seems not to have evaluated the process but more the final product. In this the 'relationship between Dance Umbrella Festival and new dancers was a stormy one' (Rubidge 1988: 8).

Rubidge claims further than ten years after the first Dance Umbrella festival it is clear that the festival did not provide a 'forum for political debate, for the discussions of issues which affect the content and form of the work of dancers and dancemakers' (Rubidge 1988: 9). Nevertheless, it gave the opportunity to young British artists of showcasing works in small scale events in fully equipped venues. Furthermore, they showed to British dance artists a 'range of artistic approaches which are available to be taken on board and absorbed into their own ways of working' (Rubidge 1988: 9).

According to Early and Lansley, even though Dance Umbrella was 'clearly inspired by X6 Dance Space activities, the ADMA Festivals and the Dartington Dance Festival, [it] placed the work within a much more commercialised context' (Lansley and Early 2018: 386). Even though Dance Umbrella was creating an enlarged visibility for contemporary dance, 'Dance Umbrella seemed unable to fully embrace the cross-art-form nature of these more research-based alternative contexts' (Lansley and Early 2018: 386). In their opinion work of Dance Umbrella somehow contrasted to the innovations brought by New Dance which were questioning the 'political and cultural status quo' (Lansley and Early 2018: 386), by establishing a new 'order', leaving, by the end of the 1980s a dance landscape mainly informed by 'on one side a few, well-funded ballet and contemporary dance companies and on the other those organisations and individuals working in community, health and education contexts, with little room (or funding) for

the individual artist in between, wanting to realise a personal vision' (Lansley and Early 2018: 386).

Furthermore, Fulkerson left Britain for teaching in Amsterdam (1987–1989) and the European Dance Development Centre (EDDC) in Arnhem and Dusseldorf (1989–2001). Somehow at the end of the 1980s there was a step from those ideas of 'non-hierarchical practices' that were at the basis of the ethos of New Dance and Dartington.

IV. The Dance Context in the 1980s in Belgium, with Specific Reference to Flanders

First, it is important to note that Belgium is a federal state divided into three autonomous regions: Flanders (majority of Dutch speaking), Wallonia (French speaking), and the Brussels Region. The capital Brussels constitutes a separate political region within national politics and is bilingual, with the majority Francophone and the minority Dutch-speaking. According to theatre critic and professor Luk Van Den Dries 'The federal government remains responsible for a very limited number of affairs (defense, social matters, finances), the other matters of state (such as culture and education) are the responsibility of the regional governments' (Van Den Dries 1998: 76). Each region has a specific economic regime for the arts. In this landscape it is relevant to mention that from the 1970s until approximately the 2010s the Flemish populist radical right, was increasing, contending for an independent Flemish State (Uytterhoeven 2019).

Dance Theatre in Belgium has a quite different history to that of Britain. When speaking about contemporary dance in Belgium, especially during the 1980s, it is relevant to specify that the focus is the Flanders region, situated in the north and which

geographically also includes the capital city of Brussels. As reported by Laermans and Gielen (2000), the 1980s represents a flourishing time for Flemish theatre directors and choreographers, during which they obtained international fame. Choreographers such as the well-known Fabre, Platel, Vandekeybus, De Keersmaeker flourished in that period. Interestingly, except for De Keersmaeker who had a multifaced training in dance (with Mudra first and then in New York at the Tisch School of the Arts), the others were mostly self-trained and without a dance background. Fabre was trained as an artist at the Municipal Institute of Decorative Arts and at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Antwerp. Platel's former education is of remedial educationalist, and he is an autodidact director. Vandekeybus, after some studies in psychology, and some dance experience in tango (see V.B.), had just one theatrical experience with Fabre before initiating his own dance company.

IV.A The Dance Scene Before the 1980s

But what was the dance panorama in Belgium before the 1980s? I am giving a short introduction here, with a focus from the beginning of the 1900s.

During the 1930s some independent groups guided by Lea Dann and Jeanne Brabants brought to the Flanders region the theories and thinking of Emile Jaques-Dalcroze and Rudolf von Laban. These groups referenced themselves to *Ausdruckstanz*, but without gaining a professional level (Manente 2003). During the same years the dance artist Akarova (real name: Marguerite Acarin), was working, influenced by the aesthetics of Ballets Russes and of Duncan (Lambrechts, Van Kerhoven, Verstockt 1996). With the Second World War, dance survived mainly in the major opera theatres and through the national ballet companies, in Antwerp, Ghent, Brussels, Liege. During the 1950s Jean Brabants founded Het Ballet van Vlaanderen (Royal Ballet of Flanders (Antwerp). The

programme of the company in those years was quite eclectic showing works by Birgit Cullberg and Jiri Kylian to mention a few. After 1984 the company took a conservative perspective being led by the Russian Valery Panov. During the 1980s another major ballet company was the Ballet de Wallonie, directed by Jorge Lefèbre and then it was guided by Frederik Flamand, at the time director of Plan K, one of the first experimental dance companies founded in 1973.

During the 1960s, Maurice Béjart founded in Brussels his own company Ballet du XXème siècle which was based at the national opera house La Monnaie/De Munt. In 1970 he founded the school Mudra starting a renovation of the vocabulary of the ballet tradition. His school trained many artists of the upcoming generation such as Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker. In 1987 he left Brussels for Lausanne. Therefore, until the end of the 1970s the predominant landscape of dance in Belgium was the one of ballet, in its traditional and new format.

IV.B The 1980s: New Dance, New Festivals, New Journals

Before the 1980s and at the start of 1980s for young choreographers and dramaturgs it was not easy to find space in the traditional theatre structure. We must acknowledge that some parallel trends started within the 1980s: on one side young artists, often, without a recognised background into the dance and theatre field started to produce new works based on a hybridization of the medium used (dance, theatre, music, art) (Van Den Dries 1998: 78) [54]. On the other new spaces and new formats supported their works which I introduce first.

[54] Interestingly Van Den Dries claims further that one of the examples that this generation had was Pina Bausch's works (Van Den Dries 1998: 78).

Parallel to the development of 'New Flemish Wave' new spaces and organisations[55] devoted to experimental dance and theatre and to its documentation developed which became the cultural centres for spreading the work of the new artists. Soon, these venues and associations played a role in production and management making them central to the development of the young artists (Van den Dries 1998: 78). Furthermore, a young generation of dance producers was emerging like Hugo De Greef of the Brussels Kaaitheater and Michel Uytterhoeven at the Stuk arts centre in Leuven,' who transformed the biennial Klapstuk Festival into an event entirely dedicated to new dance' (Laermans 2010: 406) in 1983 (Gielen and Laermans 2000: 19). Klapstuk and the Kaaitheater, with the Vooruit in Ghent and deSingel in Antwerp started to create an audience for Flemish contemporary dance, and for 'defining its hybrid multi- and interdisciplinary identity' (Laermans 2010: 406).

In those years these spaces were presenting international contemporary works as for instance Kaaitheater in 1979 presented Bob Wilson and Lindsay Kemp and in 1981 Reinhild Hoffman. In 1982 Kaaitheater directed by De Greef brought an international programme with Steve Paxton and others and the next year Uytterhoeven gave to Klapstuk festival a new international frame bringing into Belgium many artists from abroad, like the Merce Cunningham Dance Company. And at the same time, they were supporting the young choreographers, and for instance Kaaitheater in 1983 co-financed the work *Rosas dans Rosas* by De Keersmaeker (Uytterhoeven 1994). In 1987 De Singel programmed both Fabre, Monnier, Petronio, and in the following years planned works of Bausch, Brown, and Forsythe with Rosas.

[55] Such as Schaamte, Beweging, VTC, Limelight.

The emerging discourses in contemporary dance, launched by young choreographers, were implemented by some journals and magazines, which became sites for artists and critics to engage with the trends in print. The most relevant is the still existing magazine *Etcetera*. Founded in 1983 by Johan Wambacq and Hugo Degreef (who later became director of Brussels Kaaitheaterfestival), the four-monthly journal *Etcetera* was open to dance, theatre, music, and cinema. It critiqued ballet and supported the New Flemish Wave (Laermans and Gielen: 2000).

In the same years two associations were also supporting the creative artists and their productions and were *Contredanse* founded by Patricia Kuypers in 1984 and V.T.I. (Vlaams Theater Institut now Flanders Arts Institute) in 1987 for supporting the documentation of dance music and theatre. Furthermore, two TV channels were influential for the dance: the Francophone RTBF and the Flemish BRT, showing dance documentary and press reports regarding emerging choreographers.[56]

IV.C The New Flemish Wave

Creators such as De Keersmaecker, Fabre, Vandekeybus, Platel appeared on stage, and they changed the scene in a radical way. This radicality seemed to include not only the physicality and movement language (as I will develop further in this section) but also the relationship between choreographer and dancers: first they could have various backgrounds (not necessarily from dance) and the dancers could work with various companies and contribute to the choreographic material itself (T'Jonck 1996). As for instance as previously mentioned in section II, Vandekeybus from the very beginning wrote 'created with and by' naming all the dancers at the same time as creators and

[56] Thanks also to this many directors developed screendance approaches, contributing to make this genre know also abroad, including Thierry De Mey, Octavio Iturbe, Eric Pauwels, and Walter Verdin (Manente 2003: 28).

interpreters. Vandekeybus also explains that 'the performers are co-creators, not just interpreters; but a piece is not a collective creation' (Vandekeybus in Shank 1992: 63), in this way on one side he is acknowledging their contribution in creating the piece and at the same time highlighting his role of overall director of his pieces.

Similarly, De Keersmaeker, recognises the 'energy' deriving from her first company 'We were a company made up exclusively of young women, then, but full of quite a bit of rage. We listened to the Sex Pistols and Nina Hagen, who sang about a scandalous desire which was "unbeschreiblich weiblich", "indescribably feminine"' (De Keersmaeker 2019: 5). Then she goes further to explain the extent to which to create a choreography (at that time, as today) is a 'production of material', and

> this is only possible through a great collective effort. It is work that should be shared. This sharing touches on everyone's intimacy, to the extent each commits his or her body, and all the coded lines found in this body. The choreographer dictates an approach to certain questions, highlights the problems and determines, *in fine*, definitive solutions. But exploring the possibilities is an extremely intense *social* process. What happens in a contemporary dance studio is a unique event in our world.
>
> (De Keersmaeker 2020: 25)

Of course, this is a thought of De Keersmaeker, many years after her beginnings, nevertheless I think it is relevant statement of her choreographic approach which started back in the 1980s.

According to Laermans (2015), this new movement, the 'Flemish wave' was comparable to the Punk movement:

> This freedom from binding historical references, even from a profound secondhand knowledge of previous developments, indeed created a unique situation. Overall, the 'Flemish wave' partly demonstrated that 'not knowing dance' could be a

> productive artistic force because it was an invitation to explore the physicality of the body in novel ways.
>
> (Laermans 2015: 16)

This exploration of a physicality of dancers who had not gone through formalised training represented a way for choreographic and theatrical research, where the peculiarity of the individual characteristic was primarily emerging.

Moreover, it is relevant to note that Flanders in a sense represented Belgium, but they were not fully representative of Belgium.

> Interestingly, Flanders, the Dutch-speaking province of Belgium, was more than once confused with Belgium as a whole. This is ironic considering that since 1980 Flanders and the French-speaking Walloon province have had autonomous governments within a federal Belgium state. These regional governments are, among other things, fully responsible for cultural matters and during the 1980s this resulted in distinct cultural policies.
>
> (Laermans and Gielen 2000: 12)

At the beginning, the dance and theatre artists (like Fabre and Vandekeybus) operated independently. The Theatre decree of 1975 established that the funding was given with a decreasing order to: repertory theatres, distribution companies, chamber theatres, experimental and political theatres. Even though this decree removed the supremacy of the traditional theatres, it established some rules that did not allow some directors to receive funding. For instance, Fabre could not be sustained because he worked with non-trained and non-professional actors (Van Den Dries 1998: 83). Despite this, from the very beginning of the 1980s there were efficient networks of co-production between theatres in Belgium and abroad.

On this point Van De Dries strongly affirms that

> The international reputations of Belgian theatre artists like Jan Fabre, Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, Wim Vandekeybus are not due to the government support of their work. It took a long time before their organisations were being subsidised and even now they can only survive thanks to co-productions with art centres from all over Europe. Fortunately the neighbouring countries (France and Holland) are very keen to invite Belgian productions, so that a considerable part of the annual turnover is being made abroad.
>
> (Van Den Dries 1998: 109)

Then the young New Flemish Wave in its beginning was not founded by the Belgian and Flemish government but they developed their works through partnerships and international co-production. For example, Vandekeybus' *What the Body Does Not Remember* (already mentioned as one of my 'starting point' for this research in Chapter 1), was a 'production of Ultima Vez & Addison De Witt' and an international 'co-production by Centro di Produzione Inteatro Polverigi, Festival de Saint-Denis, Festival d'Eté de Seine-Maritime, Toneelschuur Produkties Haarlem' and only at the end we can read 'with the support of the Flemish Government and the Flemish Theatre Institute' (Vandekeybus and Boudens 2016: 391).

It was the cultural decree of 1993 (expanded in 2005), that helped to consolidate the new dance scene, giving funding on a four-year basis 'both for the arts centres and for the now already internationally renowned new companies such as Rosas, Ultima Vez and Jan Fabre's Troubleyn, while equally offering project-based subsidies for many other artists' (Laermans 2010: 406). Thus, some of these artists were also given extra funds as 'Cultural Ambassadors of Flanders', showing a growing nationalism in this region.

> the Flemish parliament voted in favour of an umbrella decree on the Performing Arts. (…) The decree at once symbolized and furthered *the institutionalization of contemporary dance and an autonomous artistic field* [italic as in the original] within Flanders
>
> (Laermans 2015: 17)

These new rules finally conceived new funding allocations only for dance companies and dance centres, facilitating the creation of new works and new groups.

As discussed above, it was in Belgium that the new figure of the dramaturg took a predominant place. As Van Imschoot states, it was:

> in Belgium where the figure of the dramaturg was an important co-(f)actor in the formation of a new cultural 'field' and aesthetic paradigm in the performing arts that emerged in the 1980s and was consolidated in the 1990s.
>
> (Van Imschoot 2003: 57)

This change in the role of the dramaturg was also reflected in dance:

> This type of theatre does not aim to generate a specific coherent message that can then be decoded by the audience, but opts for a fragmented dramaturgy that works by means of association, juxtaposition, multimedia and sampling.
>
> (Van Den Dries 1998: 80)

As previously noted, the Belgian dance scene before the 1980s was characterized mainly through a classical ballet. In the 1980s in Flanders the process of legitimization of dance as an autonomous genre from theatre started. This process initiated both from an intention by regional authorities to establish the autonomy of dance and from young creators who started their work as a detachment from the ballet tradition and in response to post-modern dance currents happening outside Belgium. As previously mentioned, thanks to the reference to specific already acknowledged dance vocabulary they could legitimate their work. Dance sociologist Ertem (2016) considers the ‘Flemish Dance

Wave' as exemplary of the gradual formation, legitimation, and internationalization of contemporary dance in relation to aesthetic, structural, and political factors' (Ertem 2016: 36).

The New Wave was from the very beginning acknowledge from abroad. During the 1980s Flemish dance had a huge impact and reception in New York, through the works of De Keersmaeker, Vandekeybus and Fabre (Willinger 2010: 461), seen on the occasion of the Next Wave Festival organized by Brooklyn Academy of Music in 1987.

Remembering those years, choreographer Vandekeybus states that, even though his work was starting to gain an international recognition a lack of consideration from institutions was present. Dance critic Jane Cornwell narrates that 'The early years were tough. Even when *What the Body* was awarded a Bessie, the prestigious New York dance and performance award, Vandekeybus had to borrow money so he could fly to the US and accept it' (Cornwell 2013). Vandekeybus remembers: 'We stayed up all night because we couldn't afford a hotel' (…) Then we flew straight back again; I was already so in debt I was nearly in jail.' (Cornwell 2013). This is connected to the previous mentioned lack of first support from Belgian and Flemish institutions. According to Vandekeybus one of the reasons of this absence of support was that 'We all came from different genres and were not doing what we were supposed to do' (…) We didn't get institutionalised and we didn't follow any rules' (Cornwell 2013).

Regarding Vandekeybus' *What the Body Does Not Remember*, dance critic Anna Kisselgoff wrote 'Tough, brutal, playful, ironic and terrific. Adjectives seem unduly passive to describe *What the Body Does Not Remember*.' This piece was awarded a

Bessie Award for ‘a brutal confrontation of dance and music’ (Felsenburg 2011: 358). Dance journalist and audience were mostly impressed by the physical challenges presented on stage that engendered the previously mentioned terminology ‘eurocrash’ (Brennan 1997, Mackrell 2007, see II.D) This definition carries a mix of real fascination regarding Vandekeybus’ dance language but also shows some scepticism ‘of the sensation it implied’ (Felsenburg 2011: 358). Quoting Keith Watson ‘just as Kurt Cobain’s Nirvana had to suffer the indignities of identikit grunge, so Vandekeybus inspired a lamebrain bunch who thought Eurocrash was all about trashing your bones on the floor’ (Watson 1996 in Felsenburg 2011: 358). Similar as we have seen for the British New Dance some critics were not completely ready to deal with this new dance language (see II.D).

V. Introduction and Frameworks of the Case Studies

As previously mentioned, the specific case studies I focus on are: Gaby Agis, Wim Vandekeybus and Isabelle Schad. Although Agis’ and Vandekeybus’ time frames and theatrical settings in the European context of dance in the 1980s present some similarities, they are quite diverse in their research methodologies, creative processes, and respective choreographic results. From a certain point of view, they could even be considered contrasting. The third case, Schad, is a choreographer with a background in ballet and relevant experience as a performer with Vandekeybus. Schad created her own work since the 1990s, informing it through somatic practices. For my research, Agis and Vandekeybus are the main case studies of specific uses of theatrical methodologies and somatics practices from the 1980s, whereas Schad is a choreographer from the 1990s who combines somatics and choreography as a legacy from the previous time. Moreover, as previously explained, I spent some time in the dance studios with all of

them, in different ways, as observer, practitioner and interviewer. This section introduces Agis and Vandekeybus.

The case studies examined in this research presents specific ways of understanding and practicing choreography which started during the 1980s and developed during the next 30 years in Europe. Their choreographic concepts are connected to a kind of dramaturgy whose origins could derive also from Dance Theatre but they have undertaken specific ways to combine materials from different sources. Furthermore, in these choreographically conceived works there is the use of a somatically conceived body. Dancers' and performers' bodies enter a theatrical setting with a highly organised dramaturgy without representing specific characters or without performing specific stereotypes (as could happen in some of Bausch's works, Bentivoglio 1985), where for instance usually women and men are dressed following a European conventional binary way of dressing, with some exceptions that are used to highlight gender's abuses) (Climenhaga 2009). The young choreographers of the 1980s, the focus of my thesis, were working with 'real' dancers performing a theatrical action, where 'real' is intended as the opposite of playing a role and is synonymous with finding the identity of the performer as part of the dance research process (George 2020). For example, Vandekeybus is playing with the sentence: 'making it real' (Buzzi 2014: 10). It is never faking an action but performing a real one, like the example of throwing bricks which is a real action and in response, the dancers are catching them in reality. In Agis' work there are no theatrical roles to play but specific physical conditions to reach.

V.A Gaby Agis

In an interview with the author, Agis (2016) described her training at a local dance school under the supervision of Rosemary Butcher during the 1970s. Butcher was one of the first dance students at Dartington College of Arts during the 1960s (Nicholas 2007: 179). Agis later became a key dancer for her mentor as well as working as a fashion model. From a young age she was interested in painting and creative arts — her father was a sculptor, and her mother went to art school — she thus remembers her family as a 'pretty supportive family' (Agis 2016) and from the very beginning, arts and movement have been ways to express herself fully. In her words, dance and movement represented a way to live: 'my understanding of being in dancing was a possibility of surviving' (Agis 2016).

Of those years Agis highlights how growing up in London during the 1960s was a context of 'freedom and experimentation' (Agis 2016). She describes herself as 'very skinny, uncoordinated with pains in the legs' (Agis 2016) for which the doctor suggested to her mother to make her moving somehow, then she started her first dance classes, first with ballet, then with tap and dance for commercial theatre. In her early teens she attended the Saturday morning classes at the local youth dance company, at that time run by a friend of her mother. At the age of fifteen, she chose dance as a subject at school and here first met Butcher (as previously mentioned). From her first approaches as a student, she describes herself as 'diligent, dedicate, motivated', and very rigorous also because she is the first of six brothers and sisters, and feels this gives her a strong sense of responsibility.

Agis' approach to dance and composition has always been, from a certain sense, multi-disciplinary. Her training and creativity have been influenced strongly by Butcher's

work, after the interrupted experience of study at the London Contemporary Dance School (the professional dance conservatoire of The Place), her experience at Dartington, and her study trip to New York and the influence of SRT technique. From the beginning of her career, she was looking for a personal and intuitive way of creating and collecting choreographic movements. Judith Mackrell explains how Agis reacted against the discipline of her training at The Place and began to create dances based on improvised and soft movements (Mackrell 1992: 79). She also left training at the Place because of a knee ligament injury, and also because she found a learning environment with 'bullying and mental health problems' (Agis 2016) and in Dartington she had the chance to dance in a different way, thanks to a different awareness of her body, encouraged also by Fulkerson's teaching approach and her two months of travel to New York, where she could study at the Judson Church.

> I went to the London School of Contemporary Dance for two years, previously I'd been lucky enough to have Rosemary Butcher as my Dance Teacher at Comprehensive School (Pimlico). I'd also been in the London Youth Dance Theatre for two years, but was just weekends and after school. I didn't complete the three years at The Place, I only did two, I got very badly injured and very frustrated. I think they got frustrated with me as well (laughs).
>
> Having done a lot of Contact (Improvisation) work, I've always thought what a difference it makes when you can actually feel someone's arm and the skin. What difference it makes to the contact you actually do. Our fingers are very important, they are so sensitive.
>
> (Agis in Godliman 1983: 26)

In a private conversation she also explained to me that she studied in 'New York with Simone Forti, Trisha Brown company, Joan Skinner, Susan Klein' and she did 'lots of improvising with folks'. In particular she was practicing Contact Improvisation at 'PS [Performance Space] 122 especially at the jams (Thursday or Tuesday nights) they were wild and important to me' (Agis 2016).

When she came back, she danced for various choreographers and groups in Britain, creating in 1983 her first work *Close Streams* and in 1984 *Shouting Out Loud*, working as a fashion model and collaborating in various forms with art galleries and music groups. She feels that in those years there was a lot of 'female power' between female choreographers. Even though she was working intensively gaining success, she felt 'lonely within the dance community' (Agis 2016), and in 1991 after a decade of intense work, she had a 'burn out'.

At this point in her life she started to become even more interested in the work of Joan Skinner (that she already followed in New York before, when she encountered SRT in New York as a student). The question Agis posed to herself at that point in life was to understand how to age, and the example of Skinner (who was in her sixties) was an illuminating one. Agis considers her work a 'big gift' (Agis 2016). Through Skinner's work, Agis affirms that 'you can take people into the process'.[57]

Her website explains how 'this technique [SRT] has been intrinsic to her creative practice' (Agis 2021). As explained above, SRT is a somatic approach started during the 1970s by dancer, choreographer and teacher Skinner based on imagery and release of muscular tension through specific guided and improvised movements, alone or with a partner.

[57] At the time of the interview Agis told me that she was writing a contribution for a book on SRT. The book now is out: Manny Emslie (ed) (2021), *Skinner Releasing Technique*: *A Movement and Dance Practice*, Triarchy Press Ltd.

According to Skinner,

> This technique is a system of kinesthetic training that refines the perception and performance of movement. Images are given which are metaphors of kinesthetic experience of technical principles. The poetic imagery kindles the imagination, thereby integrating technique with creative process.
>
> (Skinner 2005)

This kinaesthetic training started from the 'rest position': a position where the body lies down supine, with bent knees and feet on the ground and arms open on the side. In this position, she could present to students diverse kinds of imagery connected to movement and these 'proved highly effective in conveying kinesthetic information in order to re-educate the body without setting up harmful counter-tensions' (Nicholas 2007: 191).

Skinner was a detailed observer of the changes happening in her students' bodies, as we can read in her description:

> The muscles appear to be lengthened and wrapped around the bones rather than contracted or gripped. The joints give the appearance of having space in them and the limbs of being unbound though belonging to the torso. There is a suspended relationship to gravity which can be likened to the suspension of a dust particle in a shaft of light.
>
> (Skinner in Nicholas 2007: 191)

This description is useful at least from two points of view: first, to understand Skinner's somatic point of view and what she is looking for in the training; and secondly, the specific language used. The use of released muscles together with joints — as the joints release themselves and create more possibility of movements — forms a different dynamic with the environment explicated in the final image proposed. The description of the physical work, with consequent anatomical changes, is conveyed in the final image. This final image — 'the suspension of a dust particle in a shaft of light' — is a

creation of a poetic metaphor on a kind of effort, which represents one of the specific somatic ways to introduce and present this kind of work.

Agis later became an influential teacher of this technique, which leads her to coach internationally. She is the first British certified SRT teacher, and she introduced SRT for the first time in London in 1993 (Moran 2010). Later, she helped create the British SRT community, training many independent dancers. Her career as a dancer and choreographer started at the beginning of the 1980s and her voice emerged as one of the leading female choreographers of the New Dance.

V.B Wim Vandekeybus

Vandekeybus grew up close to nature, and his father was a veterinarian (Felsenburg in Bremser and Sanders 2011: 358). He began studies in psychology, without finishing them. He knew the actor Paul Peyskens and started to study theatre with him, in parallel he followed some dance lessons of ballet, modern and tango and martial arts and courses in photography and film. Then Vandekeybus worked as performer for Fabre, touring the world with *The Power of Theatrical Madness* (1984). After this experience he decided to work on his own project. In 1986, he founded his own dance company[58] without any initial resources from the government. In 1987, Vandekeybus produced his first piece *What the Body Does Not Remember*. From this very first work, he showed an interest in looking for real danger on stage, stimulating instinctual reflexes inside his dancers. In different interviews (for instance in Buzzi 2014), he always declares his love

[58] The company was founded in Madrid where Vandekeybus conducted a residency with young dancers, after one year of performing with Fabre. Now the company's headquarters are in Sint-Jans-Molenbeek. The mission of the company is not only to create, produce and distribute Vandekeybus works but also to organise various educational activities for various ages, counseling of young makers, and a community development work with various partners in Brussels. (Ultima Vez 2021).

for animals, values instituted also by his father. Vandekeybus' interest in them is not only a true affection, but a specific concern through which he analyses human behaviour and relationships. According to him:

> An animal has a different body. An animal is unpredictable. By humanizing this otherness, we are able to get a grip upon it.
> […]
> From our childhood, animals stand for something, for a feeling, for a value. […]
> The animal is given a significance of which it itself is not aware.
> […]
> To me, man is an animal that seeks sense: an animal that is continually preoccupied with giving his existence a purpose, while animals are indifferent to this quest.
> (Vandekeybus and Boudens 2016: 98)

Furthermore, Vandekeybus analyses the role of instinct and fear in contemporary society.

> Our society has suppressed instinct, relegating it to the background. But from a physical point of view, you need your instincts to get you where you need to be, when things get tight.
> (Vandekeybus and Boudens 2016: 74)

> When you talk about instinct, you inevitably also talk about fear. Fear is something that deeply inspires me [….] We cultivate our fears by continually seeking security. As a result of this fear, there is much less physical contact between people.
> (Vandekeybus and Boudens 2016: 24)

In this line of a search of instinctual behaviour, Vandekeybus is not concerned to create a dance just about movement, but he wants 'to create some space again for the bizarre, the unpredictable that eludes any kind of control' (Watson 1996 in Felsenburg 2011 360).

According to Laermans, 'Wim Vandekeybus immediately made a name for himself with the joyful, highly energetic exploration of various sorts of physical risks in *What the Body Does Not Remember'* (2015: 16). Following this vision, his work looks for a

real practice of fear and danger, not acting but experiencing, bringing the theatrical scene ‘back to reality’ (Vandekeybus 1993 in Felsenburg 2011: 359), as he often says during his work practice and as we can read in this quote:

> ‘Making’ is connected to desire. But desire also invokes fear, because even if desire is something positive, it is also inscrutable. It is fragile and it makes you fragile.
>
> (Vandekeybus and Boudens 2016: 16)

The concept of going ‘back to reality’, also called ‘reality in movement’ accordingly to Theodore Shank ‘results from reaction, impulses of the body which do not require thinking. This interest has continued from his first piece, *What the Body Does Not Remember* (1987), which he made at the age of 23’ (Shank 1992: 61).

And the choreographer proceeds:

> I look for a kind of reality in the movement. If it goes wrong, it goes wrong. If you hit on your head, you are in the hospital. But it’s not for the danger I look, but for the reality. There is a trust in myself, my own body, and in the other people too. This communication is very strong. I think there are too many things called dance which are missing a kind of reality –people falling on the floor, but for what? It might be a nice beautiful dance movement, but that is all.
>
> (Shank 1992: 64)

For the very beginning of his work, Vandekeybus searched for movements not exclusively agile or muscular, but ready to follow their impulses.

> As soon as a movement gets athletic, there is something missing. Movements which inspire me are those, we don’t think about, moving before you think about moving. These reactions, impulses, are very important in my work. In an audition I just jump to someone and say, “Catch me” I see how they react. I see how they communicate. Dance, movement, is communication.
>
> (Shank 1992: 64)

For Vandekeybus, dance is a 'theatrical vector of internal emotive states' (Buzzi 2014: 10), and he is interested in understanding how his dancers move more than in which technique they are using (Vandekeybus 1992) meaning that his focus is on the self of the dancer. Nevertheless, his background studies in psychology are present in the way he characterizes the dancers and actors in the dance, making distinguishably different emotional states and physical gestures.

In the following section I am introducing Vandekeybus' first work, *What the Body Does Not Remember*.

V.B.1 What the Body Does Not Remember as the First Case Study

As I previously mentioned (Chapter 1.I.) it was Vandekeybus' work *What the Body Does Not Remember* that became the starting point for this thesis. Why use a piece created by a choreographer who does not come directly from somatics? After having seen *What the Body Does Not Remember* extracts on video first, as part of the screendance work *Roseland* (1990)[59], on 12th March 2014 I went to the Cultuurcentrum Hasselt (Belgium) to experience the live performance of *What the Body…* that was touring on the occasion of its 25th anniversary.

Although conscious that what I saw was the result of a re-enactment and reconstruction process, I was completely amazed and touched by what was happening on stage, my reaction heightened by recalling at that time in 2014, the dance was created 26 years earlier.

[59] Full credits for both performances are in Appendix F.

In 1987 American critic Kisselgoff reviewed a performance at The Kitchen in New York and declared that 'The key to all these pieces is the ordinary gesture of ordinary movement, suddenly deepened into meaning that has a frightening truth about it. This is not conventional body language' (Kisselgoff 1987). At the time of the reconstruction, Vandekeybus explained that

> because it was very physical it changed something. I didn't have any technique, but it was more by not knowing that you created something new. Now, of course, you know more, but I still try to reinvent myself and also stay quite truly to myself." (…) But, seeing it again, from a distance," he says, "is now like a meditation. It's so pure, so strong. It's also a very abstract work that is deep and touching, but you don't know why.
> (Vandekeybus in Looseleaf 2013b)

Again in 2013, speaking of this piece Vandekeybus explained the main themes from which he took inspiration: 'in the 1980s I was obsessed with catastrophes and disasters [...] I wanted to explore the intensity of those moments when you don't have a choice, like when you fall in love, or the way the body reacts a split second before an accident.' (Vandekeybus in Cornwell 2013). Furthermore, he pointed out that this work is about 'immediacy and energy' and the extent to which he looks for 'drama in the movement' (Cornwell 2013).

*What the Body…*is organised in scenes that begin in simple patterns and then 'build through repetition and variation' (Seibert 2013). The actions and the movements are 'at the speed of reflex' and it looks like 'the risk is carefully orchestrated without losing the sense of danger' (Seibert 2013). The physicality is helping to maintain the theatricality of the piece. According to Jane Howard (2013) *What the Body…* is exploring those moments and situation where there is a 'loss of agency', where dancers are playing

‘with the balance of technical physical control while appearing to be purely reacting in the moment’.

In this piece nine dancers dressed in everyday clothes challenge themselves with movement sequences on and off the floor, in duets, solo and group patterns, they use and throw to each other bricks chairs, towels, jackets. The rhythm of the action and its demanding physicality, the engaging music by Thierry De Mey and Peter Vermeersch played live by the Brussels-based contemporary music ensemble Ictus and the overall energy of the dancers offered compelling elements. But my attention and curiosity was mostly captured by how the dancers’ bodies were ready to react to stimuli to deal with various kinds of action like rolling and engagement with the floor and jumps. They were prepared to wait in an active, alert state and at the same time in a released way to welcome objects and other dancers’ bodies, with trust in each other and embracing possible failures (as when bricks fell down). Their presence was never ‘fake’ but real: through their tactile feedback, it was like as we, the audience, could perceive their bodies in flesh and breath.

I was curious in how the dancers make themselves ready to follow their instincts. How socially constructed bodies and also highly trained bodies were still able to perform actions — actions and movements which were repeated multiple times — as if they were performing them for the first time? What gives this ongoing freshness? How did they listen so deeply to their inner selves, the whole dance group and to the theatrical space?

All these elements became the major starting points of this research. I was interested in how the dancers trained themselves to reach this performative status and which kind of indications the choreographer used. The way they used the floor, the rolling, the release quality of their movements, resonated with a physical theatre training but also a somatically informed one, where body-mind are connected and where the body is ready to react and to engage.

VI. Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter offers an overview of a new concept and different conceptualisations of choreography (I.D.). The concepts of post-modern dance (I.B.) and *Tanztheater* (I.C.) are presented, highlighting different contexts between the U.S. and Europe, specifically with Britain and Belgium (II). The new formulation of Dance Theatre (II.C.) which started in the 1980s, is analysed as a new way to conceive dramaturgy looking for interdisciplinarity. The characteristics of this new form have been introduced and connected to work by dance artists and teachers as they searched for a 'new kind of movement' (II.D) and to the influence of feminist thinking on dance scholarship (II.E). I have introduced some issues regarding the funding in the 1980s, first generally then within the specific British (III) and Belgian contexts (IV).

As explored in sections II.D, somatic practices started to have a significant influence on creative choreographic practices, on the one hand developing new ways of preparing the performers' bodies, and on the other affecting the choreographic process, placing the bodies at the centre of focus, augmenting the perception of the performer, and challenging a new gaze from the audience. This direct influence was stronger in Britain than Belgium.

This chapter maps some highlights of dance in the 1980s in Britain and Belgium, introducing two of my three case studies (V), namely the British choreographer Gaby Agis (V.A.) and the Belgian (Flemish) Wim Vandekeybus (V.B). These two nations were chosen because of their fundamental contribution to the European dance scene, and the physical changes they brought to dancers' bodies and hence to ways of moving and thinking. In these countries the dance movements arising at that time identified themselves with the adjective 'new': New Flemish Wave and New Dance. The object of this is the desired detachment from previous ways of understanding dance and choreography. If in the case of the Flemish one, the epithet 'New Flemish Wave' was given from the critics, in the British one it was the dance artists that thanks also to the magazine *New Dance* took the responsibility of spreading their current works and thoughts. In both cases, dance artists started the process of the dance language renovation before the arrival of the institutional support. The two movements began from a diverse individual background: as we have seen, often in the Flemish case the choreographers were self-taught in dance with previous experiences in other fields, furthermore in some work they collaborate with non-professional dancers. It is useful to remember at this point that, as previously seen, official dance training in Belgium till the beginning of the 1980s was offering a training exclusively in ballet except for Mudra, forcing choreographers and dancers to find new ways of training and expression (like studying abroad). In the British case choreographers were trained in dance and somatic practices, and this was possible thanks to college, schools and organisations already present in the country. Interestingly, both the movements were created or were supported by magazines and journals. Distinctive were the results of the performances of these two movements: on the British side we find more abstract works, on a release-based movement; on the Flemish theatrical works with physically challenging movements. In both cases, the dramaturgy of the work is articulated, sometimes with a

hybrid form of video and live music and the dancer's body is trained to be highly receptive, even though the scenic perspectives are different.

From this common point of the search for a highly perceptive body that requests a somatic attention, my field work research starts. How could a dancer/performer's body be trained to increase his/her perception and movement awareness? Which strategies do choreographers adopt to reach an intuitive state in the dancers? How is the body-mind entity situated in the corporeality on stage?

In order to investigate the changes in the physical body-mind within a European context, the next chapters focus on fieldwork experiences. I will connect specific case studies to the history narrated previously in this chapter. Chapters 4 and 5 analyse the fieldwork undertaken with Agis in the occasion of the reconstruction of two of her 1980s pieces and Vandekeybus for a new piece. These chapters explore the training and works by Vandekeybus, Agis, and Schad documented during extended periods of time spent with their companies. My research investigates their embodied dance practices, positioning their works and practices in relation to specific somatic tools such as perception, consciousness, awareness, and their direct or indirect relation with somatics.

Chapter 4: Research in the Field: Traces of Choreographers' and Somatic Practitioners' Voices from the 1980s Europe

I. Introduction: Premise and Origins of the Fieldwork

This chapter and Chapter 5 present the outcomes of my observation of rehearsals and reconstruction of historical dance pieces, practical workshops, interviews, and interactions with ten people, including choreographers, dancers, and somatic practitioners. Acknowledging the endless variation in the diverse ways in which these different levels of investigation can interconnect, the fieldwork process engaged in questioning how through analysis we can uncover choreographic mechanisms and how they have been affected directly or indirectly by somatic practices. Following the explosion of the 1980s New Dance and similar realities in Europe, as discussed earlier (see Chapter 3.III.C) are somatic practices still being used by choreographers during the creative work or are they looking for new ways of sharing movement knowledge? What kinds of training in somatics are available to dancers nowadays?

I differentiated fieldwork discussion into two main strands: this chapter presents analysis of concepts, tools and movement practices deriving from the observation of training and practices during the fieldwork and interviews. Chapter 5 investigates the structure of specific choreographic pieces through a somatic and movement analysis perspective. This chapter introduces the fieldwork research (I) and methodology (II, II.A, II.B.1-3). Data is evaluated thematically through an analysis of the four main working strategies I experienced (II.B.4 - II.B.4.a-d) which I consider the macro-level of analysis divided into four subsections: 'on the creation/re-creation of a piece' (II.B.4.a); 'on the perspective of somatically informed education' (II.B.4.b), 'on the construction of classes'(II.B.4.c); and 'on the position of the

choreographer/practitioner'(II.B.4.d). These categories represent the four specific situations where I engaged in fieldwork, namely watching a reconstruction of a piece or a new work (II.B.4.a); observing, participating, and engaging with a somatically informed class or discussion (II.B.4.b); observing and sometimes taking part into the training/warm-up (II.B.4.c); observing and analysing how choreographers, teachers or practitioners situated themselves (II.B.4.d). After this I direct analysis of the data into a micro-level (III., III.A-D), some themes and topics that arose in the fieldwork are divided into four further categories: 'living understanding of somatics', 'perception and consciousness', 'encounter', and 'tools for an embodied dance practice'. Each section explores different modalities and assets of the complex and deeply layered interrelationships between somatics and dance — in a broad sense — and of the impact of somatic practices on European dancing and choreography. The analysis develops further in Chapter 5, where I investigate in more depth its application to choreographic processes.

This chapter connects specific concepts and tools of dance and movement originating from the fieldwork to specific thematic research strands (section III.A.B.C.D), serving as a point of reference for a further analysis of the choreographic structures. Indeed, the process of analysis derives from fieldwork observations and at the same time from research on theoretical and movement sources and how these strands interact. Therefore, the fieldwork started from the need to find some open answers and to research around the following questions and issues:

- How much has the somatic field contributed to the development of contemporary dance and choreography?
- To what extent are the influences of somatic practices evident in 1980s European theatrical dance?
- How and in what ways are the dance artists using somatic awareness? Are they aware of using it?
- How does the dancer's somatic training affect the inter-relationship between choreographers and dancers?

These questions overlap and are interconnected, joining the process of physically understanding the theoretical issues at the foundation of my research.
In the next section I introduce the fieldwork and methodology.

II. Fieldwork: Perspectives for a Methodology

II.A Methodology: A Step into Ethnography

My background in performing arts and somatic movement education facilitates my ability to embrace ethnography as 'the investigation of human interaction through observation and participation' (Collins and Gallinat 2010: 14) as my primary methodology. In accordance with the work of dance scholar Tuuli Tahko (2016), I needed to become involved directly with artists and practitioners, and when possible, observe their creative work in order to uncover some of the processes and voices around somatic practices, dance and choreography.

My fieldwork experience was a practice of encounters with different dance artists and their choreographic works (live, on video and during rehearsals) and with the practices and narratives of various somatic practitioners. Tahko's thesis has been influential for my research because it involves case studies of two contemporary dance companies in

the process of making new work. Tahko's main focus is the inter-relationship between dancers and choreographers and collective creative processes. Her approach is based on the study of the social organization of contemporary choreographic practices, taking into account strategies deriving from dance studies and the study of 'organisational behavior and interaction' (Tahko 2016: iii). Her methodology was based on rehearsal observations, interviews and conversation analysis and transcriptions (Tahko 2016: 15), with a specific focus on non-verbal interaction. Ethnography was her main approach to understand choreographic research. In this light, my investigation offers a similar path: observations of rehearsals and trainings, interviews, and discussions with the participants, investigating the inner processes with a focus on the physical, somatic, and creative approaches that support and influence the choreographic process.

Following the overall work of dance anthropologist Andrée Grau (1999), Ann David and Linda E. Dankworth (2014) and Tahko (2016), dance ethnography could be seen as the search for embodied knowledge and how the researchers understand their own position in relation to the subjects of study (David 2014), to provide new understandings of dance practices. In the chapter 'Fieldwork, Politics and Power' (1999), Grau analyses the anthropological process from interaction and collection of fieldwork data to its analysis with theoretical references.

Grau's work was one of my first inspirations to develop ethnographic research because she clearly expresses that 'Fieldwork is about dialogue, intersubjectivity, building bridges of understanding between self and other' (Grau 1999: 167). Furthermore, as previously narrated, my fieldwork took place in three European countries, and three cities: London, Brussels, and Venice. Whereas I spent a couple of weeks in Brussels, I lived in London for 2 years (2007 and in between 2013-2014) and, until the pandemic, I

travelled there many times for studies, for work and for visiting friends, so for an extended period of time London has been my second home. Lastly Venice: it is the city where I came from (I was born in a small city on the mainland), but all my life and work has been situated between Venice and Mestre (both cities are in the same council). So, this is a territory that I know very well. Having considered this, I can affirm that my fieldwork places itself in a 'at home' (Grau 1999: 167) modality because I have not been travelling into some exotic land to pursue it. Nevertheless, as Grau significantly explains 'Because of the nature of participation-observation, no matter where fieldwork is taking place, dislocation and stress can be expected' (Grau 199: 167). Grau proceeds to narrate her experience of fieldwork in 1980s London within a group of actors: 'It was, however, a learning experience for me to discover that my dialectical method of fieldwork did not result in the interaction anticipated' (Grau 1999: 167).

Acknowledging these possible difficulties emerging in the encounters somehow relieves me of the stress, for example, when introducing myself into a new context or when exploring with the participant my thinking in my interviews. Except for specific ethnographic group research, when starting an ethnographic process, you are often alone. You travel alone to reach your destination and to encounter your future interviewees. You know them only via a previous email exchange or their reputation. You do not know how their voice sounds live or how their bodily gestures appear. It is always a matter of trusting yourself to know the unknown. Furthermore, for most of the fieldwork undertaken, I utilised the English language, which is not my primary language. My mother tongue is Italian, and English is not the first language of some of my interviewees (some speak Flemish, others Spanish, Italian, or German). We understood English as a common language, that in the dance field it represents a lingua franca. Nevertheless, I admit that some nuances of expression are being missed.

Looking back over that period in my life and those encounters, I consider myself lucky because I felt always welcomed, both physically – in Agis' home, in Ultima Vez's kitchen and rehearsal space or during the various locations of the rest of the interviews, like in the sofa at Independent Dance, in a café in Brussels or in front of an Aperol spritz in Venice – and in relation to the topics proposed. Organizing research around work and funding was crucial as this project is mainly self-funded with the exception of small scholarships from Santander and Ede & Ravenscroft, and I was working as a teacher and trainer to support myself. I arranged two intensive weeks of fieldwork at the Ultima Vez company and a total of 13 days with Agis and ten days of practice with Schad (for the specific timing and places of the fieldwork see this chapter section II.B.1). The rest of the research participants were interviewed for one hour to ninety minutes or so and, with their willingness, to continue the discourse via email for further issues, but I have not met most of them in person again.

In *Dance Ethnography and Global Perspectives: Identity, Embodiment and Culture* edited by David and Dankworth (2014) various nuances of what embodiment could be experienced are addressed in the context of dance ethnography, considering how the ethnographer gains insight through acquiring embodied knowledge. For example, it could be considered as a means to internalise specific dances through improvisation and perception of the spatial context. A chapter by Allison J. Singer considers embodiment

> as part of a kinaesthetic and symbolic process that occurs in a specific place and time and through which an individual or group can experience or re-experience emotions, feelings, ideas, lived experience, and memories. This re-experiencing creates the possibility for understanding, change, and a symbolic transformation of experience.
>
> (Singer 2014: 135)

So, the research moves from an embodied knowledge gained directly in the field, to creating new awareness and knowledge about specific topics.

As Theresa Buckland (1999) states, it is crucial for the ethnographer to ensure a reflection on ‘what do we know?’ and ‘how do we come to know what we know?’ (Buckland 1999: 7). The position of the ethnographer is situated in the ‘we’, namely they are always connected to the situation/people/inputs that they are receiving and analysing. In this light I referred to my ethnographic practices as a way of encounter, where my identity as interviewer became modified by the ‘who’, ‘what’ and ‘where’ of my contacts. Of course, I considered myself an ‘external’ eye and observer, but at the same time I was engaged with the discussions and practices proposed and seen. Through this engagement, questions, references, perspectives, and points of view became integrated through the dialogical exchanges with practitioners, choreographers, and dancers whose work I had the chance to observe and discuss, to better understand their choreographic and perceptive processes.

I focused on observing and reflecting upon methods and mechanisms used by dancers, choreographers, and somatic practitioners rather than the cultural contents and connotations of the dance gestures themselves. Each different situation, conversation, and interaction with dance artists and practitioners was assessed by considering how they dealt with specific questions and methods. Furthermore, I compared their teaching methods during classes and rehearsals, looking for similarities and differences, such as the type of exercises, use of imagery, voice, and use of tactile feedback.

When possible, I immersed myself in specific dancing or somatic contexts, attending workshops, classes, and rehearsals both as observer and practitioner, participating in

classes and workshops and interviewing, discussing issues with dance artists and somatic educators. In a sense I was close to what Buckland expressed:

> the dance ethnographer can reveal something about a society by immersing herself in its culture and documenting and trying to understand the concepts behind its movement systems.
> (Buckland 1999: 5)

Specifically, in my case studies, I am striving to develop a layer of understanding that identifies specific concepts behind the diverse movement systems, highlighting the moment of encounter as a way to collect data for analysis.

Furthermore, I chose ethnography as a process of general analysis because it involves personal participation, engaging directly with the dancing community, where all is about learning by doing, and the first-person experience is one of the most relevant keys to understanding the practice of the other. This 'embodied method of observation' (Tahko 2016: 65) selects different kinds of data, such as participant observation, which consequently informs the analysis. Moreover, as a dancer and somatic practitioner, I embodied the notions in different levels of my being, and could accept their resonance physically and mentally, through memory, empathy, and kinaesthesia (Foster 2010), interconnecting different perspectives in-between the verbal and nonverbal interactions with body and the practices encountered.

My theoretical and fieldwork research opened some spaces and hypotheses for the exchange between dancer and choreography, and somatic practices as shared and connecting territories. The case studies fieldwork revealed the potential to understand deeply the process happening between dancers and choreographers, or somatic practitioners and dancers. This necessitated a shift in the focus from the historically

informed perspective seen previously in this thesis to a more critical-analytical point of view.

My desire as an observer was not to adulterate the normal order of the events, but to use the observational, practical, and interview times as chances to record different levels of understanding of the overall experiences I witnessed. The research methodology relies primarily on observational data, for which I used the work by Tuuli Tahko (2016) as a model, and fieldwork research following the models by Leena Rouhiainen (2008), Jenny Roche (2009), and Sarah Reed (2011). The fieldwork encompassed rehearsals and class observations, semi-structured interviews with choreographers and practitioners (which I recorded), discussions and conversations, transcription of specific parts of the conversations and notes on exercises and movement sequences and structures.

My approach to fieldwork has been a combination of observation, interview, and practice: with Agis I participated in her Skinner Releasing Technique (SRT) classes and sessions before rehearsals (see Chapter 5.III.A.1-2) and with Schad I performed in her piece in Venice. As narrated in Chapter 5.III.C my participation in Schad's performance included warm-up classes (of about ninety minutes), thought of as a body-mind preparation for the performance and three to four hours dedicated to the site-specific performances. The class was mainly constituted by practices devised from BMC, Qi Qong and Aikido, working alone and in pairs. The performance work was mainly a visual oriented research process, where Schad and her collaborator Laurent Goldring were re-constructing the piece *Collective Jumps* inside Palazzo Grimani, a Venetian historical palace. From this perspective, my engagement with Agis' and Schad's work represent two examples of 'embodied practice'.

According to Sally Ann Ness (2008: 131), 'Embodied practice (…) appears to act as a methodological "silent partner"', however, the participatory experience helped me in understanding some movements from the inside and some choreographic mechanisms through a physical understanding. I must highlight that in my case some fieldwork was undertaken in a somatically informed context, where being part of the practice itself represents the first step to gain knowledge of it. Namely: from a certain perspective it is not possible only to read about Body-Mind Centering without 'trying' a class because the experience of BMC, as of other somatic practices, goes through the first-person perception. In this sense, I acknowledge the definition of Hanna of somatics as 'the field which studies the soma: namely, the body as perceived from within by first-person perception' (Hanna 1986: 4, as reported from Chapter 1.I). Thus, a section of my field work could be defined as 'somatic ethnographic' work because the attention which I dedicated to it was my first experience of both being a 'doer' and a critic of myself in experiencing the practice.

In contrast, for instance, when observing Vandekeybus at work with his company I considered myself an outsider: I was witnessing a choreographic process. In my dance training I took some workshops of Ultima Vez vocabulary, that informed me on a 'technical' level, so my body could remember some feelings. Nevertheless, during my weeks with the company I was sitting at the same table as Vandekeybus and only taking notes (most of them are in the appendix).

As previously defined, my fieldwork has been transnational and transcultural, and the overall process could be defined in the words of Ness: 'home office— field site— home office' (Ness 2008: 146), and this re-positioning is coordinated with 'the action

sequence of: research conceptualization — participant/observation (embodiment-notework) — writing-up' (Ness 2008: 146).

In this light, I consider the fieldwork notes (or 'notework' as termed by Ness) of various types: daily journals of rehearsals (as in the case of Vandekeybus see Appendix D) where I am writing in a more discursive way; notes in bullet points of the reconstruction of Agis and from her classes; some key words I have taken from the class or performance I engaged in myself (SRT and Schad's performance); some sentences, words, linguistic expressions written live during the recording of the interviews, like the words containing the concepts that I felt more urgent or more pertinent to my research/inquiry. I observe that in my field notes during my fieldwork with Vandekeybus and Ultima Vez workshop with German Jauregui[60] the notes are discursive, and with personal comments on the side, whereas when observing Agis, where also I took part in the classes, my writing is more fragmented, with short notes/points. With Schad my notes are even more condensed: keywords, and name of the exercises (some of them I knew already from my practices with BMC).

I have also to highlight that the experience with Schad was extremely intense: for ten days we had the class in the morning held with various teachers from Biennale College (where I met Laura Aris) at Arsenale and then a short lunch break before walking under the late June mid-day sun to Palazzo Grimani (which is approximately two kilometres distant). Then, started the work with Schad, first with the previously mentioned warm-up class and then performance for the entire afternoon. At the end of the day there were other performances to see, so the time to write contemporaneously was very short.

[60] Appendix D contains only the fieldnotes on the work with Vandekeybus and the company, not the ones on the workshop led by Jauregui. Nevertheless, these latter notes have informed my analysis.

Furthermore, some exercises she proposed from BMC were so intensive that they were also difficult to translate into words in real time.

Ness conceptualises two types of writing connected to the fieldwork and afterwards: the 'written downs' as the 'subjective, spontaneous, private, unpublishable narratives of some incidents (…). They are first encounters or arrival stories, moments when the subjectivity of the ethnographer has traditionally been allowed to be incorporated into the "writing up" (Ness 1995: 133). And 'the writing-up' as the 'he construction of monographs' (Ness 1995: 138) as the final work of elaboration of the fieldnotes into an ethnographic work accessible to the readers.

I consider my fieldwork notes a sort of togetherness of 'written down' and 'writing-up' because especially when I was observing from the outside, I was paying attention and at the same time reflecting on what I was observing. Somehow my fieldnotes, as claimed by Ness, are 'keeping my memories from dying' (Ness 2008: 133).

Together with my bodily memory of the travels, the remembrances of specific gestures and voices, or my physical feelings after a SRT class for instance, these written notes are 'what is left' from my fieldwork experience and from my encounters. When I listen to the recording of the interviews, I am always looking for specific words of my notes taken in real time. My notes represent me in listening to their voices in real time. In this perspective 'As Kirsten Hastrup has noted, fieldwork experience becomes memory before it becomes text' (Ness 2008: 146). I consider the following writing 'at home' with the distance from the field a way to memorise previous states and issues, and a first analysis of the experience in the field.

Interviews often complemented observations of specific dance works, held with people with whom I had already passed some time, so I was able to deepen and expand specific themes and aspects. Appendix E shows the main questions asked of all participants in the semi-structured interviews, with different follow-up questions depending on their answers. Each interview is a unique case study, with a specific 'world vision', disclosing a particular poetics and engaging various and different body-mind practices. All data gathered — notes, observations of rehearsals of new pieces and reconstructions of old pieces, video recordings, and interviews — have first been evaluated thematically.

The analysis is divided into macro and micro levels which arose during the fieldwork. According to psychologists and sociologists Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, thematic analysis is 'a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data' (Braun and Clarke 2006: 6) which enables the researcher to organise large amounts of information. Such information is not only gained verbally, but also includes speech, gaze, gestures, and bodies in space. In other words, thematic analysis could condense together all the types of information gathered, differentiating them in specific layers of understanding. The macro-level of analysis defines the 'strategies of working' situated in sections II.B.4(a-d) and the micro-level consists of constructing the four thematic categories in section III (A, B, C, D), and they are the four 'branches' emerged from the fieldwork and are discussed below in section III: living understanding of somatics', 'perception and consciousness', 'encounter', and 'tools for an embodied dance practice'. Strategies and themes arose during fieldwork as common factors and points of references in different contexts. As my overall research questions concern the relationships of contemporary choreographers with somatics, the main themes relate to these subjects.

The consent form (see Appendix B) indicates that the most important ethical issue which emerged from this project was to gain permission to attend rehearsals and to conduct interviews in person or via Skype. I was fortunate to obtain complete availability from all the dance artists and somatic practitioners involved in the research field process. The interviews often started with biographical details of the interviewees, memories from childhood and early training emerged, sometimes remembrances and reflections on periods of their life which were difficult on emotional and professional levels. Feelings of solitude, loneliness and detachment from the dancing community, and occasional disagreements with creative processes, are some of the 'sensitive' topics that arose. Our discussion proceeded accepting those issues, and depending on the interviewee, were discussed in-depth, and other times were simply acknowledged and moved forward to the next topic.

II.B Fieldwork Details

II.B.1 Premise: Different Places — Different Contexts

I started conceptualising this research during my training as a somatic educator with the Body-Mind Centering school, traveling from the village of Tuscania in Italy to Paris, and to Vussem in Germany, a small village close to Cologne. At that time (2011) I was very involved in dance practice and actively performing with an Italian collective. My background was basically in modern dance, Horton, and Limon techniques. I later became interested in release-based technique, supported by scholarships that allowed me to travel to New York, where I studied Klein and Alexander Techniques. I had also the opportunity to follow Trisha Brown Company classes and many other dance artists at Movement Research, a centre for 'the investigation of dance and movement-based forms' (Movement Research 2018).

In that period, I watched — live and on video — some works by the Belgian choreographer Wim Vandekeybus, especially the extract of the piece *What the Body Does Not Remember* (1987, discussed in Chapter 1.I and Chapter 3.V.B.1) included in the screendance work *Roseland* (1990). I became interested in analysing the dancers' performance in that and other works. We could consider Vandekeybus' choreography as moment in dance history, a break in the 1980s theatre dance scene (see Chapter 3.IV) where there was a need to look out and to react to physical danger. Vandekeybus (Ultima Vez 2018) was searching for 'raw emotion, physical power and guts' against the predominant 1980 dance aesthetics focused more on abstracted movement sequences based on the North American post-modern movement legacy on one side and on a Dance Theatre driven manifestation in Europe from the work of Pina Bausch (see Chapter 3.IV). In studying how the dancers became involved in those practices, many influences from somatics emerged as investigated in Chapter 3, section II.D.

When I started my PhD research, I was fortunate to be based in London and to immerse myself again daily in the somatically informed practices proposed mainly at Independent Dance — an artist-led organization devoted to supporting dance artists, based at Siobhan Davies Studio in Elephant and Castle (Independent Dance 2018) — and Chisenhale Dance Space, a member-led space and organization for dance and community development. The possibility of a personal, physical engagement offered a chance to deal with specific dance languages, practices, people, and environments that were engaged in discourses between somatics, choreography and dance.

My main fieldwork occurred in three areas: the U.K., particularly in London; Belgium (Brussels) and Italy (mainly Venice). The U.K. and Belgium are where the two main choreographers are situated. Italy was included because it was my primary base from

the second year of my PhD and where I met and worked with some practitioners and choreographers, including Isabelle Schad.

In the U.K., I met British choreographer and Skinner Releasing Teacher Gaby Agis for a total of five times in unique contexts on different themes. The first meetings took place at Independent Dance Studio during 2006-2007 and in April 2014 when attending her class in Skinner Releasing Technique (SRT). I met her again in September 2014 at University of Roehampton for the reconstruction of her historical piece *Shouting Out Loud* (1984), and then in May 2016 at Chisenhale Dance Space for the reconstruction of *Close Stream* (1983). In both these occasions I witnessed the reconstruction process. Subsequently, again in May 2016, she invited me to her home for the interview. Lastly, we met in Venice during April 2018, when she was teaching Skinner Realising Technique to the young dancers at the Biennale College, and we showed two of her dances for the camera at the event *Screendance Landscapes* at IUAV (University of Venice / Università di Architettura) where I was working as teaching assistant/lecturer.

The encounters with the creative work of Vandekeybus and his close collaborators, the dance artists, and teachers German Jauregui and Iñaki Azpillaga, took place mainly at the location of Ultima Vez Company in Brussels, and at the Belgian Café Walvis during February and April 2017. I observed the rehearsals of Vandekeybus' new choreography for one week (*Mockumentary of a Contemporary Saviour* 2017) in the Ultima Vez company studio. In the same period, I observed work by the dancer and teacher German Jauregui (presenting Ultima Vez movement vocabulary) with students for one week in the Ultima Vez studio.

In Italy, I met Elena Giannotti and Isabelle Schad on the occasion of the Biennale Danza Festival in June 2016, where Giannotti was assistant to the artistic director Virgilio Sieni and I had the chance to interview her. There, I had the opportunity to attend a 10 day-workshop and perform in a piece choreographed by Schad for Biennale Danza Festival, *Collective Jumps* (see Chapter 5.III.C). On the occasion of Biennale Danza I also followed some morning classes with Laura Aris (a former member of Ultima Vez company).

During my fieldwork period I conducted 10 interviews and conversations, some through Skype and some in person, with choreographers Agis and Schad; dancers and teachers Jauregui, Azpillaga, Kirsty Alexander; dancer and somatic practitioner Giannotti; and conversations with the following people: Vandekeybus, Aris and Cristina Rizzo, and Einav Katan. Where the interviews follow a semi-structured organization and were all recorded, the conversations were more informal, such as during a breakfast in my place with Katan, when I invited her to Mestre (Venice) for a talk, or during some breaks from rehearsals during a project with Rizzo, or in some asides during the intensive performance preparations with Vandekeybus. To me these conversations, even though not formally recorded and unstructured, offered occasions to deal with some issues of the research from a direct point of view, placed in the ‘here and now’.

The following chart (Figure 1) summarises specific details and gives an overall idea of the general fieldwork research:

Artist	**Time Frame and Place**	**Activity**	**Rationale - Summary**
Gaby Agis	2 days - Roehampton University - September 2014	Reconstructions of *Shouting Out Loud*	A dance work from the 1980s
Gaby Agis	3 days - Chisenhale Dance Space -May 2016	Reconstruction of *Close Stream*	A dance work from the 1980s
Gaby Agis	one week - Independent Dance - April 2014	Practical SRT workshop	I practiced Skinner Releasing Technique with Gaby Agis
Gaby Agis	3 hours - Agis' Home - May 2016	Interview	Discussion with Gaby Agis on different topics (somatics, choreography, teaching, etc.)
Ultima Vez	one week - Ultima Vez company - Brussels - February 2017	*Mockumentary of a Contemporary Saviour* - new piece creation	Observation of training and rehearsal of the company Ultima Vez on a new work; short conversation with Vandekeybus between the work
Ultima Vez	1 week - Ultima Vez company - Brussels - April 2017	Observing the work of the dancer and teacher German Jauregui	In observing the workshop, I was especially noticing physical and verbal/imagery instruction

Ultima Vez	3 hours - Brussels- February 2017	Interview with German Jauregui	Discussion with German Jauregui on his long-term collaboration with Wim Vandekeybus and his personal path through creative and teaching experiences.
Ultima Vez	2 hours - Brussels - April 2017	Interview with Iñaki Azpillaga	Discussion with Iñaki Azpillaga on his long-term collaboration with Wim Vandekeybus and his personal path though creative and teaching experiences.
Isabelle Schad	15 days - Venice - June 2016	Workshop and final performance *Collective Jumps* with Isabelle Schad	I worked with Isabelle Schad for a new creation for Biennale Danza College
Isabelle Schad	1.5 hours - Skype	Interview	Discussion with Isabelle Schad mainly focused on how somatics has influenced her creative work.
Kirsty Alexander	1.5 hours - Independent Dance London - May 2016	Interview	Discussion with Kirsty Alexander on somatics informed perspective in dance and her experience.
Elena Giannotti	2 hours - Venice - June 2016	Interview	Discussion with Elena Giannotti on her career with Rosemary Butcher and her personal approach to dance and somatics.

Laura Aris	10 days - Venice - June 2016	Practical workshop and conversation	Studying with Laura Aris movement and improvisation. Informal discussion on her movement practice after her long-time collaboration with Wim Vandekeybus.
Cristina Rizzo	2 weeks - Venice - June 2015	Workshop + performance *Bolero Effect* + conversation	Working with Cristina Rizzo for a creation for Biennale Danza College and I had the chance to talk with her on different topics, and on dance and somatics.
Einav Katan	1 hour - Venice- November 2017	Conversation	Discussion with Einav Katan mainly on the topic of embodiment.

Figure 1

In a general exploration of the themes of connection and interconnection of somatics and dance, I have chosen dance artists mainly concerned with these two strands of research (choreography and somatics). They include dance artists who have a strong somatic background such as Agis, Alexander, Giannotti; choreographers who are using somatics in their individual training and for their dancers such as Agis and Schad; dance artists who started their career in the 1980s such as Agis and Vandekeybus; and dancers/choreographers who do not speak directly of somatics but use specific tools derived from somatics, challenging perspectives and cognition of moving bodies, such as Vandekeybus (in the observation Ultima Vez work), Jauregui, Azpillaga, Katan, Rizzo, and Aris. I have summarised their features in the following chart:

Dance artists with strong somatic background	Choreographers using somatics in their training	Dance artists not directly informed by somatics	Dance artists who started their career in the 1980s
Gaby Agis	Gaby Agis	Wim Vandekeybus	Wim Vandekeybus
Kirsty Alexander	Isabelle Schad	Iñaki Azpillaga	Gaby Agis
Elena Giannotti	Elena Giannotti	German Jauregui	Kirsty Alexander
Isabelle Schad		Laura Aris	
		Einav Katan	

Figure 2

Agis is one of the most relevant case studies because she is a British choreographer who initiated her research in the 1980s, largely influenced by her knowledge of Release Technique and later of Skinner Releasing Technique practice, of which she thereafter became one of the most influential educators in the form. Alexander is a Skinner Releasing Technique teacher as well as a former dancer with Agis and Rosemary Butcher. Alexander is one of the co-creators, together with Gill Clark, of the MA/MFA *Creative Practice: Dance Professional Practice* at Trinity Laban, an associate editor of the *Journal of Dance and Somatic Practices*, and former co-director the centre Independent Dance (from 2015-2018). Schad is a former classical ballerina and dancer for Vandekeybus' company Ultima Vez. She is processing a way of choreography resulting from her research and encounters with Body-Mind Centering, Qi Qong (a martial art-based form), and visual arts. Rizzo is an Italian choreographer who integrates exercises from Body-Mind Centering and experiential anatomy into her creative processes. Katan is a dancer and a dancer philosopher, author of the book *Embodied Philosophy in Dance: Gaga and Ohad Naharin's Movement Research*

(2016), which explores how somatics influences choreography. The work of the Belgian choreographer Vandekeybus and his company Ultima Vez developed one of the most challenging uses of the body during the 1980s (as seen in Chapter 3.IV.C). In the classes and training of the dancers, the movement exercises are connected to the expansion/integration of the body and mind cognition levels even though the words are not somatic.

II.B.2 Positioning the Fieldwork

During the research process, I was situated differently depending on the circumstances. My rehearsal observations focused on how the choreographers gave directions and suggestions to the dancers, how they guided the group or soloist, and what kind of verbal indications were given and how. During the class observations, I homed in on the kind of exercises proposed, the indications of the teacher, focusing on verbal instructions, on imagery used, and on the sound played. I was also attentive to the students' reactions, and the kind of comments and discussion which arose during the class feedback session, such as observations, feelings, and difficulties.

When situated as a class observer, my attention was mainly directed to the physical tasks and exercises proposed by the teacher/practitioner. I noted the use of the space and of different levels (deep, medium, high), the kind of effort/energy used, the mental concentration needed, the overall rhythm and the presence or absence of flow. My interest was taken by the specific exercises proposed in different contexts, such as warming up for rehearsals or training classes, whether somatically informed or not. Exercises such as the X-position or starfish position (deriving from Bartenieff), rolling, spirals, running, jumps were all used as a common language to achieve different outcomes. In the given tasks, I was looking at which kind of words were used —

whether verbs, nouns, adverbs — and how they were pronounced. In particular, I considered how somatic movement vocabularies and choreographic expression were similar or not, and to what extent there were possible similarities or differences in the physical execution. In order to record data from these observations, I kept written notes of words, instructions by the teacher/leader of the session, indications, personal reflections, and drawings.

As detailed in Appendix E, during the interviews the main questions focused on the specific background and training of the dance artist/people interviewed; if and how they enter in contact with somatics; whether they would describe their approach as a somatic one; how they would define somatics; to what extent and in which specific ways somatics has influenced their choreographic work. The interviews also helped provide understanding of what somatics means for each interviewee and the interrelationships of their training to the creative experience. Interviews were recorded and partial transcriptions are discussed below.

Somatics determined a change of paradigm in the approach between external structure (intended as both the overall corporeal structure with bones and muscles, and the choreographic organisation) and personal perception and awareness, shifting the structural focus from the inside to outside, and vice versa, seen, for instance, in the work of Susan Leigh Foster on the proto-somatic practitioner and educator Margaret H'Doubler regarding early dance education (Foster 2010; see Chapter 2.II.A.2). Where western dance pedagogic traditions such as ballet utilised firmly codified movement vocabularies and stylistic parameters and standard of execution, H'Doubler's pedagogic approach was based on tracing the connections 'between individual impulse and its kinesiological realization', to reach a 'natural performance' (Foster 2010: 45).

Through the lenses of key concepts including empathy, memory, and kinaesthesia I explore some relevant elements of dance practices and somatics. Before proceeding, it is useful to highlight the three fundamental elements. The term kinaesthesia, coined in the 1880s by the English physiologist and neurologist Henry Charlton Bastian and later replaced with proprioception, acknowledges the awareness of the position and movement of the parts of the body thanks to specific sensory organs (proprioceptors), in the muscles and joints. According to Foster the perceptual psychologist James J. Gibson 'posited that kinesthesia assisted in integrating sensory information from all other systems' (Foster 2010: 7). Recently, neurobiologists have explored how the brain feels the movements of the body. According to the American dance therapist Mary Whitehouse

> there is a technical term for feeling one's own body move — it is called the kinaesthetic sense and it is just as valuable as the five which inform us of the physical world about us. The kinaesthetic sense is the sensation which accompanies or informs us of bodily movement.
>
> (Whitehouse in Johnson 1995: 244)

Through kinaesthesia a body could perceive itself in space and the extension or dimension of its movements. A body which dances is a body in a constant kinaesthetic awareness. With empathy we could consider specific mechanisms of identification as we could literally put 'ourselves in the shoes of others'. According to Foster (2010: 10), the concept originally derives from the German aestheticians, philosophers who coined the term *Einfühlung* (feeling with), regarding the experience with artwork as a physical connection to the work of art. Later, it was mainly used by psychologists and considered as a cognitive and epistemological process through which two different individuals could enter a relationship, with movement offering a relevant system to achieve it. Empathy must be recognized as a fully sensorial capability/means, which 'entails a

kinesthetic level of recognition' (Foster 2010:10). On this, recent scientific discoveries such as the mirror neurons have provided further supporting evidence (Gallese and Staminov 2002). Therefore, memory could be considered the bodily capacity to remember specific movement sequence patterns within bones, muscles and so on and at the same time to translate the body into a container of physical pattern and feelings. Furthermore, memory adds another level of understanding the movement ('muscular memory'). These three elements enlarged my methodological processes during the fieldwork, because they acted as a foundation of my movement analysis in the general investigation as detailed below.

II.B.3 Fieldwork Data Gathering

In order to further develop hypotheses and perspectives emerging from the fieldwork, I summarised my findings in charts inserted in Appendix C and include a brief excerpt below (for the full charts see Appendix C).

Gaby Agis	Rationale	I somatics definition	II perception consciousness awareness	III encounter	IV tools for an embodied dance practice
there is a structure and an inside of the structure	on the creation of a piece starting from inner perspective	X			
the process is the piece	on the creation of a piece and links with the practices involved to it	X			
making choice all the time - take responsibility	same processes used both for creating a piece and during the somatic practice	X	X		

Each chart is composed of a selection of my notes (on the left) with a brief contextual note, and four columns referring to how the material will be analysed in the chapter (see section III.A-D). In order to explain the process of enquiries, I extrapolated some notes to reconstruct the embodied knowledge arising from my experiences. My X in the charts shows which of my categories the issue falls in to. I selected only those sections regarding training and practices and reserved for now information concerned more with a choreographic perspective, discussed in Chapter 5.

In Appendix C, the first chart based on the training practices observations highlights the experience with Agis, encompassing the interview conducted in her home and rehearsal observations. The second chart summarises my interview with Alexander at Independent Dance. Additional charts are dedicated to the fieldwork in Belgium, by

Ultima Vez; specifically, one is about the observation of the training before the rehearsals and the other discusses the workshop with German Jauregui. In these charts, I compiled a list of key elements arising from the thematic analysis classified into four major sections: ‘somatics definition’, ‘proprioception, consciousness, awareness’, ‘encounter’, and ‘tools for an embodied dance practice’. The categories derive from recurrent patterns and modalities happening in diverse fieldwork occasions (rehearsals, trainings, classes) and to a certain extent they were also structured by my questions.

From the beginning of the data collection, it was evident that a number of similar elements recur in the different somatic practitioners and dance artists. This shows two points: firstly, how much somatic practices are and have been commonly used by dance practitioners; and secondly, to what extent both physical movement exercises and mind-body creative techniques are significantly used in diverse contexts and with diverse purposes. Furthermore, some concepts emerged as equally central to both practices.
A comprehensive outline summarises connections between key concepts of the selected practices and descriptive terminologies which emerged from the analysis. A significant number of affinities in the practices are seen and discussed, introduced below within four main perspectives.

II.B.4 Fieldwork Shared Perspectives

As a further introduction to the data analysis, it should be taken into account that different systems of body knowledge (such as voice, movement, tactile feedback, etc) interact. The perspectives from where the thesis develops include: first, that different layers of diverse kinds of training constructed different levels of shareable body-mind knowledge, with complications arising from the attempts to differentiate what derives from where, for instance what is specifically derived from somatics and what emerges

from choreography. Secondly, the choreographic and creative process has particular pathways, and each choreographer interacts with the dancers/performers in a specific way, depending also on the training and background of the choreographer and dancer. Thirdly, each choreographer has developed a unique physical training scheme before rehearsals of their works, where one of the major concerns is the physical and mental reaction to stimuli. The use of imagery, touch, and voice are all elements in common in between the different choreographers researched here. These are relevant components essential in somatics as set out earlier. For instance, a SRT class is guided through voice and tactile feedback: the voice is modulated depending on specific states of body-mind reactions and tactile feedback is used to draw specific paths in the body and to reawaken specific sensations, a gentle touch could be softer, with more pressure (Skinner 2018; for an introduction of SRT see Chapter 2.III). The SRT teacher always conducts the class by speaking and guiding through anatomical examples and poetic examples, using images from natural elements such as the air and the sea. In Experiential Anatomy classes specific body images, such as specific parts of the human skeleton, help to visualise the body forms in order to make them clearer in the direct practices. The vision of the external proposed image clarifies the individual perception of specific body fragments. In Body-Mind Centering tactile feedback, imagery and sound are used together to facilitate entering in contact with the inner self (Bainbridge Cohen 1993). For example, ‘cellular breathing’ is a practice usually done in pairs or trios; it involves touching a specific part of the body gently and letting the body touch resonate with this feeling, also creating a physical sensation because the cells of the skin are migrating towards the point of touch (Bainbridge Cohen 2013). In my personal experience, both in the practice and in the observation, this exercise is very useful to reconnect the outside of the body to the inside.

During the fieldwork observations detailed above, I traced the following major four working strategies which emerged from rehearsals, training sessions and classes which I consider the macro-level of analysis that I named as: 'methodologies of creating or re-staging a piece'; 'the somatically informed education perspective in a dance class context'; 'specific practices for using the body'; and 'the position of the teacher/practitioner in relation to the other dancers/practitioners/students'. In the next sections, I analyse the four categories through the fieldwork data.

II.B.4.a On the Creation/Re-creation of a Piece

From my fieldwork observations, the creation and or re-creation/ re-enactment of a piece involves different practices with the main underlying principles introduced below in italics. In the case studies, I am not looking to develop an insight in the choreographic craft, rather I am establishing links to preparatory movement processes which affect the choreographic creation. Without these specific preliminary movement practices, the choreographic result would differ.

In observing a choreographic work and its process *there is an internal and external structure*: the prior/external/visible structure (that could be of the body, of a movement sequence, of a choreography), and the inside, which means the individual and singular perception and vision of what the body-mind perceives from specific physical movements. For example, Agis in her practice often speaks about internal and external structures, regarding the different layers possible in a movement sequence, and the external movement path and the internal emotional feeling perceived by the mover. The internal affects the external outcome and vice versa.

Pointing to one of the main topics developed in the next chapter, *the process is the piece*, refers to how the steps towards the creation of the choreography are not only based on an assembly of movement patterns, conceptual ideas and so on, but they become a continuous collective dialogue based on feedback deriving from growing experiences of the dancers and the choreographer. For example, Agis stimulates her dancers to enter deeply into the choreographic material, starting from the preparatory exercises which determine the quality of the choreography. These exercises are release-based movements, partnering sequences, and breath exercises.

Both in the choreography itself, in the rehearsals, and in the movement class and warm up there is a request from the choreographer/teacher to the dancers and students to make choices all the time, taking responsibility: the agency of the dancer/performer/practitioner is always active. The dancers or students are being challenged and stimulated in each moment, bringing participatory awareness of choreography or in the class, bringing their specific contribution with the physical movement and with concepts/ideas/emotions. For example, both Jauregui during the class and Vandekeybus during the rehearsal warm-up stimulate the dancers to constantly 'be present'. This means to be aware in the movement patterns about their own emotions and sensations and to integrate them into the movement.

This request to make choices all the time is strictly connected to the *necessity of negotiating*: during the choreography and/or class the individual is stimulated to not only execute the movements/patterns/sequences, but to act/re-act/re-enact to the diverse stimuli, in order to develop an individual and personal way to 'act' the performance/class. This point is close to the previous one; negotiation is often a prerogative of the improvisation technique, where the dancers are always in relation with non-settled movement sequences, but open to the movement dialogue.

Choreography and classes create a specific *atmosphere* where teachers/practitioners/choreographers strive to shape an ambience. In the class, this necessity derives from the will to realise a specific full sensorial experience for the participants; in the choreography it is part of the process of creating new 'worlds'. For example, Agis uses particular images and words to bring the dancers inside the movement material, such as 'melting' or 'expanding'. This atmosphere or ambience is also obtained by *developing images*: through imagery and landscapes it is possible to create an atmosphere. Vandekeybus often works through theatrical images, such as 'the abandoned lover', or 'people coming from the future', while Agis uses the figure of 'the woman'. During training, images such as 'diving out from the water' or 'feeling your body melting into the sand' are used to give a precise kinaesthetic sense. Furthermore, both in the practices and in the choreography, use of specific vocabularies, including words and tone, are carefully selected.

The last, but not least, approach that emerged during both the movement and somatic class, and the choreography is the specific recognition of *ethical rules*, where the respect of the individual agency and of the personal and collective space are primary concerns (I discuss the ethos as a concept arising from the fieldwork in this chapter II.B.4.b, III.A, III.B).

II.B.4.b Perspectives of Somatically Informed Education

This section follows the seminal work of professor Sylvie Fortin (2002, 2009) who investigated how somatics contributed to stimulation in the dance classes. It also draws on the work of dance educator and scholar Jill Green (1996), who illustrates integration of principles regarding the 'soma' in dance teaching, pointing out how much somatics and creativity are not separate, but are interlaced within the personal self. This

relationship is evident in the process of creation of a piece and in the educational context of a class, encouraging an interconnecting attitude within an ethos of trust, being specific within the provided means. In Chapter 2.II.D I discussed the topic of somatic education in relation to dance training, but my overall fieldwork research was mainly based (with the exception of Jauregui's workshop based on Ultima Vez movement vocabulary) on the training for the preparation of specific choreography or re-enactment.

Key concepts in the work of somatics and dance emerged in analysis of the data.

- *Two people together can generate a new and different system, creating a unique ethos*: thanks to a verbal and physical dialogue, it is possible to develop new political and ethical landscapes. Dance and somatic environments are somehow creating reflective, alternative, and somehow protective situations from the outside everyday world, in this way they are enhancing new possibilities for discussion. It is furthermore interesting when the new ethos is reflecting on the outside; meaning that the ethos manifests connections to the world outside which impacts upon the content of the choreography;
- *Trusting the work and the practice*: practice and creative processes need time to be understood which are different for each individual. This also means to be confident in the work done;
- *Touch is precise and specific*: in any situation (class and/or choreography), tactile feedback is considered a means of knowing, a way to direct awareness, to help people in understanding a movement, to calm down or to speed up;
- *Layers — different kind of layers*: both the body's systems and the choreographic structure present various layers. There are diverse functional systems in the body such as bones, organs, or the lymphatic system. There is

imagination as well as emotional layers. Choreographic layers include movement patterns, emotional patterns, and narrative patterns;

- *Imagery and embodiment*: in the process of developing imagery/imaginations there is a search for embodying the images, instead of an imitation of images;
- *Agency — individual choice*: the possibility for the person to choose position, status, relationship, their place in the room, speed of the movement, in regard to the specific situation in which they find themselves in that precise moment;
- *Economy*: search for a way of movement close to the most anatomically and physically efficient. This could also mean an economy of the emotions, to engage/to direct them in a specific way. I noticed this specifically in the details which Agis explains to embody specific movements, as for instance, the precise indication she gives for the movement initiation of the neck in a roll down, or the direct indications (usually connected to visual imagery, like 'run for your life') Vandekeybus communicates to run on stage, that should be a 'real' one.

II.B.4.c On the Construction of Classes for Specific Movement Practices

During the classes, for pre-rehearsal warm-up and more specific technical ones, I observed that proposed movement practices are composed of elements which keep recurring such as *physical indications and suggestions, use of specific external props, use of experiential anatomy, specific exercises in the warm-up, physical and imagery suggestions as explored below*.

Physical indications and suggestions are employed in order to improve balance, prevent injuries and reinforce the physical and cognitive understanding of the body, often with *use of specific external props* (such as balls, a proprioceptive board which is a specific unstable piece of wood used to increase proprioception often used in physiotherapy and

physical rehabilitation). For instance, during my observation, Vandekeybus suggested a couple of time to the dancers to use the proprioceptive board to reinforce their balance.

Drawing clearly from a somatic methodology, there is the *use of experiential anatomy*, mainly through anatomical pictures and drawings. This is frequently correlated to *practices of specific exercises such* as starfish and roll down as common movement practices, deriving from and in association with fundamentals of specific somatic or 'protosomatic' (Brown 2015, see Chapter 2.I.B) practice exercises. The *starfish* derives from the Bartenieff - Laban lineage; the *roll down* from the Klein technique lineage. For example, in the starfish or X position, the body is prone, with the hip joints and shoulders girdle completely relaxed; the body is totally opened as in the iconic figure of the *Vitruvian Man* by Leonardo Da Vinci (approx. 1490) and released to the ground. From this position it starts to roll toward the foetal position and then opens in the X again, before again going back to the foetal curl and rolling on one side, followed by exploring different levels and speed. The rolling down starts from a vertical position, with the feet in a parallel position under the pelvis and slowly, slowly, vertebra by vertebra, the spine rolls down, allowing a full stretch of the back muscle chain (spine and ischium femoral muscles).

The *warm-up* reveals itself to be the main moment where practices of such sequence movements as spirals and circles of the chest, knees hips, weight transfer appear. For instance, starting from the X position mentioned above, the body starts to roll initiating the movement from different parts such as arms, legs, knees, and with different speeds. Often, this all starts from a warming up of the feet with a massage, a common practice to begin a class. Furthermore, the practices and the exercise proposed as warm-up also

included a mix of release-based and yoga exercises, such as the ‘diamond pose’, ‘cat stretch’, ‘cobra position’, and ‘happy-child’ position.

During the given movement sequences and exploration, and warm-up a wide but specific range of *physical and imagery suggestions* is given such as ‘feeling the sitting bones’, or ‘feeling a stretch in the psoas’ as in Agis’ SRT classes, in Jauregui movement explorations or in Aris’ morning warming up classes.

II.B.4.d. On the Position of the Choreographer/Practitioner

In each situation, the choreographer and teacher were reacting and situating themselves in various ways and forms. This depended on the rules that they were following each time and on what they wanted to stress. Following my observation, they are positioning themselves in the practices as follows.

Choreographers and teachers *give physical and verbal indications*, in order to direct the work both in the class and in the choreographic process. Sometimes, they accompanied the verbal indications with *tactile feedback through a physical touch* along a sense of guiding. At times *the teacher practices the exercises with the dancers* and students following them with visual demonstrations and verbal instructions, similarly to some martial arts (for example as in tai chi). Drawing from these first data outcomes, I gathered different kinds of notes, information, and audio recordings which are thematically analysed below.

III. The Process of Data Analysis: A Thematic Investigation

As an analytic methodology, I have chosen thematic investigation. As Braun and Clarke (2006), suggest, thematic analysis is the process of identifying patterns or themes within qualitative data. Since my fieldwork was based mainly on qualitative research, thematic analysis is used to focus on structuring themes within the collected data.

Scientist Michael Murphy, cited in Sarah Reed's PhD dissertation (Reed 2011: 68), published in the book *The Future of the Body: Explorations into the Further Evolution of Human Nature* (1992), arising from research into seven different somatic practices. Murphy (introduced in Chapter 1.V) lists thirteen characteristics common to seven somatic practices as follows:

Murphy's Outcomes of Seven Specific Somatic Practices
• sensory and kinaesthetic awareness
• control of autonomic processes
• efficient modulation of sensory input
• sensory motor coordination
• the articulation and coordination of particular muscle groups
• grace and efficiency of posture, carriage, and movement
• new patterns of movement
• flexibility of facial and gestural expression
• general relaxation as well as the relaxation of particular body parts during complex behaviours
• recuperation from stress

• vitality
• awareness and control of emotions and mental processes
• sensory, kinaesthetic, emotional, and intellectual pleasure

(Murphy in Reed 2011: 68)

I am not pursuing the same analysis, but I identify analogous and correlated concepts derived from different perspectives. Murphy's chart serves as a model for this research for how he has extrapolated similar concepts from different somatic practices. For my research, it is a useful example to understand how to extrapolate specific contents from somatic practices (as reported in the detailed charts in Appendix C). As a background for extrapolating these contents I also used key concepts established in Chapter 2.II.A ('body-mind entity' and 'body schema', 'functions', 'touch', 'journey', 'agency', and 'imagery'). The key concepts have been useful in analysing the content explained below, which specifically derive from Appendix C. In Appendix C there is one chart for each choreographer and practitioner and the information is divided into categories which inform the following thematic analysis.

III.A. Living Understanding of Somatics: Comparisons of Somatic Concepts

This first section explores somatics within the understanding of the overall fieldwork and how somatics has been framed by different artists and in different contexts.

When I was discussing her creative process with Agis and her path inside somatics practices, she affirmed that from a somatically informed perspective, 'imagery creation, language, landscapes all come in the body, on different/multiple layers of understanding' (Agis 2016). Agis is speaking of the somatics perspective also as a multiplicity of layers, as a structure with different levels, a structure which it is possible

to access from its inside perspective. This is clearly visible for instance in how she constructs the warming-up exercises: the gradual access from the surfaces of the body, from the skin to the articulation of the bones.

For example, when she teaches SRT she proposes an exercise in pairs, where one individual — person A — moves and articulates the body of another person — person B. Before starting the manipulation process, person A prepares the body of person B through soft tissue massage and joint releasing movements. Focusing on the choreography, for example she directs the attention of her dancers both to the big external structures and to the 'essence of the structure', which is for instance each subtle movement and small sequence inside.

When I met dance artist, teacher Alexander, I became involved in how she is developing an ethos of somatic learning, enquiry and research which opens new possibilities to 'research choreographically through the body not only conceptually' (Alexander 2016). Interestingly, she offers a new possible understanding of what we could define as somatics. Starting from Thomas Hanna's definition, 'the field which studies the soma: namely, the body as perceived from within by first-person perception' (see Chapter 2.II.A), she opened the first-person singular perception (I) to the first plural person perception (we), thus enlarging the definition. With this openness, the body perceived by 'we', rather than 'I', the focus moves from the single individual to an enlarged community, as for instance the process of togetherness in *Shouting Out Loud* discussed below in section III.B.

A contextual direction of perspective is pursued by German choreographer Schad. She has been touched by the capacity of the 'attention to the self in relation to the world and

the other' (Schad 2016). Similarly to Alexander, Schad refers to somatics as an enlarged possibility to be in common. After her training as a classical ballerina, and work as a dancer for Vandekeybus' company, Schad encountered somatics thanks to the work of Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen. Although, when asked about a possible definition of somatics, she preferred not to provide one because this rational modality would enter too much in the 'brain modality', somatics has influenced the way Schad constructs her choreographic pieces (as discussed in Chapter 5). Schad considers movement as what informs the form, deriving this concept from Cohen's movement discovery in Body-Mind Centering (Schad 2016).

Other participants were willing to share their definitions of somatics. For example, Italian dancer and choreographer Giannotti, long term collaborator of British choreographer Rosemary Butcher, defines somatics as 'the capacity of leading the consciousness in listening for the perception' (Giannotti 2016). During conversation with Azpillaga, teacher, former company member and close collaborator of Vandekeybus, he defined somatics as the 'perception of what the body is doing', 'a special consciousness of the body in the space' (Azpillaga 2017) from the perspective of the dance artist. Azpillaga stresses the influence of perception and proprioception as meaningful and essential tools for understanding how the body moves in relation both to the inner feelings and outer environmental circumstances.

In line with Hanna's definition of somatics, for the Italian somatic practitioner and director of the course of study in Body-Mind Centering in Italy, Gloria Desideri (2013) — who I have met in different occasions during my BMC training — somatics derives from the word soma, that is the body capable of perceiving itself. Thanks to this capacity, people are discovering new possibilities and foster new potentialities.

Referring to the previous notes and charts, it is possible to summarize somatics as:

- somatics perspective as a multiplicity of layers, as a structure with different levels, a structure where is possible to access its inside;
- necessity for a perspective including the first plural person perception (we) beyond the singular person perception (I);
- 'the capacity of leading the consciousness in listening for the perception';
- somatics could be considered as the 'perception of what the body is doing', 'a special consciousness of the body in the space'.

Hanna's definition, focused on the 'I-experience', has been enlarged, from the singular person sensation to the relation with the world and the other. This revised perspective includes the assumption that the singular perception is always in relation and connected to the outside circumstances. On one side it has made it possible to accept the individual position in regard to this world, and on the other, to create relations within the world: how close could I stay to myself while staying in relation to the world?

III.B Perception, Consciousness and Awareness

As pointed out by Reed (2011), the development of somatics, awareness and augmented consciousness and perception have played a critical role in dance. Hanna (1977: 50) proposes that somatic practitioners and educators usually 'tend to see consciousness, not as an abstract mind, but as a potent neurophysiological function for controlling the body' (1977: 50). Consciousness and perception are not only a focus of somatics but also of interest in the fields of philosophy, neuroscience, and psychology. What we could understand with awareness is the individual capability to perceive, feel and being conscious of different events and on various levels. Following Foster (2010: 8),

awareness ‘of the body’s positions and movements’ is a specific meaning provided by kinaesthesia or proprioception.

Perception and consciousness are two of the major concepts deriving from the data analysis in general. These are in line with the idea of linguist and philosopher Julia Kristeva's ‘subject in progress’ and with that of the dance theorist Hubert Godard (both quoted in Reynolds 2007) who conceives the dancing body in terms of the way in which it organizes intensity and intentionality’ (Reynolds 2007: 13).

As the German philosopher Walter Benjamin argues:

> It is quite significant that our own body is inaccessible in so many ways: we cannot see our face, our back, our head - the most elegant part of our body - we cannot lift ourselves up with our own hands, cannot embrace ourselves (…). Thus it is essential that our body metamorphose us in the moment of pure perception.
>
> (Benjamin cited in Brandstetter and Voelckers 2000:14)

Thus, perception activates the conscious being and it involves all our body-mind connections.

Recently many studies have been directed on this specific theme, and the work of dance philosopher and scholar Erin Manning is highly relevant in order to understand some aspects of this specific process:

> Perception infolds thoughts in the making. It does not reflect the world, it ingathers its relational fact into a feeling for its future infolding. […] Perception is the force for the world’s infinite unfolding.
>
> (Manning 2009: 80-81)

In her words, perception became the principal instrument of enquiry, not only as a passive means of knowledge but also an active selector of feelings which become

actions. In this light, an increased possibility of creative tools is given to the facility of perception: not only the capability of perceiving/ sensing, in this sense 'infold' as enveloping, but furthermore the possibility of creating and re-creating, and unfolding as developing.

Perception is not a spontaneous means that each individual has, but rather a specific capability that could be developed in diverse processes, such as during movement or somatic classes or creative choreographic processes. Perception, as the individual capacity of sensing, stimulates the developing of both consciousness, the capability of reflecting on the facts perceived, and of awareness, the prompt ability to re-act. These three characteristics situate the individual organism in a specific context. They are deeply interconnected with each other and deal with the possibility for the individual to enter into contact with the outside world. Furthermore, for this research, I consider perception in the light of Maurice Merleau-Ponty:

> Perception is not a science of the world, it is not even an act, a deliberate taking up of a position; it is the background from which all acts stand out, and is presupposed by them.
>
> (Merleau-Ponty 2002: xi)

Perception is considered as a background information field.

In relation to this specific fieldwork research and findings, it is interesting how perception and awareness are being sought and reached in the practices I observed. A similar condition used both for creating a piece and during the somatic practice is the *necessity of making choices all the time and taking individual and collective responsibility*. For instance, in his dancers' training Jauregui (2017) enhances the constant individual capability of the dancers to choose directions, points of touch, timing of the movements, modulating their use of speed and strength energy.

A specific requirement of these practices is *respect*: referring to self-respect and respect for the other in somatic practices; in this sense Alexander (2016) speaks of ethos, and Agis (2016) of 'ethosofy' — a specific philosophy of the ethos — which is differentiated from ethics by its intrinsic use in somatic practices. For instance, respect is understood as a deep sensing of the individual and external space. In my observation, I noticed that Agis, in *Shouting Out Loud* for example, involves the dancers in developing a common understanding of feeling each other in the space to start or finish specific movement sequences together. The sequences are not defined by a precise external timing but by a precise choice made together by the dancers.

In the body and in the movement there is an attitude to perception of different layers: Agis (2016) contextualises this concept with her approach to SRT processes and her creative work, highlighting how the internal paths serve as a substratum for external creative output. The dancer's body-mind preparation is directly connected to the 'atmospheric landscapes' (Agis 2016) that are proposed in the choreography. For atmospheric landscapes we could consider specific ambiences the choreographer strives to develop. On a different level, as remarked by Desideri (2013), in the Body-Mind Centering work, the body is seen as its different systemic layers (bones, organs, cells, lymphatic system…), where the structure is always more than one, which could be the skeletal structure, the blood structure with its inside of micro components such as cells, or the ligament structure.

Physical and mental imagery are used to change and improve the awareness and the quality of movement: examples include phrases such as 'diving from the water' (Fieldnotes 2017); 'how my breath supports my movement' (Jauregui 2017); 'my body creates the tension, my body releases the tensions' (Jauregui 2017). These are

expressions where the image gives a vision of a possible movement, and furthermore imagery is a means for passing on a specific body-mind status.

Generally speaking, within the practices observed, there is a *great attention and focus on the breath* and how the breath could influence the spatial position and placement of the dancer's body; breath helps to position the bodies in the space because it increases dancers' awareness, strengthening their physical presence. For example, Schad used specific breath exercises deriving from Qi Qong in her warm-up training.

As the above concepts make clear, many features are understandably close to those in somatic practices. However, it has been highlighted how much the the training exercises help develop perceptive awareness.

III.C Encounter

Each encounter with the practitioners who participated in this research was a unique process for understanding and having the possibility to experience different approaches and concepts. As the word 'encounter' arose many times, it is useful to investigate what encounter means in these practices (during the exercises, during the choreographic practice). In a context of individual agency, a precise and specific touch is the very first means of entering directly in relation with the other. Somatics and other creative systems aim for a creation of new systems: the encounter of two people together can create a new and different system. Each of the practitioners discovered somatics within an encounter. Deducing from my previous observations and from what emerged from the practices and fieldwork I extrapolated the following individual meaning for encounter. For Agis, encounter is expressed through the voices, the touch and in the dancing. Alexander sees in the encounter a specific ethos for creating a system of

knowledge. For Vandekeybus encounter means a specific process of taking care of each individual dance/theatre artist. Jauregui understands encounter as guiding the dancers towards a common contact/movement practice. For Azpillaga encounter is self-awareness. In the case of Schad encounter happens in the continuously challenging ways the bodies interact with each other and her private encounter with somatics (especially BMC and Feldenkrais); in other words, encounter is a model to re-educate themselves. Finally, for Giannotti encounter is an extended possibility of a feedback system.

III.D Tools for an Embodied Dance Practice

During the overall fieldwork, diverse elements in the dance and movement practices emerged, highlighting similarities between different choreographic ambiences and situations. This section highlights some practices that appear similarly in the practices of somatically informed classes (such as in Agis'class) and those that do not (such as in Jauregui's class). In the general observation of training directly informed by somatics and not, some specific exercises, practices and verbal suggestions and tasks frequently occurred. I refer to an 'embodied dance practice' to highlight the practices that help in making the dancers aware of their actions in time-space and in relation to the others.

The following list sets out *common practices observed* regarding the *physical movement patterns and sequences (with the associated situation provided in squared brackets: I specify 'not somatics': for those classes/trainings/creative situations that are not informed directly by somatics, and with 'somatics': those informed by somatics):*

- *Warming up of the feet with a massage*: this is the first exercise to raise awareness of the outside surface of the body, to make the body weight spread more easily and to have

the perception of groundedness [observed in Jauregui class / not somatics and Desideri practice/ somatics].

- *Different yoga positions, stretching, breathing exercises*: all of these movement patterns are 'used' to prepare the body-mind as a full organism capable of responding to different stimuli both physical and mind-engaging [Ultima Vez training / not somatics].
- '*X position' and rolling* (use of starfish position): practice exercise to spread the body fully on the ground, giving the impulse to easily move towards and across the floor [Ultima Vez training / not somatics and Schad / somatics].

Referring to the *verbal indications of the teacher / choreographer on how to improve a physical movement*, the most recurring have been:

- *'Engage your eyes'*: eyes are a fully acknowledged means for giving and receiving motor feedback in the space; for example, Jauregui used to direct the attention of his dance students to engage their eyes to make them aware both of the use of the space and to increase their presence during a highly technical floor work movement sequence [Ultima Vez / not somatics and Agis / somatics].
- *'Use the fall for the rebound'*: the falling — a condition where the body is muscularly released — as a possibility to enhance the rise; this request was used in different moments of my fieldwork. For example, it was a specific suggestion given by Jauregui to his dance students during a rolling sequence on the floor and he was stressing how a passive action, such as the fall, could transform itself into an active one, the rebound. At the same time, it is an underlying principle of somatics, when the body is released from muscular tensions [Ultima Vez / not somatics].
- *'Move your centre from the impulse'*: to give attention not only to muscular and skeletal (joints) movements, but the flow of energy to the possibility of moving using the arising of an impulse [Ultima Vez / not somatics and Schad / somatics].

- '*How my breath could support the movement'*: the breath is seen and perceived as an effective agent in the movement [Ultima Vez / not somatics, Agis and Schad /somatics].
- *'While dancing I am taking decisions'*: paying attention to the faculty of choices while dancing; this is a mental and a physical faculty [Ultima Vez /not somatics].
- *'Working on the connection between the movements'*: the ways the movements are interconnected could be multiple [Ultima Vez / not somatics].
- '*The body creates the tension, body releases the tension'*: faculty of the body-mind to change inner physical conditions [Ultima Vez/ not somatics].

Starting from an inner focus, the somatic approach also means giving attention and focus to the environment where we as bodies are living, placed, and positioned. The request to open the gaze outward comes from the vital necessity to enter in the relations and act with or against the surroundings, the other and consequently the political organization of the society. In this perspective the body displaces itself, moving from the position of subject, referring to Manning's work (2009), to that of the verb, enabling continuous possibilities to act, re-act and re-enact, as an independent agent.

IV. Conclusion

This chapter presents fieldwork results central to the argument of this thesis. I summarised fieldwork carried out with choreographers, dance artists and somatic practitioners in London, Brussels, and Venice, at different times and in different contexts. Furthermore, I explained the methodology in relation to the fieldwork (II.A), using an ethnographic approach and thematic analysis, exploring the practices of specific artists through interviews, observations, and my own practical experience as a somatic practitioner. Through empathy I could relate myself to the dancers' work and enter into contact with their practices. Thanks to kinaesthetic empathy, I could transport

and transmit to paper and words the movement practices, strategies, and feelings/emotional states I encountered in the rehearsal room.

This chapter offers analysis of specific parts of the fieldwork focused on questions and issues deriving from observation of classes, rehearsals and from interviews (all sections in B.II). I considered a macro and micro level of analysis. The macro-level of analysis is represented by what I defined as 'working strategies', namely the various situations experienced during the fieldwork: 'methodologies of creating or re-staging a piece'; 'the somatically informed education perspective in a dance class context'; 'specific practices for using the body'; and 'the position of the teacher/practitioner in relation to the other dancers/practitioners/students'.

Thematic analysis, as the micro-level of analysis, has revealed some similarities in practices, ways of communication and training between dance artists who are strongly connected to somatics and others who are less so. These points in common have been presented in the previous four thematic sections (III.A-D): *living understanding of somatics*; *perception*, *consciousness*, *awareness*; *encounter*; and *tools for an embodied dance practice*. In understanding the extent of the interconnection of somatics and creative practices, a similarity of modality in the warming up exercises emerged, with similarities in ways of deepening into the movement materials, using perception, awareness and consciousness, and an analogue way to approach the 'other' through a kinaesthetic encounter.

Although this study is not focused on the training but on the process of choreography, it can be argued that there is a very profound connection between the diverse kinds of rehearsals and dance practices observed above, and what could be commonly

understood within the umbrella of somatics, creating a common ground for discussion. This analysis has shown that in precise circumstances preparation for choreography and somatic practices are similar to certain extent (as for the physical indications given, and visual imagery used), although I have not investigated somatics as a therapy or well-being treatment, rather focusing on its creative contribution. In their creative processes and somatically informed educational processes, even though these practitioners and dance artists have different backgrounds, they employ similar means such as the use of voice, touch, imagery, and movement patterns and their aims may differ from the pure practice of somatics.

This first analysis reveals that the approaches are different to a certain extent. The main concern emerged around the concept of process; even if a process implies an evolution from a beginning to an end, with a general structure. In the specific field of somatics, we cannot speak of an end of the process itself, because the process never ends, but only of different possible continuations. In contrast, in choreography or a conventionally structured dance class, the 'end' is an appropriate requirement as a reaching for the result of the overall work. The other major concern is the one of time as a temporal duration: time could be considered more as a basic element of the final creative production (each creative work has a specific time/duration), and at the same time, it could be evaluated as a specific element of the somatic process of discovery, as it is a fundamental issue of the body-mind research. I will expand on these arguments in the next chapter.

One of the problems identified in this chapter is the major difficulty in clarifying and defining what is meant by particular terms within specific somatic and dance practices. The language used can sometimes be seen as problematic because it is employed in a

very personal and figurative way by dancers, choreographers, and somatic practitioners, so is never neutral, and it is relevant to recognise this in relation to the act of analysis. Another complication was the possibility to transfer the kinaesthetic tension to a writing modality. The last great challenge has been to set up models of analysis with only a few models of reference in the field, since models of analysis are necessary to make the material accessible to everyone (Reed's model was a very useful example).

Whilst recognising its complexity, the issue of how somatics and dance/choreography are interrelated has been addressed in this chapter through the processes of analysis presented above. Resonances emerged between different exercises and practices to make the border between somatics, somatically informed practices, and choreography a subtle one. Analysis of creative choreography sessions follows to further develop these subtleties. This chapter introduced fieldwork analysis; the next chapter develops analysis of the fieldwork in choreography and somatics, while seeking insights into dance-somatics within a choreographic context.

Chapter 5: Choreography and Somatics: Fieldwork Research Analysis

I. Introduction

The previous chapter focused on examining the results of the fieldwork as they revealed an understanding of somatics in relation to specific observed training practices. This chapter investigates the correlations between somatics and choreography in order to explore the methodologies, ethics, and aesthetics of choreographic process and somatics which originated from the fieldwork. Through observation of rehearsals, workshops and trainings, and a dialogical approach with ten interviews and conversations with dance and somatics practitioners in the field, I gathered various perspectives in order to position them into the context of a somatics critique. I was looking for the presence of specific elements in the choreographic and rehearsal processes that could refer to somatically informed practices and elements.

This investigation on the influence of somatic knowledge and the creation of a diverse corporeality through a physicality within European contemporary choreography as seen in Chapter 3, contends that from the 1980s there was a shift of focus in some choreographic structures. The shift can be seen for instance in the works of Wim Vandekeybus and Gaby Agis (Chapter 3.II.D -III.C-IV.C), even though their choreographic methods and aims are substantially different. As we have seen, on one side Agis represents a case of trained dancer and choreographer with a somatically informed background, and on the other Vandekeybus, without a former solid training in dance, researched through the body new choreographic possibilities. However, these choreographers are particularly relevant in this context because they used a released informed movement and/or a somatic approach (for a definition of these terms see Chapter 1.I and for the concept of Release see Chapter 2.IV) in a theatrical context, as

seen in Chapter 3.II.D. Specifically, a somatic approach in their body in this context means that the dancers and performers trained themselves through practices that enhance their capability to react to movement on stage in the 'real', meaning in relation to the 'here and now' and in relation to the decision making of the performative action, in a choreography where set movements and improvisation work together.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, one of the choreographers analysed here, Vandekeybus, is not directly or primarily using somatic practices in his creative works. Even though his approach is not part of the accepted umbrella of somatic practices nor has a holistic purpose, he employs psychophysical exercises and practices that have similarities with the somatic field previously explored (Chapter 2.II).

When I started my research, as explained previously in Chapter 1.I.-II and Chapter 3.II.B.2 my attention was driven by the work of Vandekeybus *What the Body Does Not Remember* (1987). In this production, the movement vocabulary refers to an instinctive and 'wild' body, seemingly deeply informed by agents of tactile feedback, contact, physical reactions, all qualities that could reference to a somatic knowledge background, where the integrity of the body-mind is visible in the performed actions (see Chapter 3.V.B.1).

In defining the role of instinct in *What the Body…* Vandekeybus claims:

> *What the Body Does Not Remember* is a performance that shows that you also have to rely on your instincts onstage. Your instinct wants to protect you against calamity. Sometimes we chose to offer resistance to that instinct, by seeking out danger. Every moment was supposed to feel like it was the last'
>
> (Vandekeybus and Boudens 2016: 74)

We could relate the bond to instinct to the fact that Vandekeybus has not received any professional dance training (as discussed in Chapter 3.V.B), and this also reflects on the

difficulty he has to ‘distinguish between the technique and what comes about instinctively’ (Bleeker et al. 2002: 279). Therefore, Vandekeybus prefers to work with dancers who ‘possess a certain intuitive capacity to adapt themselves to different circumstances’ (Bleeker et al. 2002: 280) than have an excellent technique.

Interestingly in *What the Body…*one of the elements from which generates the impacting instinctual movements are the bricks, in other words a theatrical prop, an external element inserted both to create a specific movement quality but also to delineate a dramaturgical passage in the choreography. But how did he start to use them? Vandekeybus recalls the starting reference for the bricks:

> I once showed my dancers a photograph of a woman who is throwing her child to safety out of a burning building. You can see the woman in the window, the man downstairs who is ready to catch it, and the child hovering somewhere in between. (…) I said: ‘we have to make this’. That is when we started throwing bricks in *What The Body Does Not Remember*.
> (Vandekeybus and Boudens 2016: 169)

Thus, Vandekeybus transformed the child into the brick.

As previously explained, the throwing of the bricks on one side are training the dancers to use their instinct and on the other represent a dramaturgical reference. As explained by Vandekeybus ‘shock and danger were depicted by the throwing stones; these elements may live on in certain tics or impulses’ (Bleeker et al. 2002: 284).

My questions at that time were: how do the dancers react to the physical contact and movement in time and space? How did they prepare themselves for those actions? How did they improve their awareness? In observing the dancers’ bodies at that time, I was intrigued to understand how the body, in response to stimuli, could construct a choreographic moment.

When looking for connections within choreography and somatics, I initially thought about which kind of instruments that would facilitate a possible movement determined by instinct, intended as the tendency to act following specific innate behavioural patterns and ‘as innate tendency of actions or as inherited combination of reflexes’ (Kuo 1921). For instance, analysis points to how ‘forgotten instincts’ and ‘the forgotten reflexes in our body’ (Buzzi 2014: 10) relate to Vandekeybus’ choreographic material. To what extent does somatics prepare the performer’s body to deal with a choreographic process? How much could somatics define itself as an instrument for the creative process? This chapter investigates processes in the case studies around these questions. Furthermore, I investigate the position of the performer in the choreographic process, considering them within a collaborative relationship and their contribution to the choreographic development, their capability to understand the process through their agency and leadership, and inter-subjectivity. In addition, I consider the choreographic process itself through the keywords of process, authorship, reconstruction, and realisation of a final product. Before proceeding to summarise the chapter’s structure, I clarify why I sometimes use the term ‘performer’ associated to dancers in Vandekeybus’ work. Even though most members of his company are dancers or performers with a dance informed background, Vandekeybus collaborates with actors or visual artists on stage (as the work *Hands Do Not Touch Your Precious*, 2020, with the visual artist Olivier de Sagazan), thus I am using the term ‘performer’ to include a variety of people (dancers, visual artists, actors) who participate in the performance.

This chapter reconsiders my methodology, the main hypotheses and research questions, introducing the corelation with direct or indirect somatically informed practices (in section II). The two main case studies are briefly introduced (III), namely Gaby Agis and Wim Vandekeybus and I investigate my fieldwork with their companies. In

particular I speak of Agis' *Shouting Out Loud*: *Reconstructed* (III.A.1) and Agis' *Close Stream*: *Reconstructed* (III.A.2); the days spent with the rehearsals of Vandekeybus' *Mockumentary of a Contemporary Saviour* (III.B.1-4) and I offer a comparative analysis of the two choreographers' work (III.B.5). My third case study on the work of Isabelle Schad is introduced (C.) The chapter concludes with an analysis of the three case studies.

II. Main Hypotheses, Research Questions and Methodology

This chapter follows Chapter 4 in the methodological approach employed, using fieldwork conducted through qualitative research methods — interviews with somatic practitioners, dancers, and choreographers — and attendance at practical workshops and performing in one of the pieces. The following is also informed by viewings of contemporary dance rehearsal processes, performances, and archival footage of dance works from the 1980s.

One of the main hypotheses of this study, is that somatically informed dance practices (Brown 2011) had a major impact on the European choreographic scene in the 1980s (see Chapter 1.IV, Chapter 2. I.B-II.E, Chapter 3.II.D); following this idea specific choreographic processes were and currently are influenced by somatics on different levels. It is possible to speak of 'direct' and 'indirect' levels of influence. By 'direct' level, I mean the use of specific somatic techniques — such as Skinner Releasing Technique (SRT) in the case of Agis, Alexander, Body-Mind Centering in the case of Schad — and concepts — such as imagery, anatomical imagery, touch — to construct the choreography, where specific somatic strategies are consciously used by choreographers to create and organise the scene. In contrast, the 'indirect' level uses strategies that appear to be a combination of dance and somatics — as in the cases of

Vandekeybus, Iñaki Azpillaga, German Jauregui, but they are used only as a reference and as means to explore the choreographic work. Within the 'indirect' approach, somatics could be seen not only as a holistic way to perceive the body but offers ways of engaging with critiques of the creative process itself. According to Judith Butler (2002):

> Critique is always a critique of some instituted practice, discourse, episteme, institution, and it loses its character the moment in which it is abstracted from its operation and made to stand alone as a purely generalizable practice.
> (Butler 2002: 212)

Following this vision, my intent is to abstract somatics from its commonly used context and use its intrinsic mechanism (seen Chapter 2. II.A.1-5 and Chapter 4.III.A) in order to refer to it as a 'generalizable practice', in this case in the context of choreography. In other words, I am extrapolating for comparison concepts from somatics and from the practices/rehearsals/performances I observed and analysed. Explicitly I maintain focus on how to explore somatics in choreography through three choreographer case studies. My research is not a global analysis of somatics (even though it is reflected on in Chapter 2) but represents an investigation of case studies of specific choreographers working with specific circumstances of re-enacting older works and creation of a new piece.

The research questions investigated in the following chapter are:

- How can one enact choreographic scores and concepts without losing a more internal physical connection? To what extent do different choreographic and aesthetic approaches, such as the ones of Agis and Vandekeybus, deal with the body-mind relation?
- How do the dancers move in response to verbal, written, sound or visual tasks?

- How does the dancer's somatic training affect the inter-relationship between choreographers and dancers? And, on the other hand, how is a choreographer's somatic awareness manifest in the way they direct dancers?

III. Introduction and Frameworks of the Case Studies

As previously explored in Chapters 1 and 4, the main case studies of this research are Gaby Agis and Wim Vandekeybus while Isabelle Schad offers a genealogical connection. Although Agis' and Vandekeybus' time frame and theatrical settings in the European context of dance in the 1980s present some similarities, like the search for a new dramaturgy in the contents and in the use of the body (as seen in Chapter 3.II.C and 3.II.D), they are quite diverse in their research methodologies, creative processes, and respective choreographic results. From a certain point of view, they could even be considered contrasting. In Agis' case we can notice poetic, sensitive, time expanded gestures and movements, together with more rapid increasing of pace. In Vandekeybus we often see an almost continuous breath rhythm, virtuosic and high energy movements and sometimes the feeling that he looks for creating a 'surprise' moment for the audience. The third case, Schad, is a choreographer, with a background in ballet and relevant experience as a dancer with Vandekeybus. Schad has created her own work since the 1990s, informing it through somatic practices. For my research, Agis and Vandekeybus represent the main case studies of specific uses of theatrical methodologies and somatics practices from the 1980s, whereas Schad is a choreographer from the 1990s who combines somatics and choreography as a legacy from the previous time. In this light, Schad exemplifies the integration of dance and somatics, not only in the training but also in the choreographic result. For instance, in her work *Der Bau* (2014, explored below in III.C), a work based on upper torso

movement repetitions with a textile, we can notice some correlation with the continuously recreation of the cells (see this chapter III.C).

Furthermore, as explained by Jenny Roche (2009), speaking on the works of choreographers such as John Jasperse, Christina Gaigg, Liz Roche, Jodi Melnick and Rosemary Butcher,

> Each choreographer had a personal working methodology and a specific creative objective that shaped the choreographic movement for the piece.
>
> (Roche 2009: 2)

Roche highlights to what extent the individual agency of the choreographer differentiates the movements and, moreover, she relevantly also underlines the agency of each dancer and the expertise and body-movement knowledge that he/she carries (Roche 2009: viii).

Two additional factors are significant to this analysis. The first is that the body of the dancer is always a stratification or layering of various training and choreographic experiences as an 'accumulation of new patterns of embodiment that remain incorporated as choreographic traces' (Roche 2009: viii). The second point is that each diverse choreographer's movement decisions have the 'the potential to impact deeply on the dancer by altering older motor patterns and responses' (Roche 2009: 35). This means that creative research in movement always influences the individual sense of embodiment of each dancer.

However, these case studies represent three different choreographers and their unique conscious or unconscious correlations with somatically informed practices: I define the first two case studies as clear examples of direct and indirect choreographic approaches

with somatics from the 1980s. Specifically I define Agis as a ‘direct’ one, Vandekeybus’ as ‘indirect’ and Schad’ as an example of genealogy (see Chapter 2) and direct use of somatics from the 1990s. Genealogy in this case is considered as a model of enquiry, without searching for the origins, or looking for a linear development or a subsequent time, but rather searching for discursive formations (Foucault 1969), through which it is possible to create different categorisations of concepts.

It is relevant to underline that the choreographic works that I witnessed or to take part in (as in the case of Schad) were the following: two reconstructions of historical pieces, in the case of Agis; the creation of a new piece, in Vandekeybus’ case; and a re-staging of an earlier work, in the case of Schad. Thus, my analysis deals with two pieces restaged from the 1980s (*Close Stream* 1983 and *Shouting Out Loud* 1984), one completely new dance from 2017 (*Mockumentary of Contemporary Saviour* 2017) and one relatively new dance from 2015, restaged in 2016 (*Collective Jumps*).

This means further differences in the approaches of the choreographers, and in mine in observing their works. Even though the temporal distance in Agis’ case was not really perceived because of the ‘still fresh’ nature of the contents of her two pieces, I must acknowledge the specific era when they were born. Interestingly Agis was not working to reconstruct the original work; she was more interested in creating again new situations in order to rework the ‘old material’. Vandekeybus was in a specific and delicate phase of creating new materials and assembling ideas for his new piece (at the time of my fieldwork were left a few weeks before the premiere). Schad was passing onto us a work she set previously on other groups, for which she constructed entirely new sequences and adapted it to a site-specific location (Palazzo Grimani, a Venetian historical palace).

III.A.1 *Shouting Out Loud*: Reconstructed

Agis and her biography are introduced in Chapter 3.V.A, and here I present the two reconstructions from the 1980s she made in 2014 and in 2016, which constitute my fieldwork materials supporting the further analysis of the correlations between choreography and somatic practices.

The first reconstruction I witnessed was *Shouting Out Loud*[61], a piece from 1984 reconstructed at the University of Roehampton in September 2014. On this occasion the cast was composed of a total of 13 dancers, as the original number of performers, (including Natasha Beauchamp, Joy Esaya, Rachel Gildea, Jessica Loeb, Jessica Murray, Rosalie Wahlfrid, and Megan Elizabeth Williams), some from the original cast (Lucy Fawcett, Mary Prestidge) and the live musician and composer Ana Da Silva and The Raincoats. There were extra dancers (Florence Peake, Susanna Recchia) and some Roehampton dance students and staff (Katja Nyqvist, Amaara Raheem). From this point, I should stress the differences in the cast's ages and experiences — whereas in the original version the performers were all in their twenties — and the ability of Agis to turn this into a strong positive point instead of a weakness. Each day, before beginning the reconstruction process, Agis gave a SRT class in which I participated as well together with the dance group. Sensing, feeling, liberating the movement and a complete sense of ease and comfort emerged. Her reconstruction process was in a sense a re-doing of the piece as I will expand on below (III.A.1). Dancers acted as if they were doing the piece for the very first time. Interestingly, two of the dancers chosen for this reconstruction, Recchia and Peake, are dancers and practitioners with a strong somatics background. In particular, after her graduation from Trinity Laban

[61] *Shouting Out Loud* has been restaged several times with different casts, in different contexts and countries until 2019. For more information please visit: http://www.gabyagis.com/shouting-out-loud.

conservatoire, Recchia followed a Foundation Course in Dance Movement Therapy at Goldsmiths University and obtained an MA in Dance and Somatic Well-being at University of Central Lancashire. She also follows a yearly practice with Andrea Olsen and Caryn McHose on the relation between the individual and the environment called Body&Earth. Besides her artistic path, Peake also trained in SRT with Agis (Moran 2010).

The idea to remake the piece happened thanks to a conversation taking place at Chisenhale with a collective of dancers in 2013. When she created it, back in the 1984, Agis was 24 years old and now she felt the need to redo it for its 30thanniversary. Agis affirms that she was able to re-enact the piece only at that point in time (in 2014) because her daughter was grown up and living away from home.

Shouting Out Loud derives its title from a song by the band The Raincoats of which Agis was a fan at that time. Their collaboration started when Agis wrote to them asking their permission to use that song for a dance. Then, the collaboration expanded, and Ana Da Silva and The Raincoats wrote the entire soundtrack of the piece (Agis 2015). Agis remembers that the dance was created on five Saturdays at the Riverside Studios for a performance for Dance Umbrella. This is a piece conceived for 13 female performers to celebrate female power; its main movement language is informed by a physicality that at that time ‘was radical’ and today ‘maybe less’ (Agis 2015), constituted of running, walking, and moving through visual imagery. Within the idea of ‘portraying the solitude’ but also ‘collectiveness’, that I expand on below, this work is contextualised in the political activism of those years, where collective responsibility was a considered issue. In this light this piece is a clear example of the response within dance to the 1980s in the U.K. Agis remembers that in that time you could live in London cheaply,

squatting, renting a dance studio for free or for little money, even though it was freezing, there was little emigration and a lot of activism and solidarity against the political economic cuts of Thatcherism (Agis 2015). As for many dances of that time, there isn't any recording or documentation available; Agis considers the archive material 'in her head', and through the bodies of the performers of the original cast.

The structure of the piece is a container where inside are improvisational sections that depend on mutual arrangement between the performers. Each physical detail is relevant, as for instance in the rolling down of the spine or when two bodies meet each other, keeping awareness in the relationship between people. Agis says that the key point is to 'see the person', as each person is important in this piece. For her, one of the questions at the basis of the reconstruction is 'how the time you live in impacts your way of creating' (Agis 2015).

Shouting Out Loud is a piece about collective responsibility (Agis 2016), understood both as the main theme and the choreographic approach. On the motivation that brought about the recent reconstruction, Agis explains:

> The 1980s were a period of great social and political unrest. Thatcherism was in full swing. The miners' strikes and the gay pride, anti-racist and feminist movements dominated the landscape. This provided the context and backdrop to artists' lives. Again, we live in turbulent and uncertain times. By reconstructing *Shouting Out Loud*, I am interested in discovering to what degree art reflects the times that we live in.
>
> (Agis 2018a)

Performing *Shouting Out Loud* requires a strong physical body-mind connection in order to manifest in a non-didactic way the social and political perspective the piece reflects and imparts, which Agis was concerned to transmit and to recreate with the dancers through the preparatory workshop based on SRT and improvisation exercises

on feeling and liberating the body. When I participated in one class, the first attention seemed oriented to the breath and how the breath influenced the spatial position and placement of the dancer's body; the focus on the breath helped to position the bodies in the space because the individual attention to the breath gave an augmented awareness to the dancer's body. Agis was conducting her dancers from the inside of their physical body structure to the outside into the choreographic structure. She was proposing specific somatic movement practices as the SRT to reach a specific released and receptive status (Agis 2015).

Agis draws attention quite often to perceive the breath as a source of movement. This is an ongoing process, happening during rehearsals and classes. Some of the language which she used in a class held at Independent Dance (2010) and which recurs in her teachings includes:

> (…) endless, perpetual motion…
> …perhaps you can have an image that the breath is like a wave…
> …you can explore different qualities of moving…
>
> (Agis 2010)

After the breath experience, she encourages the dancers to work with a partner, saying:

> (…) and I am going to take this one (referring to the hip joint) from my partner; I am going to find the bones and I am going to draw a circle, up to the waist take your time to move to rest…
>
> (Agis 2010)

One person was carefully tracing the external body structure path with the hands, starting from the hip joint and moving to the beginning of the rib cage, maintaining a gentle touch. The traced path helps the partner who receives the tactile feedback to increase his/her body's connection awareness.

In working with this new cast in 2014, as the first time that the piece was restaged after thirty years, one of the main concerns was to bring an 'old' performance to life. In explaining this process Agis said:

> (…) it's different, it's different, it will be different…
> how might would it be different for me, and when I know … it's something nice in the difference. But, within that difference you will feel the familiarity of this process, and hopefully…
>
> (Agis 2014)

With this concern, Agis shares with the dancers and observer her consciousness of creating a 'different piece' from the one of the 1980s, and she develops a way to make this old piece familiar to new dancers in a new process.

III.A.2 *Close Stream*: Reconstructed

The second reconstruction I witnessed is *Close Stream* (1983) which was Agis' first choreographic work when she was 23 years old. I observed it at Chisenhale Dance Space in May 2016, where I met again Agis and the dancer Eeva-Maria Mutka. At that time there were just the three of us in the Chisenhale space, and I remember the embracing atmosphere that was created. Even though Agis and Mutka were carefully reconstructing the work, they never let me feel an intruder. On the contrary, we discussed *Close Stream* multiple times and at a certain point I also helped them with the soundtrack.

In this work, Agis explores different states of feelings and experiments with various levels of energy: quietness, speed, anxiety and so on. The work is a blend of improvised and structured moments (Agis 2016).

> *Close Streams* is a duet originally choreographed and performed in 1983. It is a viscerally intense physical work in which the two performers run for a sustained period of time in circles.

(Agis 2018b: 1)

It was originally performed by Agis and Helen Rowsell.

As we can read in John Percival's review in *The Times*, the work was received very positively:

> The most striking work was a solo by Gaby Agis, which actually was meant as a duet but had to be adapted because of her partner's illness. She also chose to perform it not in the studio but on the flat roof, where she danced in a huge shallow pool of water. The capacity of the dance to survive such drastic changes and still look good is evidence of her imagination. Dressed in an old-fashioned underwear and sporty boots, she used a mixture of stomping and skipping, quick energy and stillness, eagerness and reserve, to convey both character and emotion.
>
> (Percival 1983, n.p.).

This description gives an indication of some of the characteristics that I analyse later, such as the theatrical presence and costumes and the use of a non-theatrical space. This review also reveals the strength of the piece itself, that was not influenced by the last-minute adaption from a duet to a solo, and the change of setting.

In the reconstruction Rowsell was substituted by Mutka. In 2016 the curator David Ward invited Agis to reconstruct *Close Streams* at the Turner Gallery (Margate, Kent) for a series of performances as part of *Seeing Round Corners*, a Turner Contemporary Gallery summer show. Critic Josephine Leask spoke about this reconstruction and the issues of the remaking:

> Revisiting a piece that you have created back in the past is an emotional and complex undertaking especially in the case of Close Streams, which was the first work that Agis made. She describes the challenges of recreating it: peeling back the layers of memory and association in the choreography, meeting the material again as an older woman with a changed body. Consequently she brings both enormous wisdom and vulnerability to the work.
>
> (Leask 2016)

As previously mentioned, Agis was accompanied in the process of reconstruction and on stage by Finnish performer Mutka, who is based in Wales. Mutka has a strong background in body-mind practices such as Mindfulness, Body and Earth, Touch Trust Programme/ Communication through Touch, and she is a collaborator of choreographer and somatic practitioner Miranda Tufnell and also co-directs the project *Somatic is…* at Penpynfarch, Carmarthenshire.

In order to reconstruct the piece, Agis and Mutka used some of the original choreographic notes from the 1980s. Sections of the handwritten script that I read during my fieldwork thank to Agis' availability are transcribed here with square brackets indicating indecipherable words:

> 1. Starting in darkness. Helen + I start slowly running in a circle. We increase the space slowly until it builds up a normal pace the lights come on. The speed reaches a peak and the slows back down again. Until we stop. Side by side facing audience.
>
> In between 1+2 stillness of standing and breathing.
>
> 2. Arms up both lifted by a contact touch. They explore the space plus each other. This leads the body to move behind, across, infinite of each other. Into a small lift, like flying, Helen over the top I'm lifting.
> 3. This lift slides down to the floor. One person going over the other. Small sketch as it gets further along the diagonal the crowding is reduced to slides along of the belly. A complete stop rest. Then Helen gets up.
> 4. [Helen] goes for a strong march, walk, in very direct pathway. She has long […] in which I move. Coming to overlap the timing. This continues until we've both standing.
> 5. The next […] is very small broken down movement. Letting go. It gets bigger and bigger. Into running and jumping. There's always a feeling of […] direction. Sketch builds up to being very fast, big loud, until a crash where I fall over Helen. Stop let it collapse.
> 6. We stand up to waltz for a while half way through the waltz the music comes on.
> 7. From the waltzing taking it in turns to point out on the other person very small specific contact points only using the hand (but all the surfaces) point out an ear, nose, foot, ad covering or pointing out that point of the body. Very purposely but not looking to the point away for it. Traveling along the back.
> 8. End of music and holding of last contact point.
>
> (Agis 1983: private notes)

These written score notes served as a fundamental track to reconstruct the dance, and Agis and Mutka referred to them to recreate the piece. I have annotated the movements and actions of the choreographic score observed from my direct observation of the rehearsals in May 2016, and compared to the original notes, they resulted in this following order:

- the dancers enter walking together, in short feminine dresses in a light material and waterproof boots;
- they run, creating repetitive circular trajectories and staying focussed on the intensity of their breath;
- they raise their arms/hands, interlacing them like a protest symbol;
- the dancers look for mutual support: walking on ‘all fours’, they search for some support points between their bodies; in this way, their bodies became interlaced;
- the physical action of touch between the two dancers became more intense; they start to touch different parts of their bodies with their hands, first very delicate and then in a very intense way;
- the touch intention is more physical, adding sounds, use of the voices, noisy breaths;
- when the physical action increases, the body also increases in intensity, energy, and sound of the body is getting louder;
- first they start to walk in circles, then they run, they touch themselves, and after Mutka runs into the circle, while Agis is still;
- they look for some contact points between the two and make them vibrate (hip joint, shoulders, small stomps);
- feet stomps on the ground increase and become more furious —the dancers beat the ground with their boots;

- the two dancers come together again in a moment of reconciliation with *Sunday Morning* by Lou Reed, which is the only music track used in the whole piece;
- the dancers explore different body parts of each other, and they start again to walk in the circle until they become still again, after one precise touch signal;
- after they pass through a range of different emotions, their facial expressions are different now — more relieved — and they go offstage;
- the piece has ended.

On this skeleton of the dance's physical actions, and observing the rehearsals in May 2016, I noted at least three working points where Agis was focussed. Italics are used below to highlight the aspects and themes, all taken from my fieldnotes. The first is that *Agis was clearly defining what structure means for her*: *'essence is the structure — there is a structure and an inside of the structure'* (Fieldnotes 2016). In Agis' work, a defined structure could enable dancers to develop diverse feelings and emotions; with 'structure' she initially refers to the overall/general scheme following specific time/space/movement patterns (see Chapter 4). 'Inside of the structure' refers to specific details of each movement sequence and the subtle subtext of individual dancers' movements. Secondly, *the figures of the circles repeat themselves in different moments* as if to point out that the choreography presents spatial and movement repetitions. Thirdly, *the original diagonal is reconfigured in another circle because of the spatial structure of the gallery exhibiting space which is rounded* (Fieldnotes 2016), showing that the original spatial structure of the choreography is adaptable.

On the same day, after this rehearsal, Agis gave some precise feedback to her partner in the enactment of the performance. Agis *is looking for the person inside-outside*, in other words *how the person/dancer is connecting her inside movement and feeling patterns to*

the outside spatial and choreographic indication. With this, Agis refers to the necessity for the dancer to enter in contact with the spatial context in a precise way. Furthermore, Agis is *looking for a synchronisation between the two performers*, with some movement patterns *in/ out of sync from the running*, namely she refers to the rhythmical approach and working to make it more specific and well-defined.

Once that the structure skeleton is clear, more work and care are now needed on adding and refining elements. This means that, after having reconstructed the overall structure of the dance piece, Agis now needs to work on specific physical and emotional details.

During the reconstruction that I witnessed, some concerns came up. For instance, some were specifically spatial connotations, while others were more focused on details regarding the performative gestures. I discuss concerns which Agis was overtly working towards, and aspects that arose from my personal observations, without necessarily being mentioned by Agis.

The following aspects were directly touched on by Agis. First of all, she was looking for maintaining a clear overall structure of the piece; once the structure is defined, such as sections, their lengths, their spatial organisation, the work of the emotions/feelings starts. Then, the search occurred for moments of synchronisation between the two dancers, changes in their movement sequence, creating a common pulse, and stomps for the ground beating. Finally, this work was done to adapt the choreography and the spatial structure of the piece to the new gallery space.

Overall, in this choreography, I notice some recurring features. First, there was a search to maintain clear physical intentions, through sound, voice, and breath: when the action became more intense also the body changed its energetic state. Second, as the action increases, tactile feedback between the dancers becomes stronger and defined. Third, the kind of action was drawn from pedestrian movements such as running in circles, walking in different moments, and raising arms as in protest. Fourth, in the duets dancers were perceiving and giving mutual body weight support. The final moment of the piece looks as if the two dancers, who were first acting as independent dancers, are reunited in a final moment together. To conclude, the dance presented two women in theatrical costumes which distinguish a western female body. Their bodies are relaxed but at the same time ready to react to different possibilities of relations, actions, and impulses on stage.

During both reconstruction sessions I noticed the following characteristics which relate directly to the previous analysis of somatic practices (as discussed in Chapters 2 and 4). These features include: *tactile feedback* (precise and specific), *imagery*, *journey*, *agency*, *perception*, *consciousness*, *awareness*, *encounter*, *embodied dance practice*, *trusting the work and the practice*, *different kinds of layers*, and *economy of movement*.

Agis' choreographic process is an internal and experiential practice of investigating through *imagery* and hands-on work, this shows her somatics attitude through the use of specific *imagery* and *touch*. Her methodologies of reconstruction include the use of written notes and imagery from the past and present choreographic situations. During training sessions for her dancers, she often uses key words-concepts-practices to develop their *perception*, *awareness*, and *agency*, such as 'looking for person inside-outside' meaning that a dancer could project their own inside as well as outside;

‘preparing the dancers/people to being present’; ‘being ready to take the responsibility as dancers to make choices all the time’. Furthermore, Agis keeps the attention on movement from the inside to the outside, meaning staying focussed on how the internal physical and emotional states, and consequent emotional feelings, could influence the external/outside choreographic structure, stimulating this process carefully through *perception, imagery, journey, layers* and *encounter*. In this way it emerges how somatic practices establish mind-body connections, which impact upon qualities of movement. It also highlights the physical engagement that these practices generate through the use of a specific language and key recurring terms (as seen also in Chapter 2).

I am now going to introduce the work of Vandekeybus through the frame of my fieldwork observations.

III.B. Fieldnotes: A Thematic Approach, Inside Vandekeybus’ Creation

During my time in Brussels, I attended days of creation and rehearsals as a guest of his company in February 2017 during the creation of *Mockumentary of a Contemporary Saviour*. I remember the moment I arrived at the company headquarters in Moleenbeck: it was a late cold rainy February morning and Kristien De Coster, the company director, welcomed me first with a tour of the building, then introduced me to Vandekeybus’ assistant dramaturg at that time. We ended with an informal chat in the big kitchen of the company, and I was welcomed to make all the coffee and tea I would like. In the following days, I learned that the kitchen was a significant space for the company, not only because it gave all the members a nice place to eat (and to survive for the high demanding hours of working) but also a site of exchange, breaks and collective meeting. In the following days, I experienced how the collective work is a feature of the company, as the first introduction in kitchen revealed.

During this time, I observed Vandekeybus' work with the company and had informal conversations with the dancers in-between the rehearsals. The artists involved in this production are Anabel Lopez (actor), Maria Kolegova (dancer), Yun Liu (martial art practitioner), Saïd Gharbi (dancer), Jason Quarles (dancer and actor), and Flavio D'Andrea (dancer and performer). As in many Ultima Vez productions, the performers have quite diverse backgrounds. In particular, Kolegova (nicknamed Masha), practices martial arts and yoga in parallel to dance; Flavio D'Andrea also trains with Maria Consagra (Laban Movement Analysis); and Yun Liu is a martial arts practitioner from Taiwan. *Mockumentary of a Contemporary Saviour* takes place in a dystopian future and develops as a science-fiction story. As the company summarises:

> We are in the distant future. A turning point in the history of mankind has been reached. A devastating force is engaged in utterly destroying all life on earth. With the aid of a child, a few people have nonetheless succeeded in reaching a place of safety. But life in this safe room is far from easy. The survivors, being human, are constantly at odds with one another. On top of all this is the fact that the chosen ones cannot escape life. Immortality prevails, and suicide doesn't offer any way out.
>
> (Ultima Vez 2017)

The child is interpreted by the young Liu, who uses a movement vocabulary influenced by kung fu and martial arts.

During the time with Vandekeybus' company, my daily notes provide a full understanding of my experience (the full fieldnotes diary can be found in Appendix D).[62] It was important to keep an everyday journal in order to trace some references on trainings and choreography and how the two intersect. From those fieldnotes I selected excerpts related to the themes relevant to my research: *warm-up exercises* (*with imagery*

[62] In this chapter the excerpts of the fieldnotes are edited for grammar, whereas tAppendix D contains the original notes. In Appendix D I inserted only the fieldnotes from the days of creative research with Vandekeybus and not the ones on the workshop with Jauregui.

and physical exercises), *choreographic approach, narrative and character threads, relationship between choreographer and dancer*. In the next sections I investigate each one of these themes in relation to Vandekeybus' work. As with Agis, I am inserting excerpts from my fieldnotes in italics.

III.B.1 Warm-Up Exercises (with Imagery and Physical Exercises)

Interestingly the warmup and training before each rehearsal is conducted by a different dancer. In this section examines three sessions led respectively by Vandekeybus (February 21st 2017), Kolegova (February 20th 2017) and Gharbi (February 24th 2017).

As I wrote in my journal Vandekeybus *introduces the movements, demonstrating them and describing them with voice. They start positioned in a circle, with a full body stretching, rolling on the side, half, and complete somersault, front and back. They move toward the centre with a unilateral movement and coming back with pushing from the feet. Maintaining at the side of the circle, they transfer the weight from a plank position, rolling on the side to another plank position, following the perimeter of the circle.* […] *During all the warming up class there is an energetic sound of a rock guitar in the background. The working climate between Vandekeybus and the performers is very relaxed.* (Fieldnotes, 2017 February 21st). This sequence description indicates the movement range and their technical and physical complexity. This challenging physical movement elaboration is an element present later in the choreography.

In my notes I wrote about the second warm-up: *Kolegova teaches a warming up class open to all the company members, dancers and actors, a warm-up dedicated to the whole body. They start moving from the starfish position, with the body spread out on the ground in a form of star; the performers explore movements such as spirals, circles,*

leg swings from knees and from the hips, allowing different kind of weight transfer in-between the transition. In the meantime, Vandekeybus — who is participating in this warming up class — is taking care of Gharbi, the blind dancer, accompanying him in the movements through caring touch and voice (Fieldnotes 2017, February 20th). These warming up exercises are preparing the body to be reactive and ready for rehearsals. Movements and elements such as starfish position (from Bartenieff, spirals, and the use of tactile feedback are connected to somatics as previously seen in Chapter 2).

I find particularly relevant that *Kolegova is repeating 'try not to relax but to reach' — which is a sentence often expressed also by Vandekeybus himself and his teachers (Azpillaga and Jauregui) in order to activate the dynamics and the focus of the movements* (Fieldnotes 2017, February 20th). The use of the term 'relax' versus 'reach' means the looking for a constant tension for action. 'Relax' here is understood as a non-use of the muscular force and a loss of movement flow. The exercises Kolegova proposes are a combination of stretching and yoga informed poses. *The movement sequence increases with more specific physical tasks —push ups, hands support— turn from the head into the space. Simultaneously, Vandekeybus, who is still participating in the class, gives physical indications to all the members such as: 'reach up, push yourself up'. Kolegova continues with proposing a stretch involving different parts of the body* (Fieldnotes, 2017 February 20th). This represents a fusion of practices close to somatics vocabulary such as the use of the yoga movements, different kinds of words and sentences referring to imagery, and the connection of physical body parts to spatial connection. Dancers are responding physically to verbal indications. These clues keep the dancers on track.

The last warm-up session was led by Gharbi, a blind dancer. *He leads the warming up with focus on 'taking time'. They start walking on different levels — half point, bended knees, opposition leg arms — maintaining a consistent rhythm. Then they change position, and transfer to the ground with push ups, and abdominals. An integration of pedestrian movements, such as walking, running, running with high and low knees, push ups, abdominal exercises, and shoulder rolls followed. To these follow a high impact series of runs, body shifts and crossings, interrupted by stops and 'sit and run'.* (Fieldnotes, 2017 February 24th). As we can read, in these range of proposed exercises, Gharbi connects different types of transferring of weight with various gymnastic informed movements. His visual status was not an issue. Gharbi worked with the company for many years, gaining experiences both in dancing and teaching and he knows very well the rehearsal space; furthermore, the company members and the choreographer are supportive of him. As previously mentioned, for instance, Kolegova was using tactile feedback with him, or Vandekeybus accompanied him through the movements.

I observed a few recurring features regarding the warm-up training. *I notice that the warming up has a very fast pace from the very beginning. Despite their quite different movement backgrounds, the performer group is strongly in accord. The choice of proposing this speed at the beginning of the class seems to derive from a familiarity of the performers with the movement vocabulary proposed by Kolegova and a mutual knowing and trust between them and her* (Fieldnotes 2017, February 20th). Generally, the warm-up has a fast rhythm, and a precise focus on the proposed execution of the movements that looks strictly connected to the quality and high energy required later from the dancers and performers in the choreography. I find this preparation is central to

reinforce internal and external physical connections to enact the choreographic structure.

Following this, *the class prepares the body to work on diverse levels — according to Laban's definition: high, medium/central and deep/low* (Fieldnotes 2017, February 20th). From these movement sequences we understand the full range of movement and levels used in the class and later in the choreography.

In order to sustain this high intensity training, the dancers and choreographer were keeping care of how the movement and exercise were performed. One example is that *Vandekeybus starts giving specific indications on movement sequences, how to prevent injuries, and the work on the balance, as he suggested the use of a proprioceptive table* (Fieldnotes 2017, February 20th). This table is a specific prop made by a tilting wooded platform with central fulcrum used in physical therapy and rehabilitation to improve proprioception, body position awareness, specifically the receptors of the foot, and it is also used for strengthening the ankles. This suggests that the choreographer is mindful of the internal and somatic relation within the body (see for instance Chapter 4.II.B.4.d).

III.B.2. On the Choreographic Approach

One of the main features of the choreographic approach I witnessed often was a continuation between the warming up, training and the rehearsals. *Without a specific end of the class, they pass to work on the choreography, demonstrating again the continuity from the class to the choreographic work. Vandekeybus suggests an improvisation on the song 'Each Man Kills The Things He Loves' by Jeanne Moreau* (Fieldnotes 2017, February 21st). Here I highlight that the dancers maintain the same

movement quality created in the warming up session, into the new proposed improvisational movement.

The choreographic process is determined by the time constraints that influenced the working timeline. *Speaking of some specific movement sequences and pieces of choreography, Vandekeybus says: 'we choose, we go for it and we go for it'* (Fieldnotes, 2017 February 20th). These are precise voice instructions by the choreographer acknowledging firstly the determination to reach for the goal, and secondly to sum up the creative confusion also determined by constraints due to production timing. Theatre and dance making need creative time which is not always the same as the time available for the production.

The choreography is constructed through narrative elements. *Vandekeybus is looking for a new scene, searching for the specific role and function of each performer. He asks the performers to tell stories and to listen to each other's stories. At the end they use the improvisation to create a new movement sequence* (Fieldnotes, 2017 February 21st). Here we can see how the choreographer uses specific verbal clues and a narrative thread, together with improvisation, to create the choreography, and to construct a psychological scene. Narrative features are always chosen in relation to the overall dramaturgy. For instance, one narrative element on which they were focusing was the ritual. *Vandekeybus stays focussed on the ritual, the 'ritual of the heavy hands and heavy stones' and asks the performers to create a movement sequence on 'image of the heavy stone that guides your movements, your rhythmic movements'. He further explains: 'this is a ritual: you have to enjoy nicely to suffer'. He looks for the unison in the movement phrase. The choreography is rather geometrical, the choreographer gives an indication and constructs movement sequences. He looks for the performers'*

individual differences. In this 'fake' ritual construction, they experience a lot of fun, especially in throwing bodies into space and hugging themselves (Fieldnotes, 2017 February 23rd). As we can read, ritual is considered as a state of mind, a theatrical element, and a mood creator.

In the overall choreographic process, narration is always followed or introduced by physical action. *I arrived when the warming up class was already finished. They begin from the previous day's theatrical scene based on the music 'Each Man Kills the Things He Loves'. Vandekeybus explains how important it is for him to look first at the physical actions in order to define the dramaturgical order of the events. This next physical action is based on how the performers are looking for connection and disconnection between themselves, trying to find a modality of resistance and holding each other, in a constant movement pattern. Vandekeybus' image is 'coming together like a magnet' and he guides the movement saying 'pushing millimetre by millimetre', he is showing physically with his body this work on union and separation* (Fieldnotes, 2017 February 22nd). The choreographer is pursuing an image of union and separation, and it is being worked out through different verbal and imagery tasks.

To create choreography is not just looking for a dramaturgical and physical interconnection of actions and themes, but a mood. *Vandekeybus continuously reminds the dancers': 'when performing you are creating a mood, let the things grow from the inside before putting them out'. After they move again on working on the text, Vandekeybus and collaborators are looking for a story that keeps surprising, 'the story is good when it keeps surprising'* (Fieldnotes, 2017 February 22nd). This image of 'letting things grow' is again an example of a clue used to maintain a strong connection between the internal feelings of the dancers and the external choreographic structure.

The choreographer is always concerned about time and space, recognising its place in relation to the individual characters as part of the dramaturgy and as performers who bring their agency into the piece. *Nevertheless, Vandekeybus is very specific in the spatial placing of the performers and often he advises them likewise 'I like your presence but you need a place where to go' and also he constantly controls the timing of the actions and the relations of the performers with their characters: 'Let things happen: do not rush over it'* (Fieldnotes, 2017 February 22nd). As director, he is constantly concerned with the timing of the action.

III.B.3 On Narrative and Character Threads

In the warm-up, as previously seen, some time is dedicated to rehearsing the sequence of the choreography, specifically they look at those movement sequences referring to a specific character. *They conclude the warming up with a movement sequence that they were constructing in the previous days, based on movements such as slides, turns, kicks in the air, falls, change from the foot as a support to a hand. This sequence is part of the choreography and has as image to contrast the figure of the enemy* (Fieldnotes, 2017 February 20th). The enemy here is intended to be an imaginary one; as explained before, these characters are living in a constricted space and are waiting for something evil to happen to them, or rather, they do not know their future. Thus, they must confront an enemy, a psychological enemy even more than a physical one. This final sequence is relevant because it shows the direct relation with the choreography, both thematically and temporally.

This sequence with a narrative element (the enemy) is constructed by physical elements. *Vandekeybus gives the following indications 'drop your head down and slide on the*

side', 'you have a tv on your belly and you show it to the front'. Also Kolegova gives physical and spatial inputs to Gharbi, and he touches the body of the teacher to understand the movements. She explains the relevance of controlling the body movements: 'you don't throw yourself whatever instead you control yourself in the space'. Vandekeybus gives more explanations on one movement in the sequence, the run: 'we have to change really the run - now that we know the movement sequence…running into space, we need the speed' (Fieldnotes, 2017 February 20th). This is still related to the 'enemy sequences', specifically to how to make them more real.

In the construction and in the processing of the characters, the choreographer works with the performer to deepen their roles through a visual physical imagery. For example, D'Andrea *is performing a text on Italian painter Caravaggio, as he is moving; the text is on attraction and repulsion. Vandekeybus helps D'Andrea suggesting that he feel more deeply his own presence inside himself and feeling as if he is taking away his own skin* (Fieldnotes, 2017 February 22nd). This image of taking away his own skin helps the dancer to stay in contact with the authenticity of his character, and not to have only a superficial personification with it, but a fully embodiment.

Other elements helpful in the dramaturgy are sound, stage construction and the overall rhythm. *There is a strong connection between the sound (curated by Charo Calvo), the scenic construction, and the general rhythm of creation, which is very intense. Afterwards, they start to work on the diverse sections of the full choreography. Then a discussion in groups followed, based on concepts such as 'follower, chosen, strategy, manipulation'. Vandekeybus focuses on the construction of a movement phrase based on pedestrian movements, kung fu movements and articulate spatial interlaced movements, 'a love duet', with Liu and D'Andrea* (Fieldnotes, 2017 February 22nd). In

the overall dramaturgical structure, the dancers develop their characterisations through diverse kinds of movement.

A key point for the dramaturgical and choreographic construction is the necessity of 'listening'. *After the lunch break, they start again to work on the ritual scene. Vandekeybus encourages them to take the time they need to feel the scene and at the same time to take the risk to explore new possibilities. After a long run of the full creation, Vandekeybus gives some feedback: 'in a lot of things here is much more important to listen, than to makes things happen; listen to the things from the inside, the dances are like a breathing, like a breath'. He is still looking for some specific qualities of the characters* (Fieldnotes, 2017 February 24th). Listening is considered a way to connect the internal to external structures in a dramaturgical way. The moving from the inside of the performer is connected to all of the dramaturgical scene, and this is similar to what happens in Agis' work.

In working through the characters, on one side the choreographer increases their specificity, providing more details and on the other, asking the performer about their difficulties in dealing with their characters. *Then, they start the rehearsals with a discussion on the dramaturgy and on the concept of cruelty on the specific issue of the baby girls killed as new-borns. After they move to the next scene which is situated clearly in future. Vandekeybus gives the context on explaining who is the character of the kung fu girl, who is this child arrived to rescue them. He asks to make an improvisation on each individual character in relation to the king fu girl. Vandekeybus specifies that in this show they represent values 'that are not only good or bad' and they are working as 'making a movie'. He also explains to what extent it is important for him to know the individual states and difficulties experienced by everybody, 'I need to know,*

I need to listen to everybody' (Fieldnotes, 2017 February 24th). In this general discussion, we can see two key elements: first the specificity of the psychological skills of each constructed character (in this case the one of the kung fu girl), second the interest of the choreographer for the personal feelings regarding the characters.

III.B.4. On the Relationship Between Choreographer and Dancers

I noticed an organisation of the work where each one of the performers is evaluated. *When the class is finished, everyone practices his/her own parts and Vandekeybus follows the work of everyone* (Fieldnotes, 2017 February 20th). The final movement sequence requires more focus on the energy level. Vandekeybus works on the details independently with one dancer/performer at a time.

Despite the clear dramaturgical construction of the characters, the choreographer encourages the performers not to fake the actions but to be 'real'. I wrote on my notes: *they rehearse the full choreography structure, starting from a 'kung fu' inspired scene. Vandekeybus gives feedback on the walk: 'this is not contemporary dance, when you go you go', meaning that they have to look for the real action of the pedestrian movement and not an imitation of it* (Fieldnotes, 2017 February 20th). With some humour regarding the common idea of what constitutes contemporary dance, the choreographer is stimulating the performers to be real in performing their pedestrian action.

A relevant feature is the search for togetherness in the performance. *Vandekeybus is also reminding the entire group that 'it's important to feel that everyone is working on the same thing, even though you represent many different characters. You need to go into each other'* (Fieldnotes, 2017 February 22nd). The choreographer encourages and looks for a common rhythm.

As the premiere was approaching (almost one month to go at that time), and some tension and also some fatigue was emerging, the choreographer was continuously giving clues on the performance itself. *A discussion on how to proceed follows up; Vandekeybus: 'dance has to transform itself to another level, I need some days where I start to work in things; it means I need to enter on the material already present without the pressure to create something else. Everybody can bring energy. It has taken to me a long time to understand what is this piece. I feel your struggle, believe in yourself, believe in things you are proposing'* (Fieldnotes, 2017 February 24th). The choreographer encourages the dancers through verbal clues, who feel themselves in a fragile moment of creativity.

On the same path, even though aware of the time running, the choreographer was stimulating the performers to give time to themselves and their comprehension of the performance roles. *The day starts with a group discussion on the piece and on possible/eventual use of props. Vandekeybus again repeats as mantras 'everyone is the same, everyone is different', 'taking the time to let the thing grow'* (Fieldnotes, 2017 February 24th).

III. B.5 Analysis

During those days, I observed some main characteristics and threads of Vandekeybus' work with his company as collected here:

- the theatrical pieces came from specific ideas transposed into physical actions;
- there is a strong interest in building the psychology of the characters and in keeping attention on each performer as a way of taking care of them;
- the performers' bodies are led to challenging and extreme physical movement possibilities;

- there is a continuity between the class and the choreographic work and rehearsals;
- the majority of the training exercises start at the floor, with rolls on the back and dynamic stretch; the high impact sequences are transplanted later into the choreography;
- the extreme physical actions and exercises, the task and kinds of practices proposed are connected to the research for those ‘forgotten instincts’ (Buzzi 2014: 10) and ‘the forgotten reflexes in our body’ (Buzzi 2014: 10), mentioned in section I.
- there is an integration of all the company members, with the blind dancer being guided through touch and voice; these two elements represent a way to integrate a sight-impaired dancer as a company member;
- there is an intense but relaxed working atmosphere.

As discussed previously with Agis’ case study, some keywords and inputs used from Vandekeybus in the creation of the piece and directed to his dancers are compared with previous definitions of somatic characteristics (see Chapter 4.II.B.5a-d and III.A-D). According to my fieldwork notes in Appendix D, Vandekeybus often alludes to specific aspects of the dancer’s *awareness* and *perception* of themselves as individuals and in relation to others and in space. He says when working individually: ‘let things grow from inside’, enhancing the *agency* of the dancer; ‘listen to what’s happening’, making the dancers aware of the surrounding actions; ‘take care on how you are on stage’, considering the dancer’s internal feeling on stage; and ‘you are inside yourself’ in creating different characters. When he says ‘everybody can bring energy, different kind of energy’ or ‘control yourself in the space’, he highlights the *agency* of the individual performer.

On the concept of the agency of the dancer Vandekeybus considers it crucial to ‘work with people who are well aware of what they are doing, who trust themselves and each other’, this awareness is the precondition to reach for ‘the extremes of movement’ (Bleeker et al. 2002: 282). Again, it is the instinct (as seen previously) the first element that helps to ‘protect others and to catch them when they fall is essential’ (Bleeker et al. 2002: 282). In this light, the agency of the dancer allows them ‘to stop thinking’ during the dance, in relation to the scene and to their instinct. In this sense, ‘l’ètat (…) “the state of doing something”, an almost emotional kind of concentration’ is emerging (Bleeker et al. 2002: 280).

Acknowledging the agency of each dancer is a matter of first relevance for Vandekeybus, as I have witnessed. All the dancers are heard and contribute with their feedback to the creation. Even though there is a teamwork, Vandekeybus prefers to ‘treat all of my dancers differently. I prefer to respect the individual than to let team spirit prevail’ (Bleeker et al. 2002: 283). Obviously, this does not mean that the process is without tensions, but what Vandekeybus and company are trying to do it to create a ‘constructive and positive’ atmosphere (Bleeker et al. 2002: 283).

As recorded in my fieldnotes, Vandekeybus refers to an embodied dance practice when he claims to strengthen physically the body, to stress the relevance of warming up and the overall training as preparation of the body for the choreography. When he says ‘can we first look at the physical actions in order to create a new dance’ (Fieldnotes 2017), this is done together with the dramaturgical thread. Whereas when he declares ‘let things happen’, he refers to the *trust* needed to accept the time for the choreographic narration to grow. Lastly, when he says for instance ‘dances are like breathing’, it is an example of use of *imagery*.

From these points, the somatic attitude of the choreographer also emerges. Vandekeybus clearly does not pursue a somatically defined path, because he does not construct the training or the rehearsals with only somatically informed practices. For example, he introduced gymnastic-based exercise. Nevertheless, he is working on developing specific clues together with his dancers that refer to somatic strategies (as trust and imagery) as seen in the above description. Specifically, I observed that he often speaks of 'listening', putting the dancer's own individual agency in relation to the full dramaturgy of the choreography; he repeats 'let the things grow', meaning that he is trying to give individuals time. He always trains the body through somatically informed exercises (e.g. rolling on the ground feeling the body released onto it); and he uses imagery to construct characters, to narrate the dramaturgy and to create specific movement qualities within the dancers/performers.

III.C. Isabelle Schad

My encounter with the work of German choreographer and performer Isabelle Schad happened almost by chance in 2016. At the time, I was pursuing my PhD research on a part time mode. I was back to my hometown Venice, working between Venice and Trento, where I was teaching Dance History at the Liceo Coreutico. Schad was one of the dance artists invited by Virgilio Sieni, artistic director at that time of Biennale Danza, to reconstruct *Collective Jumps* (premiered in 2015 at Live Arts Festival in Kampnagel Hamburg) for the Biennale College and to perform her solo work *Der Bau* (The Nest, premiered in 2014 at Explore Dance Festival in Bucharest). When I discovered she was coming to Venice, I applied to participate in her Venetian production.

Schad represents a unique case study of a dancer with a ballet background, who performed in Vandekeybus' company and who is deeply informed by somatic practices such as Body-Mind Centering, and martial arts such as Aikido. She is an example of genealogy and legacy since she has been an interpreter for Vandekeybus and now she is working with somatics. My fieldwork was based on taking part actively in her dance, which involved following the morning training and daily rehearsals for 10 days, having some 'informal' chats with her and her collaborator, the visual artist Laurent Goldring, and an interview. Thus, in this case, my role and my experience as an observer differs from the previous cases of Agis and Vandekeybus because I was learning and observing by doing.

Schad's involvement in dance began at an early age with the ballet training, and after that she spent six years in a ballet company. Later, she auditioned for Vandekeybus, and worked for him for two years. In 1999, when she was still in Ultima Vez, she started to conceive and produce her own choreographic works. A few years later, she founded her group named Good Work Productions together with the visual artist and light designer Bruno Pocheron and the architect Ben Anderson. Later, she started her ongoing collaboration with the French visual artist Goldring.

When Schad started to create her own work, she was focused 'on the embodiment of images instead of imitating them' (Schad 2016) meaning she is not using images to construct a character but instead as ways to access specific motional and emotional feedback in the body. Crucial within this, has been her encounter with somatics, firstly through Feldenkrais, with its work on the nervous system through verbal tasks, and later with Body-Mind Centering thanks also some workshops with Bainbridge Cohen. For Schad, the role of the embryological development was crucial to her understanding of

somatics. The cell is the ‘uniqueness form that we have’ (Schad 2016). Following Cohen’s notion that the ‘movement is about what informs the form’, Schad found it is close to the martial art form of Qi Qong.

> In my work I am looking for answers in somatic practices such as Body-Mind Centering, which was developed by Bonnie Bainbridge-Cohen. The emphasis here is on the perceptions and sensations of one’s body — towards understanding our past processes, and how we are by embodying physiological or embryological processes.
>
> (Schad 2013: 278)

Nevertheless, her interest also includes feedback created by the nervous system, specifically how the transmission of information works. ‘Transmission of information is a function of our nervous system that allows us to form responses and not just reactions’ (Schad 2013: 282).

As previously explained, her current choreographic work is informed by Body-Mind Centering and martial arts such as Aikido and Qi Qong. She is also a professional Zen-Shiatsu practitioner, who regularly gives treatments to people. Zen-Shiatsu represents for her:

> a wonderful way to work on the energetic body that we are/have. It is a method to look at the body and the person *as a whole* versus looking ’only’ at *where the problem seems to be* (e.g. where there is pain).
> Mostly it is by ’working around’ this place that seems to be ‘louder’ than others, that change appears.
> By looking at all the organs, by finding out where there is resonance, by feeling the empty and the full ’places’ in the body, it might be another pathway than expected that will be chosen. And yet it is very probable, that well-being and a more balanced energetic presence emerge in a surprisingly light and easy going way already after the first session.
>
> (Schad 2019)

She clearly explained in an online statement to what extent somatics and martial arts are integrated into her choreographic work:

> As a choreographer, dancer and Zen-Shiatsu Practitioner, I am currently working with everything I have learned supporting the multiple layers within this practice. I am integrating the work in my teaching, i.e. in my open practice sessions at Wiesenburg in Berlin or within group works, or in the frame of workshops that I give e.g. at HZT [Hochschulübergreifendes Zentrum Tanz] Berlin or elsewhere abroad. I am also integrating the work in my choreographic process and in my pieces. Here it becomes dance, energy, sensual experience in its own way.
>
> (Schad 2019)

As previously explained, during my fieldwork in Venice, I experienced two of her works: *Der Bau* and *Collective Jumps*.

Der Bau (2014) is a 'metaphorical approach' (Schad 2016) to Franz Kafka's work (1923) with the same name. In Venice she interpreted the solo version of approximately one-hour duration, with the artistic collaboration of Goldring. Schad performed naked, covered by many layers of fabric, which she moved. *Der Bau* is a work in which Schad uses and embodies some processes of embryology as a fundamental shared human developmental process; her choreographic strategy to embody it is to work on repetition, and on the 'uniqueness of each repetition' (Schad 2016). She started by standing naked, working on a series of different movement repetitions, such as upper body bounces, and shoulder movements. At a certain point she began using three enormous textiles that are lying spread on the ground and are approximately four metres long and wide and coloured in grey and light brown. She created different kinds of movement forms wrapping herself in the cloth, repeating these forms until she ended on the ground covered with them.

In *Der Bau* the nucleus is always changing, and the main focus is to add layers (of movement, of textile) to another, making the form change. Changing the core means for

Schad an ‘interaction of life’ (Schad 2016). *Der Bau* could be also interpreted in the Kafkaesque version of constructing and looking for a nest.

> The sphere of the intimate is the first space around the body; it is the space needed by the body to feel its integrity free of any threat. It is a transitional space, in the technical sense of ’a transitional object’, both part of the body and part of the world. The entire surrounding space is of the same order, namely a fully humanised space in which a person is confronted only with oneself.
>
> (Schad 2019)

The work I participated in is *Collective Jumps*. This is a choreography of about 40 minutes for a group of 16 dancers, inspired by Hannah Arendt’s *On Revolution* (1963). This piece is about togetherness, efficient ways to move together as cells, and feeling the common vibration (Schad 2016). Schad carefully explained to me that this piece is not about ideology; instead, it is about how ‘the body practice could link people in a community’. With about ten movement sections, most movements were performed in couples, looking for unison with the other couples. Movements were both on the ground and standing and were initiated by interlacing of body parts. Despite the title, there were no jumps. Costumes were black shorts and chemises. The Venetian version of *Collective Jumps* was performed as a site-specific piece and was especially revisited for the first floor of Palazzo Grimani, situated in the Castello area. In this description, Schad explains:

> The group’s body is made out of many. We exercise practices that have the potential to unite instead of individualize. We understand these practices as a relationship to oneself and to one another, as a pathway. These practices are biological ones, cellular ones, energetic ones. We look at freedom in relation to form: to form that is made of and found by an inner process and its rhythms. Rhythm creates the form. Therefore, there is multitude, multiplicity, subjectivity, and variation: variation within repetition.
>
> We look for equality in movement and for the end of hierarchy between body parts. Relations between body parts are like

> relations between people within the group. We play and distort in any kind of way. We differentiate synchronicity from synchronization. We understand synchronicity as the moment when things fall together in time, a phenomenon of energy. We borrow floor, formation, and holding patterns from other communally practiced forms, such as folk dance or Eastern body practices. We relate resistance to questions of rhythm. We relate protest to questions of organization and exercise. We look at the esthetics of representation and the kind we are trying to resist. We look at the esthetics of representation as a political practice. Could the creation of an infinite, unified, monstrous body possibly become a site of resistance? Could the body itself become a site of resistance, the body of a dancer?'
>
> (Schad 2019)

From my direct fieldwork and participatory experience, I observed the following features.

The *training* consisted of two or three hours devoted to body-mind preparation. We started almost every day in a circle, in a sitting or standing position. The practices Schad proposed to us were informed by Qi Qong, Aikido, Meridian Stretch and Body-Mind Centering exercises such as the 'cellular breathing' (Chapter 2.III). Some exercises were practiced alone and others in couples. She guided us through voice and movements, either doing or demonstrating them. The atmosphere was quiet and relaxed. Her tone of voice was calm. She also proposed some meditation exercises. It was a warm-up conducted following a procedure of practices somatically informed and based on a repeated movement phrase that came to feel like a ritual. To Schad training means also 'pleasure and desire, a motivation of desire, a response to impulse' (Schad 2016). After the somatic training and psychophysical exercises she, together with Goldring, conducted us into a 'plastic movement construction' (Schad 2016). We worked together with pre-existing movement sequences and creating new body interconnections. Schad used a lot of *visual imagery* including: resistance (embodying

the notion of resistance), interaction, collaboration, how to cover and uncover a body, creating a microcosmos.

In *Collective Jumps* Schad looks for a resistance as a utopian model of new reality. She defines her approach to choreography as a ‘modernist' one, comparing the use of precise forms and repetitions. She refers to the Modernism movement of the arts and philosophy which started at the end of the 19th century till the Second World War, characterised by a search for new forms, not based on realism. She defines herself as a modernist in the way she uses the body as a medium of repetition and a creator of lines without a realist purpose. For example, in *Der Bau*, she kept repeating the same bounce movements with the torso and a textile, and during each repetition the movement was slightly changing in its amplitude, intensity, or rhythm.

Observing and practicing her work I have noticed that firstly, internal, and physical connections are the basis for later choreographic development. The training informed by Qi Qong Body-Mind Centering and Tai Chi practices is focussed on preparing the body-mind in relation to the overall choreography and getting the performer ready to work with the other performers’ bodies.

Secondly, for the dancers it is not always easy to comprehend what she is proposing, because of the delicate interconnections of the inner work with the visual choreographic materials she proposes; her work needs time for comprehension. Finally, the choreographer is very attentive to the energy of the group, and as she transmits her practices, she looks for ways to make them accessible to everyone.

IV. Analysis of the Three Case Studies

In presenting the three previous case studies, my concern is not to define and consolidate to what extent somatics could be considered as a holistic or wellbeing practice for the body-mind, but rather how much of these practices are in use in the creative context. Before considering the common features, it is important to recognise the clear differences that exist between the three choreographers discussed above. As previously said, Agis' work is taken as a direct use of somatics and Vandekeybus' as an indirect one. Schad is also included as an example of direct use. In the framework of considering somatics as a process of analysing, of dealing with structures and layers, there are some parallels.

For Agis and Vandekeybus the *body is considered as a full receptor of stimuli,* with a direct connection between the energetic body states and the increase/decrease in the intensity of actions. The three choreographers articulate *different layers of comprehension of choreographic practices*: in Agis, the skeleton of the choreographic structure is organised in different sections of the work, which are related to internal feelings, and to dancers' individual approach to them. In Vandekeybus, the general structure of the dance is directly connected with the individual action/decision made by the performers/dancers. Agis speaks of the structure inside and outside, whereas Vandekeybus deals with 'things growing from the inside' to differentiate the timing of development of the choreographic structure. For Schad the layers of the training practices are strictly connected to the performances.

We have seen the extent to which *movement practices aimed to develop a full awareness*: in the case of Agis this is predominantly obtained by the involvement of SRT practices (see Chapter 2.III and Chapter 3.V.A.). In the classes by Vandekeybus

and his collaborators (see above) the awareness is fulfilled by all the diverse kinds of physical sequences proposed. However, the kind of exercises they propose are quite different: Agis uses SRT to develop awareness and make her dancers ready, whereas Vandekeybus proposes high impact movement sequences and trainings. In another way, Schad is directly using exercises from Body-Mind Centering (BMC) and martial arts to make her performers ready.

Vandekeybus and Agis consider *trust in the work of the performers and respect for their own agency and practice*. For Agis it is the individual performer who maintains and follows his/her internal feelings and who determines the space and time of the overall choreographic structure. Vandekeybus keeps saying, as mentioned above, 'believe in yourself and in the things you are proposing', speaking of the approach suggested to the performers in the improvisations. Whereas for Schad, the individual agency is strictly connected to that of the group.

The use of *visual imagery to reach a specific state of theatrical embodiment* is crucial. The images include use of breath, the visualisation of the skeleton, the figure of the woman in the case of Agis (the role of the woman is a recurring topic for her and also for choreographers in the 1980s in the U.K., as seen in Chapter 3.II.E) Images include the visualisation of the enemy, of the breath, of the magnet, and of the child, in Vandekeybus. Both in the training and in choreography, the use of images is always very careful and focused to bring the dancers into the choreographic vision. For Schad, the use of images (such as the floating one) is more evident during the training than in the choreography.

In all the three cases I can trace a *use of a specific economy in the movement*, the movements are always very clear and precise, without any further excess or redundancy: a run is a 'true' run. All the three of the choreographers used different spatial levels, in the air, standing, on all fours and on the ground.

Also, the *specific tactile feedback* is another common feature. For Agis, different parts of the body are carefully touched with hands or other parts of the body, the quality of touch is directly connected to the physical choreographic gestures. For Vandekeybus, the touch is connected with highly physical levels of intensity. Touch for Agis is really used as a means of discovery, whereas for Vandekeybus it is often a means for guiding. For Schad, touch is both an element of training and experience and part of the choreography.

The three choreographers' *use of theatricality* in their choreography included props, objects, and lighting, as well as elements such as characterisation, specific clothing, and specific music to delineate particular emotional states. Specifically, for Schad, textiles are used as props in an abstract way.

V. Conclusion

When I started my journey in approaching these three different and highly specific choreographic cases, I was aware from the very beginning of their differences in understanding, approaching, and using somatics. As the previous list in section IV suggests, many common points came up; on the other hand, it is relevant to maintain their creative uniqueness.

Even though I worked to be as objective as possible, I must also underline that each time I situated myself to confront their works, my observation and participation as an 'external' eye were different. There was difference in the timing — the more time I could spend observing the piece, the more extensively I could understand their practices. There was difference in the way I situated myself each time as a pure observer or as 'doer'. There was a difference in my own capability to elicit their first-person input, which varied also due to the physical conditions.

To summarise, in this chapter I redefined my methodologies (II) and investigated the fieldwork for Agis' *Shouting Out Loud*: *Reconstructed* (III.A.1) and Agis' *Close Stream*: *Reconstructed* (III. A.2). I then explained my field research within Vandekeybus' company (III.B.1-4) with a collective analysis of the above. Further, I introduced my third case studies, Schad (III.C) and provided an investigation of the three through a somatically informed perspective.

My research questions in this chapter included: How can one enact choreographic scores and concepts without losing more internal physical connections? To what extent do different choreographic and aesthetic approaches, such as those of Agis and Vandekeybus, deal with the body-mind relation? Besides their differences in understanding, using, and embodying or not the concept of somatics, all three choreographers present an ongoing inside-out process, but in very different ways. In the case of Agis and Schad the inside is intended as the inner energy and feeling of the dancers in relation to the physical and choreographic work they propose. For Vandekeybus we can speak of an inner process of the individual dancers in becoming the character of the dance, a character that can be imagined and created both by the choreographer himself and by the dancer. In thinking about strategies of enacting

choreographic structure without losing a more internal relation, all three, Agis, Vandekeybus and Schad, stay focussed on maintaining a strong body-mind connection: Agis proposes a strong warming up and preparation from SRT; Vandekeybus challenges his dancers from the beginning into some specific movement forms; and Schad is informed by practices and meditation deriving from Body-Mind Centering, Qi Qong and Zen.

How do the dancers move in response to verbal, written, sound or visual tasks? The response of the dancers and performers to the tasks depends on the specific requests, the way the tasks are made explicit and their individual personalities. One connection that I noticed is that the more the choreographer takes the dancers inside his or her own choreographic approach, making them aware and responsible for it, the more responsive they are. There are clear connections with the dancers' previous training, but at the same time it depends on the *different layers of comprehension of the choreographic practices* (see section IV). For Agis the organisation of the choreography into sections is related to specific feelings and emotional states and enables the dancers/performer to respond to them. Whereas in Vandekeybus, the whole dramaturgy is associated with the 'individual action/decision made by the performers/dancers' (section IV). This does not mean that there is improvisation but that the timing of the choreographic structure depends on the actions of the performers. In his case, his dancers respond to the verbal, written, sound, and visual task in relation to the specific narration of the dramaturgy, so they look less connected to their emotional feelings but more focused to act towards the abstract character that they are playing.

How does the dancer's somatic training affect the inter-relationship between choreographers and dancers? And, on the other hand, how is a choreographer's somatic

awareness manifest in the way she/he directs dancers? In Agis' case, for instance, her dancer, Mutka, works closely with Agis' somatic way to transmit the movement stimuli, because she also has a somatic training and has already worked with Agis. Vandekeybus works with a wide variety of dancers and his work is more based on highly energetic levels. The choreographers manifest their somatic awareness in diverse ways. Agis manifests it through her voice, her methods of presenting the practices, and in the way she directs the dancers. Vandekeybus is more connected to somatics through visual imagery and the kind of released training he is proposing. For Schad it manifests in the ways in which she conducts the group work. In all the three cases the *movement practices aim to develop a full awareness*: Agis uses the SRT technique as a main tool, and Schad is directly using practices from BMC and martial arts to make her performers ready, while Vandekeybus uses high impact movement sequences and trainings.

The main reason for starting this fieldwork research was to investigate possible connections between somatics and choreography. I decided to take in consideration both directly and indirectly somatically informed choreographers. In observing the extent to which imagery, use of a specific touch, and economy in the movement are being used, and how much trust is present in the work of the dancers and the respect of their agency, we could acknowledge that these diverse case studies have been influenced by somatics, in its expanded definition and on the different levels explained earlier in the chapter (especially in section IV).

Whereas in Chapter 4 I addressed a thematic analysis of movement practices and concepts resulting from the observations of training, warm-ups, and somatic practices during the fieldwork, this chapter focuses on how the choreographers worked in and for the choreographic creation or reconstruction. Different strategies to enact

choreographies were revealed, integrating internal physical connections and identifying some ways in which dancers move in response to verbal, written, sound or visual tasks.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This research was stimulated by my encounter with *What the Body Does not Remember* by Wim Vandekeybus, a work from 1987, seeing it first on video and then in its reconstruction in 2014, with specific attention to the moment when bricks are thrown. My questions at that time were: How do the dancers physically respond to external stimuli? How do the dancers react to having bricks thrown at them without injuring themselves? In this specific example, how do the dancers perform movement sequences throwing bricks to each other in real time? Which physical strategies does the choreographer apply to prepare the body and make it ready to deal with such complex movement dynamics?

Often Vandekeybus' works have been labelled as virtuosic, somehow aggressive, always searching for danger in the scene: but these were not the major elements that attracted my attention. I was drawn to the movement quality of the dancers, which I will define as 'real' (an adjective often used by Vandekeybus himself to describe his work). My investigation developed because I was not able to find answers to my questions. This was due first for a lack for general resources on his work (for instance Vandekeybus' and Boudens' book *The Rage of Staging* was published at the end of 2016). Some colleagues expressed a kind of skepticism in Vandekeybus' working methods, considered very distant from what is now commonly understood as somatics, the physical engagement he required was mainly perceived as athletic rather than perceptive. But what I was generally missing was a lack of answers directly from the field: what is the choreographer saying to the dancers? How is he guiding them? How do the dancers respond to the verbal indications? Which kind of exercises were offered to reach specific physical states? I noticed then that there was an absence of empirical knowledge, with Vandekeybus specifically.

Another source of inspiration was my encounter with the work of Gaby Agis. I first engaged with her during a week of Skinner Releasing Technique (SRT) classes at Independent Dance studios in London in 2007. I still have with me the bodily information of that time, the releasing of my muscles, the awareness in my full body. Then, while investigating choreographic processes which draw from somatic practices, I re-encountered her work created in the 1980s, as was Vandekeybus' *What the Body....* After deciding to include her in my research focus, in September 2014 Agis was invited to the University of Roehampton to guide a workshop for the reconstruction of her second dance *Shouting Out Loud* (1984). She represents a clear example of somatically informed practice in the creative work, but when she started back in the 1980s, she was more generally connected to Release as a practice than SRT. As set out in chapter 3.V.A), for her SRT was a creative and somatic way to re-enter into contact with herself after a period of exhaustion.

When my research journey started, I was concluding my training as a Body-Mind Centering somatic movement educator. This informed how I see and perceive dance: in specific cases, such as Vandekeybus', what I was seeing on stage was a kind of visceral movement with a quality rooted in what seemed to be a somatically informed training. I am aware that my position at that time was influencing my perspective and framing my view. However, the movement quality observed in specific works was closely connected to areas of body-mind work that are not only relayed to a dance 'technical training'. Thus, the movement quality seemed to correspond despite the choreographer not having a direct connection to somatics.

On the other side, the somatic training I was following was informing me not only on the holistic benefit that it could offer on various levels, but also on some specific

characteristics that could be seen as elements present on stage. For instance, during my BMC training, in exploring the various body systems (skeletal, organs…) I was working on perception, on agency, on tactile feedback, on imagery, all elements that as I discuss later, are present, with specific variations, in the choreographic methods that I have investigated.

The third encounter which was significant for this research was with Isabelle Schad: it happened almost by chance in Venice. As a former Ultima Vez dancer, and choreographer who employs somatics in her creative work, she is interesting for my perspective because her work offers a genealogical connection. Even though she clearly has her unique creative path dissociated from that of Vandekeybus, she offered some insight into his work, having danced with his company for two years. Furthermore, she includes practices from Body-Mind Centering in her work, either in the training or warm-up and in the choreography. Moreover, I had the chance to perform in her piece in Venice. Thus, Schad offers rare insights: the genealogical connection with Vandekeybus, utilising BMC (the somatic training in which I am professionally qualified) and the possibility to perform with her, as a unique case of embodied ethnography.

In observing these three cases, a first relevant issue arose: from the very beginning it was clear that they use unique choreographic approaches, and not all of them were directly connected to somatics. Thus, during the research process, I distinguished a ‘direct’ and a ‘indirect’ relationship to somatics.

Having established that my two key choreographers started their creating in the 1980s, their work was linked to some significant shifts in dance as well. These can be

summarised as two trends connected to their countries of origin: Britain for the integration of somatic practices into the dance field and the outset of New Dance, and Belgium for transforming the concept of Dance Theatre through the New Flemish Wave synonymous with the Flanders region of Belgium. Then, the intention of this research developed to study connections between somatics and somatically informed practices in regard to dance artists from the1980s, through an enquiry of specific choreographic works.

Another key research objective is to provide an overview of some 1980s European choreography, with a comparison between British and Belgian dance scenes, to analyse significant under-researched European choreographers such as Vandekeybus and Agis. Fieldwork research enabled me to investigate their work through an ethnographic perspective and a dual perspective, as historical artifacts as well as contemporary pieces in their restagings, while focusing on specific aspects of the inter-relationship between dancer and choreographer in the field.

Their works have been explored through choreographic analysis, where the parameters were aimed at perception and where the agency of the dancer (with or without their somatic training) emerges as a contribution to the choreography. To this end, case studies of how choreographers work in the studios revealed the use of specific exercises and practices. My fieldwork encompassed multiple strands as set out in Chapters 4 and 5: observation of trainings and warm-ups, studio work and observation of creative process, both in the reenactment of old works and in the creation of a new one. Furthermore, the fieldwork research is configured as a set of encounters: both with the practices offered by the various dance artists and interviews with them. To develop an expanded perception of the key choreographers and on the general connection between

choreography and somatics I interviewed two collaborators of Vandekeybus, German Jauregui and Iñaki Azpillaga, a SRT practitioner; choreographer Kirsty Alexander; and the former dancer for Rosemary Butcher, Elena Giannotti, as an example of dancer with a somatic background who deal with a creative process.

As established by the three main cases, my focus was not on somatics and dance training, a topic already extensively researched, but on somatically informed practices and choreography. I pursued this path, because from the 1980s the body of the performer has gained a specific corporeality on scene, and the body and its limitation, or defying boundaries, its capability to perceive and to work with the 'invisible' have been at the centre of various choreographic works. As seen, the new dramaturgy was 'using' a new conception of body as seen in the Flemish dance artists.

My primary research questions evolved out of this investigation into somatics and choreography:

- How much has the somatic field contributed to the development of contemporary dance and choreography? How and in what ways are the dance artists using somatic awareness and practices approaches? Are they aware of using it?
- To what extent are the influences of somatic practices evident in 1980s European theatrical dance?

Whilst reflecting on the above-mentioned questions, it has been useful to reflect also on the following issues: How can somatics and choreographic research processes continue to be influential to each other without losing their specificities? Are there different ways of working other than the integration of the two systems?

These questions shaped the exploration of the main objectives of the thesis, to investigate the expanded concept of somatics singularly and in relation to dance and choreography and contributing to the creation of an analytical overview of specific European choreographic trends of the 1980s, establishing somatic legacies between the U.S. and Europe. The dissemination of somatics emerged with a transnational character with features relevant to my archaeological account of the field's development. For example, I considered the German practitioners who resettled abroad during the Nazi period or the exploration of a genealogical trajectory for Europe, distinguished from US postmodernism and German *Tanztheater*.

Concerning the 1980s, for example, as noted by Doran George (2020), certain figures stand out such as American Mary Fulkerson who directed the Dance Department at Dartington College of Arts where she brought Release Technique, or the British X6 Collective that invited the American Steve Paxton to teach in London. Agis encountered SRT technique in New York for the first time in the 1980s, and years later became the first British teacher of the form. Moreover, the transnational influences are evident in choreographic methodologies and acknowledgments. For instance, thanks to post-modern performance seen both in the U.K. and in Belgium from the 1960s to the 1980s, young choreographers reinforced their individual and specific creative paths (seen in the influences of minimalism in the Belgian choreographer Anne Theresa De Keersmaeker). As well, we can speak of a transnational acknowledgment: for instance, the work of Vandekeybus became worldwide known thanks also to the Bessie dance and performance award he received in New York, even before being funded by the Belgian government (Cornwell 2013).

Transnational and international threads are also evident in my ethnographic research, which developed between London, Brussels, and Venice (where I meet German choreographer Schad).

A desire to understand the direct and indirect influences of somatics and specific body-mind and physically informed investigations into training practices connected to specific choreographic experiences. I utilised a methodological approach integrating theoretical perspectives, fieldwork, extensive dance analysis and embodied ethnography. This quest for knowledge developed out of my position as a somatic and dance practitioner as well as a dance observer. During my dance and somatic practices and dance history studies, I observed two significant elements: a transformation in the use of the performer/dancer's physicality in some theatrical choreographic experiences, which developed from the 1980s (particularly with the New Flemish Wave dance artists and some British choreographers from the New Dance), and some similarities in the exercise and practices offered between these unique approaches to the dancing body and somatics practices already in use. I was conscious of the difference between these two strands of choreography. The New Flemish Wave was informed mainly by a new understanding of dramaturgy and the British innovations were influenced by an awareness of the body derived from a dissemination of somatically informed practices in the dance field. Nevertheless, during my fieldwork research some analogous elements arose between the U.K. and Belgium in the direct/ indirect influences from somatics, for instance, in the training, in understanding of the role of the dancers, and in the importance of breath.

I investigated connections and interrelations between dance and the somatic field, specifically in the branches of Dance Theatre and choreography. Comparisons and

analyses are grounded in theoretical studies, mainly from dance studies, phenomenology, somatics theory and history, and fieldwork research of diverse experiences deriving from the European context of the 1980s. Writing in the 21st century, my fieldwork on one side relies on the methodologies these choreographers are using today, but at the same time, as in the case of Agis, I witnessed two reconstructions and discussions in how to re-stage them. This offers an archaeological understanding that draws from the Foucauldian concept of 'archaeology', conceptualising the discursive formations as a method to discover concepts and ideas and their transformation. Besides this, framing works of the 1980s in today's perspectives, offers an analysis which consider the time difference a useful perspective enabling the choreographers to reflect historically on their works.

The 1980s represents the genealogical matrix from where these choreographers have developed their methods. The social, political, and productive methods are different now, the neo liberalism that during the 1980s was starting, is now the predominant economic system. Nowadays many contemporary dancers know, or at least have heard, what is Release Technique, or what is the Ultima Vez movement vocabulary. Nevertheless, going back to the sources, helps in configuring how the 1980s dance movements started and how they developed. As Agis discussed, from the 1980s, at least from its early years, there is very little documentation available on video. Vandekeybus created by himself his first video, *Roseland* (1990) (a sort of screendance and documentation of his earliest works). Thus, an analytical review of historical sources including primary source material in contemporaneous writings (such as *New Dance*) underpins the historical context.

Today in dance education it is quite common having somatically informed approaches and also in choreography. Somatics impacts on the dancer's agency, facilitating collaborative processes and helping in prevent injuries, however the context of the end of 1970s-beginning of 1980s was quite different. There were very few colleges or independent institutions offering a somatic training to dance in Europe. The dissemination of somatic practices at that time happened through people (teachers and practitioners) and not yet through institutions. For instance, at that time Release was considered a philosophy of life (Lansley and Early 2018) and not merely a movement technique to gain efficiency as often today is perceived in the dance studios.

Another feature to take into account is the way somatics is being transmitted, for instance one of the major systems analysed here, SRT established the first teacher certification program only in the 1990s, together with Klein Technique. On the contrary, BMC training programme was already established in the 1970s. However, in creating these training schools these methods became codified, systematising the way their practices were transmitted.

As my fieldwork and theoretical research reveals, in Vandekeybus and his collaborators specific research on the bodies and similar concepts and training is evident though they are not directly informed by somatics. Whereas in Agis, it is clear her consciousness in choosing a somatic approach is in her lineage (she is the first British student of Joan Skinner), in Vandekeybus the fieldwork revealed a specific use of the image, of the tactile feedback that is closely connected to a possible somatic training. In contrast, Schad is clearly using somatics. The three choreographers in the case studies have elements in common, as summarised below.

First, I must stress that the term somatics when Agis and Vandekeybus started their work, was not yet widely used, because it has been coined only in 1976 by Hanna (as pointed out in Chapter 1.V.A). This means that practices were already on and evolving without boundaries. I found that they had these features in common:

The body is considered as a full receptor of stimuli

- There are different layers of comprehension of choreographic practices.
- Movement practices are aimed to develop a full awareness.
- There is trust in the work of the performers and respect for their own agency and practice.
- Visual imagery is employed to reach a specific state of theatrical embodiment.
- There is a use of a specific economy in the movement.
- The tactile feedback is employed in a specific way.
- There is a specific use of dramaturgy and theatrical elements (such as props, specific use of the stage, even though some of the artists are also working in non-theatre sites)

Although there are points in common with the current understanding of somatic practices, Vandekeybus is still identified as an outsider. Nevertheless, there are some fundamental similar elements.

Chapter 1 presents the framework of the overall research; one of the first issues has been to define somatics and outlining key theoretical terms such as somatically informed, somatic practices, Dance Theatre, Release, and release informed.

In particular, theories derived from dance and performance philosophy contributed to shaping and defining concepts such as ‘thinking through the body’ and more particularly, ‘thinking through dance’ by Anna Pakes, and Graham Mac Fee (Chapter

1.V-V.A-B). The search for inter-relationships emerges as a relevant aspect in the joint analysis of somatics and choreography. I draw on various dance theorists and philosophers like Susan Leigh Foster (2010), from which I recall her concept of kinaesthetic empathy in order to experience empathy through looking at others' movement or dances, when observing. Maxine Sheets-Johnstone's conceptualisation of kinaesthesia (1966, 2009) is discussed in relation to Maurice Merleau-Ponty against Cartesian dualism (1945, 2002), acknowledging the relevance of perceiving the body in movement. Dance scholar Tuuli Tahko's (2016) research articulates a relocation of the attention from the mind to the body. In particular the work of Erin Manning (2009) traces the premises for a kinaesthetically informed insight of the choreographic process, intending choreography also as a multi-layered system of communication.

Understanding the choreography as a process of communication informed by kinesthesia was relevant to start a conceptualising of choreography not only as a creative state, but as a process comprehending various layers (such as the relationship between dancers/choreographer, agency of each individual dancers…). The fieldwork process was influenced by what Leena Rouhiainen recalled as need for 'interaction or dialogical relationships with others' (Rouhiainen 2008 in Tahko 2016: 54). On this light, this was crucial to reconnect interdependence, as stated by Zygmunt Bauman, to inter-subjectivity as 'intertwined with inter-subjectivity' (Tahko 2016: 54).

Chapter 2 sets out an expanded understanding of somatics, both from an historical perspective providing a literature review, and from the viewpoint of being a togetherness of practices with analysis of some elements in common. The literature researched for this chapter highlighted a variety of proto-somatic and somatic practitioner, methods, sources spread mainly in two continents: North America and

Europe. Four main sections set out key themes: *somatics and choreography in existing literature* (II.A-E), an insight into Body-Mind Centering (BMC) and Skinner Releasing Technique (SRT) (III), and *an introduction of the origins and practice of release* (section IV). It was important to evaluate BMC and SRT because they are the main somatic practices used by two of my case studies. A section on Release introduces the work of practitioners such as Mary Fulkerson, who is discussed further in Chapter 3 as key to the development of the New Dance in Britain during the 1980s.

The analysis draws from the work of pioneers (Françoise Delsarte, Mabel E. Todd,), first generation (Moshe Feldenkrais, Irmgard Bartenieff), second generation innovators like Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, Mary Fulkerson, and Thomas Hanna and more recent practitioners such as Martha Eddy, Linda Hartley, Andrea Olsen, Miranda Tufnell, and Thomas Kampe. Further I explore the work of some choreographers in relation to somatics such as Deborah Hay and Steve Paxton. These genealogical connections trace imprints in how specific techniques (somatics, Release…) have been 'imported', created, and expanded in two different continents, creating specific connections between Europe and the U.S, showing that the legacy is transnational.

Exploration of the theoretical concepts of somatics is supported by ethnographic reflections on practical training sessions and observing the works of somatic practitioners, in which concepts such as *Agency*, *Imagery*, *Journey*, *Touch*, *Body-Mind Entity* (section II.A1-5) emerged. These are connected to the analysis of choreography and somatics developed in Chapters 4 and 5.

Chapter 3 is dedicated to the 1980s, a decade seen as a specific era of structural changes in choreography. After introducing a broad definition of post-modern dance (I.A.), of

Tanztheater (I.B.) and of choreography (I.D), I delve into development of new forms of conceiving dance in theatre relevant to the emergence of a new Dance Theatre dramaturgy (II.C). They also contributed to the development of concepts concerning the body in movement, with exploration of explicit perspectives of a released body and influences (II.D) and feminist thinking (II.E.). The concepts from somatics, highlighted previously in Chapter 2, connect to the historical period of the 1980s through the specific concept of a released body and practices, and in the definition of a new dramaturgy based on a focus on the performer' body, developing a new kind of agency for the performers. The performers' physicality becomes expressive, without representing a specific narrative character (II.A and Laermans 2010). The 1980s is framed specifically in the two major countries of research: Britain (III) and Belgium (IV). The historical contexts of my research include two of the fieldwork cases studies: Gaby Agis (V.A.) and Wim Vandekeybus (V.B.) through their lives and works.

Chapters 2 and 3 offer the grounding to establish the historical and thematic context for the fieldwork experiences, since the main two case studies came from the 1980s from Belgium and Britain. Furthermore, Chapter 2 explains the two somatic practices employed by Agis and Schad: SRT and BMC. Chapters 4 and 5 constitute the containers for the outcome of the fieldwork research. These two chapters reflect on the questions: How could a dancer/performer's body be trained to increase their perception and movement awareness? Which strategies do choreographers adopt to reach an intuitive state in the dancers? How is the body-mind entity situated in the corporeality on stage?

Chapter 4 sets out the ethnographic methodology used in the fieldwork research (II.A-B), specifying differences encountered in the diverse situations and my specific position

in each context. The historical accounts are integrated with fieldwork data, where I combined observation of rehearsals, classes, training, interviews, and my own participatory sessions, as the SRT classes with Agis or the performance and training with Schad.

This chapter also establishes some common perspectives regarding connections between dance training in the preparation of performers for the choreography and somatics that have emerged directly from the research in the field. Collected data is organised in a macro-level (strategies of working in II.B.4a-d) and micro-level (thematic analysis in III.A-D). I am using the term 'common perspective' to underline that even in different approaches in choreography and somatics, specific analogous features emerged. Two case studies, Agis and Vandekeybus, are very different from each other; nevertheless, some similar characteristics have emerged. They were selected because of their ways of using the body in a theatrical context, for their particular kinds of training, and for the era in which they started their choreographic work.

Chapter 5 is focused specifically on the interrelations between somatics and choreography, identified through analysis of the two main cases (Agis and Vandekeybus) and a third one (Isabelle Schad) that I consider an example of genealogy and of integration in the field of choreography and somatics. For instance, all case studies present a process of moving from inside to outside, understood here as a way of working with the inner perceptions and feeling of the dancers/performers and then embracing them in the choreographic structure which is built also through the dancers/performers' individual feelings and perception. These three choreographers use strategies of enacting choreographic structures without losing a more internal relation, although Vandekeybus utilises an indirect approach, meaning not being informed

directly by somatics or not using somatic practices. The fieldwork with Agis, Vandekeybus and Schad informs analysis of the following works: Agis' *Shouting Out Loud* (reconstructed) and *Close Stream* (reconstructed); Vandekeybus' creation *Mockumentary of Contemporary Saviour*. I performed in *Collective Jumps* by Schad, therefore the analysis integrates participant-observation methodologies, adding another layer to my embodied ethnography.

As the thesis develops (Chapter 3.V-V.A and Chapter 5.III), these three choreographers have very different backgrounds. Agis is a trained dancer with studies in improvisation, Release, Contact Improvisation and an expert somatic practitioner as she is one of the leading SRT teachers/practitioners in Britain. Vandekeybus has no former training in dance, with the exception of some ballet and tango classes but a first direct theatrical experience performing working for Belgian Jan Fabre in 1984. Schad has a ballet background and danced for Vandekeybus in the 1990s among others, before starting her own dance company and research informed by somatic practices such as Body-Mind Centering (Chapter 3.III.C) She represents a case of genealogical links in this study.

Why has it been interesting to relate all the three of them? First, Agis and Vandekeybus offer the chance to reflect today on their work in retrospect, they made their first work when they were both very young: Agis choreographed *Close Stream* in 1983 when she was 23 years old and Vandekeybus created *What the Body Does Not Remember* in 1987 when he was 24 years old. At that time these pieces were performed by trained and non-trained dancers: their focus was not on aesthetic resemblances to some predetermined dance rules but a body-physical search for the individual behind the performers. Before looking at their technical qualities as dancers, both Agis and Vandekeybus were looking at the person before the dancer. Agis and Vandekeybus have clear differences in their

working methods. Agis is more focused on the inside feeling connected to the overall structures, while Vandekeybus constructs the character inside a choreographic structure. Even though I am conscious this provokes a different understanding of their working methods, they seemed to look for a corporeality in the dancers that it is being constructed through precise movement-body-mind-physical experiences. The narration in Vandekeybus develops from a precise search for dramaturgy, but the means, methods and contents are the 'speaking body' of the performers. Agis creates a dramaturgical structure where the role is clear (for instance: women who interpret women), there is a more abstract focus rather than clear narrative threads but yet the dancer's body is eloquent. In a sense both Agis and Vandekeybus work with and for the eloquence of the dancers' bodies. This expressiveness is reached through specific way of body working.

On another level Schad represents a direct case of somatically informed technique applied to choreography: through somatics she worked the aesthetics of her pieces, as seen in Chapter 3.III.C, for instance working as the cells in embryology in the BMC perspective.

Details of the Findings

This study highlights the awareness that the 1980s brought to the physicality on stage, through the use of new methods within the dance field, which did not always derive from dance, as seen in the case of the Flemish ones (Chapter 3.IV.B-C). Moreover, the British New Dance and the New Flemish Wave movements were marked by the possibilities of the choreographers' self-legitimisation of their works: at the very beginning the respective governments were not funding them, at least not in a consistent way. The 1980s marked the affirmation of a new Dance Theatre, different from the

German *Tanztheater* but with influences from it, characterised by a clear use of a corporeality that is not based on narration.

In the research project, two main gaps emerged: one is historical and concerns the period of the Second World War in Europe where, as discussed in Chapter 2, many somatic practitioners and dancers moved to the U.S. The other gap arose in relation to finding sources about the 1980s, where the most considerable data I collected derived mainly from articles from specialised journals such as *New Dance*, *Dance Theatre Journal* and *Etcetera* (which is in Flemish). Therefore, on the one hand, there was a prolific interest from dance journalists at that time, even though unfortunately I am not able to understand the Flemish language. On the other hand, there was a lack of contributions from dance scholars on the 1980s which also reflects on the state of the emerging dance studies field at the time. Interestingly, delving into these magazines, some of the journalists became recognised dance professors and researchers today based mainly in Britain, such as Ramsay Burt, Emilyn Claid, Anna Furse, Michael Huxley, and Stacey Prickett. This gap was one of the reasons that encouraged me to develop this research. I must highlight that in 2020 two books were published which are highly relevant for my research topic: *The Natural Body in Somatic Dance Training* by Doran George and published posthumously and *Falling Through Dance and Life* by Claid. This also reinforces the need for new perspectives on somatics and dance.

Returning to the three main clusters of research questions, I address each point here, summarising the research process and findings.

How much has the somatic field contributed to the development of contemporary dance and choreography? In exploring this question, I have looked to theoretical research and directly to the somatic practices through fieldwork. The analysis of the literature review

was organised in four sections, with the focus on somatic concepts, history, practitioners (Chapter 2.II.A.1-5; Chapter 2.II.B; Chapter 2.II.C) and correlations between dance education and choreography and somatics (Chapter 2.II.D; Chapter 2.II.E).

Informed by the underlying conceptualisation of what constitutes the somatic field and shaped by the historical trajectories, I developed my fieldwork with the specific concern of understanding direct and indirect connections between somatics and choreography, focusing first on the training and, subsequently, on the choreographic process. By 'direct', I mean choreographers, dancers, performers who use and are informed by somatic practices in a direct way and on diverse levels (e.g. as a somatics teacher, having a personal practice of somatics etc.), such as Agis, Schad and Alexander. By 'indirect', I refer to those dance artists who are not directly using somatics, such as Vandekeybus and Azpillaga, but who present some connection with somatic in their practices (see Chapters 4 and 5). A macro-level of analysis defined the 'strategies of working' representing four approaches, presented in Chapter 4 (section II.B.4.a-d) to organise the first fieldwork data. These approaches regard the methodologies of creating or re-staging a piece; the somatically informed education in a dance class; specific practices for using the body; and the position of the teacher/practitioner. A micro-level of analysis established four thematic categories, also presented in Chapter 4 (section III, A;B;C;D): *living understanding of somatics*; *perception*, *consciousness*, *awareness*; *encounter*; *tools for an embodied dance practice*.

From this data analysis, some concepts and working methods emerged both in the case of choreographers directly informed by somatics and those indirectly influenced. These comparable and similar concepts include: *there is an internal and external structure;*

the process is the piece; making choices all the time — taking responsibility; *necessity of negotiating*; *creating an atmosphere*; and *developing images* (Chapter 3.II.B.4.a). These approaches form part of their creative process. Furthermore, these choreographers were assuming specific and similar ethical rules, such as: *trusting the work and the practice*; *touch precise and specific imagery and embodiment*; and *agency — individual choice* (Chapter 4, II.B.4.b). During the training, their practices were informed by *physical and imagery indications/suggestions*; *use of specific external props*; and *the practice of specific exercises such as starfish and roll down as common movement practices* (see Chapter 4.II.B.4.c). In warm-up and preparatory classes, the choreographers were giving *physical and verbal indications* and *many verbal indications were accompanied by a physical touch indication* (see Chapter 4.II.B.4.d.).

Common points have been also found in how somatics could be understood, through consulting dance artists with a direct knowledge of somatics and those whose practices are indirectly informed by somatics. Specifically, somatics was defined by the latter as 'the capacity of leading the consciousness in listening for the perception' (Chapter 4.III.A) and as the 'perception of what the body is doing', 'a special consciousness of the body in the space'. This leads to a shared understanding between dance artists who are directly and indirectly informed of what could be intended by perception: *perception of different layers in the body and in the movement*; *use of physical and mental imagery to change and improve the awareness and the quality of movement*; *great attention and focus on the breath* and how *the breath could influence the spatial position and placement of the dancer's body*, and consequently his/her perception (Chapter 4.III.B).

Related questions are *How and in what ways are the dance artists using somatic awareness and practices approaches? Are they aware of using it?* In the rehearsal of a

choreographic piece, these common features emerged that can also be part of a somatic awareness: considering *the body as a full receptor of stimuli*; *different layers of comprehension of the choreographic practices*; *movement practices aimed to develop a full awareness*; *trust in the work of the performers and respect for their own agency and practice*; *use of different spatial levels*; *use of imagery to reach a specific state of theatrical embodiment*; *use of a specific economy in the movement*; *use of a specific touch, and use of theatricality* (Chapter 4.IV.).

Another key question is: *To what extent are the influences of somatic practices evident in 1980s European theatrical dance?* The extent of the influences of somatic practices in 1980s European theatrical dance could be considered as diverse factors. Firstly, the stabilisation of the concept of the released body started in the 1960s/1970s with, for instance, Mary Fulkerson, Barbara Clark, Joan Skinner and developed later in the 1980s with Daniel Lepkoff, Linda Hartley, Eva Karczag, Susan Klein, to mention just a few practicing artists. The dancer/performer uses somatic strategies to develop new attitudes and methods for the moving and dancing body, as integration of their previous training or as a first means of training. These new approaches affected the development of the innovative kinds of dramaturgy which emerged in Dance Theatre, instituting a kind of corporeality with both abstract and theatrical uses of the body. A new type of corporeality, informed by somatic practices, on the one hand influenced the relationship of the dancer with the dance piece, and on the other, made the performer's body expressive without having the duty to represent a narrative character and using this new corporeality also in abstract pieces.

In addition to the above-mentioned gaps in scholarship of the decade, this research produced some specific findings. Both choreographers directly and indirectly influenced

by somatics had some similarities in their creative processes, also through demonstrating appreciation of *encounters,* where individual agency entered in contact with the others (Chapter 4.III C). The modality of the encounter has been expressed through diverse approaches, for instance in Agis' encounter is suggested through the modulation of the 'voice, touch and in the dancing.' For Alexander it is considered as a 'specific ethos for creating a system of knowledge'. In the case of Vandekeybus encounter implies a 'specific taking care of each individual dance/theatre artist'. For Schad encounter is a 'model to re-educate themselves', through the 'continuously challenging ways the bodies interact with each other and her private encounter with somatics (especially BMC and Feldenkrais).

In this light, somatics is not just an umbrella of practices, but also an approach to understand connections between diverse practices. In this perspective, somatics is considered an open field of research, both as an approach towards body-mind connection into movement, and also as specific exercises and practices developed in time and space which make somatics a continuous feeling for action.

Ethnographic methodologies have been used to understand critical connections between somatics and choreography in the field. At the same time however, I acknowledge my personal understanding is relating to my own background of researcher which informed my choices. As such I could frame the findings through my first-person experience, both as a performer and somatic movement educator myself, and as a direct and privileged observer, being accepted in the studios and performing with one of the choreographers. These elements established the perspective of my embodied ethnography, through which I experienced diverse strategies of observations

with kinaesthetic empathy, informed also by my European identity, with a training in the U.S.

Moreover, this work is part of and contributes to a literature in dance academia that highlights the relation between choreography, training and those practices called under the umbrella name of somatics, positioning concepts, ethos, physical exercises and considering creativity.

I am aware that most of the discourses considered here are examined in their contradiction, Vandekeybus is not directly speaking of somatics, nevertheless studying his work under this perspective enhance understanding into his bodily conceptions. His 'indirect' use of elements somehow associated with somatics (exercises, verbal indications), on one side highlights how much the creative process of choreography is at the basis very linked to aspects at the roots of somatics, considered as a creative practice. On the other, this approach reflects on how the physicality of specific movement training is close to somatics, going back in history in the connection of dance and somatics.

In addition, reconstructions of works from the 1980s in the 21st century show the efficacy of those creative pieces, not only for their movement language, but for the strategies used to restage them: notes, observing videos, when possible, but above all the memory of the body. The body remembers that specific state. In Agis the restaging processes involved responding to particular types of verbal instructions, connected to visual imagery and physical states rather than following only an original set movement score. In observing Vandekeybus choreograph a new work, he followed a similar path, often speaking of the state of the body and an atmosphere of the piece.

Possible Prospective Paths

This study invites further exploration. This research could be extended and expanded in various directions: in the definition of a more inclusive methodology with more extensive fieldwork, in the expansion of the subject matter, in the research of the material, and in the approach. Regarding the first aspect, the methodology, even though I spent some weeks with the dance companies, more time would deepen the relationship from the inside, expanding the project to a practice-based one, for example working with more case studies and thus expanding the inter-subjectivity field.

Secondly, in relation to the documentary materials and fieldwork, on one hand, in order to expand the connection with the European somatic pioneers I would propose expanding the research to include some German and Swiss dance archives and increase the number of interviews in order to collect a more diverse data spectrum. A wider range of materials (such as video) could be used to implement the archival research and to fulfil some historical gaps.

Thirdly, in relation to the subject matter, one theme where this research could expanded is in the transmission of somatics: how are somatic practices currently diffused? The recent pandemic and resultant growth of virtual media as a learning tool opens up new strategies and possible influences of virtual media evident in the cultural transmission of somatics. During the pandemic somatics showed ways of transmission that before were unthinkable: for instance, no sharing of the same learning environments and no touch, just practices and feedback through the screens. It is not possible to define at present the extent to which this has impacted the field, but some questions arise. To what extent is the body considered into sections, as seen via the screens? Could the individual experience have been considered more than the collective one?

At the same time the choreographers focussed upon in this study have challenged their working methods through the pandemic. Vandekeybus created *Draw from Within* (2020) a work created by distance for Rambert, Agis sent verbal instructions to students to proceed with their SRT practices individually and researched for her screendance work *My Room – Thamesmead* (2021).

To conclude, this research is part of an open process delving into a discourse in the research methodology of dance and somatic knowledge. I have argued that the relationship between choreography and somatics is an expanding field, that is to say that many choreographers are still using and in the process of implementing their practices with somatics. Thanks to the growth of dance scholarship with specific research in the field and the possibility of combining somatics and dance, the investigation could developed more deeply. I have demonstrated that, in the case studies presented above, a connection with somatics can be present even though the choreographer (such as Vandekeybus) is not directly involved with somatics. This reveals the nature of encounters present in both dance and somatics. As we have seen in Chapter 3, the 1980s represented a turning point for dance culture, with the establishment of a kind of dramaturgy based on embodiment and a new understanding of the body. These bodies were requested to became active agent in the performance. The performer body became the centre from which the dramaturgy developed. In this new understanding, somatically informed practices marked the way.

Appendix A

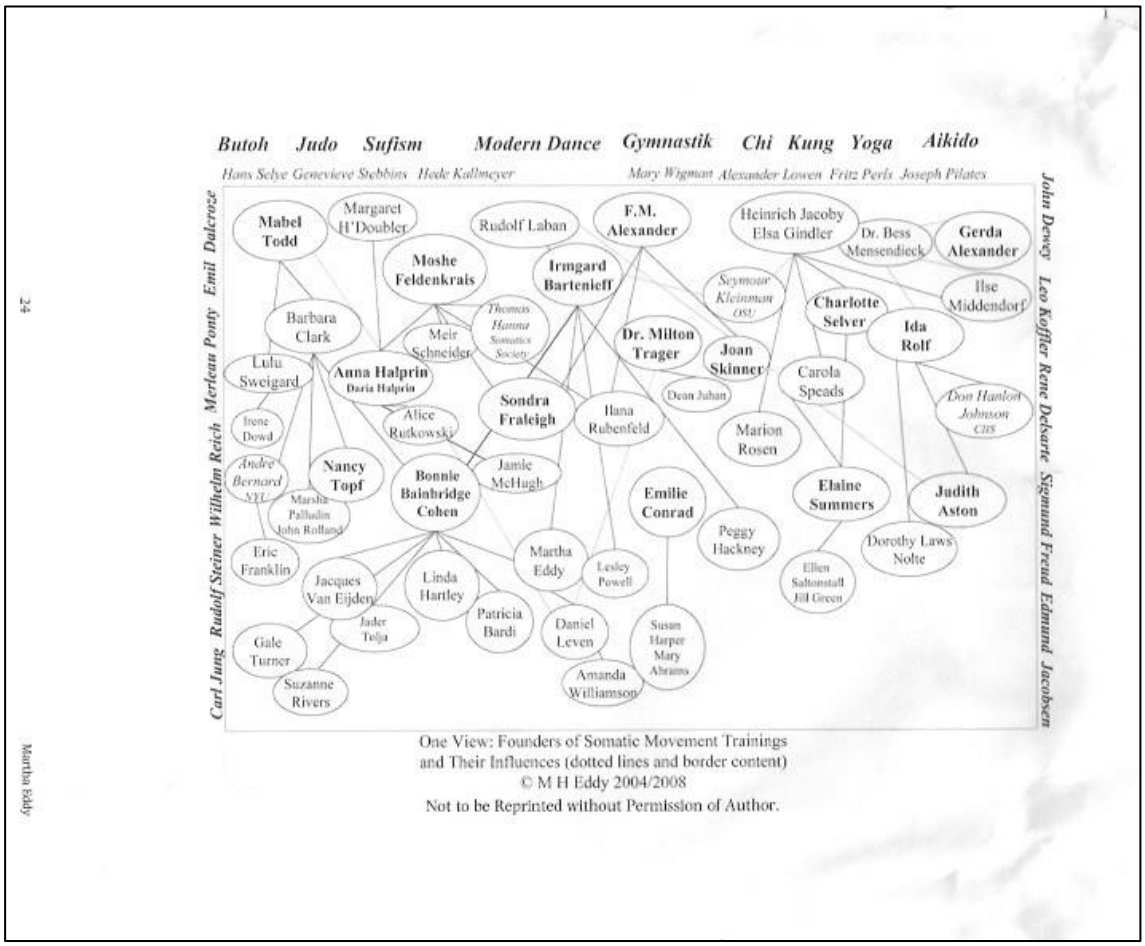

Figure 1: Eddy, Martha 'One View: Founders of Somatic Movement Trainings and Their Influences', in Eddy, Martha (2009) 'A Brief History of Somatic Practices and Dance: Historical Development of the Field of Somatic Education and its Relationship to Dance', Journal of Dance and Somatic Practices 1:1., pp. 5-27.

	TIME PERIOD	NAMES
Predecessors often strictly connected to the dance field	end of 19th sec./ beginning of 20th	François Delsarte, Émile Jacques-Dalcroze, Rudolf von Laban, Isadora Duncan, Mary Wigman, Margaret H'Doubler)
Pioneers deriving from the work of the predecessors but that have tried to set up some specific systems to work on the body-mind and recover it.	beginning of 20th	Elsa Gindler, Bess Mensedieck, Ilse Middeendorf
First Generation they have created specific systems of body-mind understanding.	beginning of 19th till middle 20th	F.M. Alexander, Moshe Feldenkrais, Mabel Todd, Irmgard Bartenieff, Ida Rolf, Charlotte Selver, Milton Trager, Gerda Alexander
New Generations or leaders some of them have studied with the First Generation and have created other somatic systems.	middle 20th	Elaine Summers, Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, Sondra Horton Fraleigh, Anna Halprin, Joan Skinner, Nancy Topf, Judith Aston
Recent Generations deriving from the previous one and have created new systems of body-mind knowledge.	60s/70s	Susan Klein, Eric Franklin, Linda Hartley, Emilie Conrad

Figure 2: Frasson, Elisa (2019), Somatic Practitioners Organised by Time Periods.

Appendix B

Participant Consent Form

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Project:
Performing Somatics - an insight in the European choreographic scene from the 1980s through the frame of somatic knowledge.

Brief Description of Research Project, and What Participation Involves:
This research investigates the influence of somatic knowledge within European contemporary choreography, by looking at representations and embodiments of different choreographic works from the 1980s. The primary aim of this research is to investigate how somatic practices inform choreographic processes, problematizing and expanding upon current relationships between the field of somatics and contemporary choreographic practices.

This is a multilayered research project, with multiple aspects, from theoretical research to fieldwork, with interviews and observation of rehearsals. The interviews will investigate the extent the dancer's and choreographer's connections to somatic practices, bringing a special focus on the discussion on creative processes and on the conscious or unconscious interaction of somatic practices in the choreographic processes. This study is inspired by my personal practice as a Somatic Movement Educator, performer and dance scholar.

I will be participating as an observer in several rehearsals as well as conducting interviews -that will be audio recorded- with the implicated artists. Interviews will last from 40 minutes to 90 minutes. I am planning to interview 5 choreographers, 10 dancers, and 5 somatic practitioners, for a total of 20 interviews. Whenever possible, I am planning to do joint interviews in order to implement the dialogue, for example between a choreographer and a somatic practitioner, etc. Any findings and documents will be a vital part of the final thesis. Audio-recordings of interviews, photographs and written material will be stored on my personal computer which is password protected and kept safely at home, as part of my personal library and archive. Any notebooks will be similarly kept under lock and key in my home.

Investigator Contact Details:
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Consent Statement:

I agree to take part in this research, and am aware that I am free to withdraw at any point without giving a reason, although if I do so I understand that my data might still be used in a collated form. I understand that the information I provide will be treated in confidence by the investigator and that my identity will be protected in the publication of any findings, and that data will be collected and processed in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and with the University's Data Protection Policy.
Name …….

Signature ……

Date ……

Please note:

Please can you indicate which of these is closest to the way you wish your identity to be protected in any publications for this project.

I consent to be identified by name in published text and photograph captions.

There may be some instances where I would like my anonymity to be preserved, so please seek specific consent for any identification of myself in published material or photograph captions.

Please do not identify me by name in any written publication or in photograph captions.

If you have a concern about any aspect of your participation or any other queries please raise this with the investigator or you can also contact the Director of Studies. However, if you would like to contact an independent party please contact the Head of Department.

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Appendix C

Charts

I. Agis

In the first chart is highlighted the experience with Gaby Agis, during the first part of the interview we had in her home and it was mainly focused on her life and experience both creative and into somatic practices.

Gaby Agis	Rationale	I somatics definition	II perception consciousness awareness	III encounter	IV tools for an embodied dance practice
there is a structure and an inside of the structure	on the creation of a piece starting from inner perspective	X			
the process is the piece	on the creation of a piece and links with the practices involved to it	X			
making choice all the time - take responsibility	same processes used both for creating a piece and during the somatic practice	X	X		
negotiating	same processes used both for creating a piece and during the somatic practice	X			
create an atmosphere	in a piece creation				X
creating images	same processes used both for creating a piece and during the somatic practice	X			X
use of specific language	during somatic practices	X			

imagery-language-landscapes	same process of creation and somatics	X			X
respect	referring to self respect and respect to other in somatic practices	X	X	X	
ethics rules	referring to the somatic field	X		X	X
reconstruct thinking about the specific conditions	in the relation to reconstructing a piece using somatic strategies to recreate the 'original' atmosphere	X			X

Chart 1: Frasson, Elisa (2019), Experience with Gaby Agis.

II. Alexander

The second chart is a summary of the interview I had with Kirsty Alexander at Independent Dance during May 2016.

Kirsty Alexander	Rationale	I somatics definition	II perception consciousness awareness	III encounter	IV tools for an embodied dance practice
two people together can create a new different system	speaking on the somatically informed education perspective and the work of Gill Clarke	X		X	
ethos	behind somatics there is a specific ethos	X		X	
experiental anatomy	a tool of integration in somatic practices		X		X
trusting the work	condition for introducing somatic practices	X	X		X
'That's OK'	condition to legitimate the somatic work and make it possible	X	X	X	X
Hanna's definition of Somatics we are missing the 'we'	the actual definition of somatics is more focused on the I-experience; in this way is missing one slot of the full experience	X		X	
touch precise and specific	peculiarity of somatics	X		X	

layers - different kind of layers	peculiarity of somatics	X	X		
imagery	peculiarity of somatics				
agency individual choice	peculiarity of somatics	X	X		X
economy	peculiarity of somatics - movement and effort economy	X	X		X
body mind entity	as a network of energy derived from the whole self multi-dimension	X	X	X	

Chart 2: Frasson, Elisa (2019), Experience with Kirsty Alexander.

III. Jauregui

The third chart represents a summary of my observation of a workshop held by Jerome Jauregui on Ultima Vez movement vocabulary, held at the company home in Bruxelles in April 2017.

Workshop with Jerome Jauregui	Rationale	I somatics definition	II perception consciousness awareness	III encounter	IV tools for an embodied dance practice
warming up of the foot with a massage	way to start the class		x	x	x
yoga, stretching, abs, breathing exercise	general consideration on the kind of work presuppose				x
the teacher is practicing the exercise with the dancers; students are following the teacher visually and verbally	general consideration				x
catch something	verbal indication and image propose by the teacher				x
X position and rolling	use of starfish position	x			x

increasing the rhythm	general consideration				x
feeling the sit bones	physical indication of the teacher	x	x		x
feeling stretching the psoas	exercise		x		x
engage your eyes	verbal indication of the teacher on how to improve a physical movement		x		x
more present, more feel	verbal indication of the teacher		x		x
use the fall for the rebound	verbal indication of the teacher		x		x
if you are making a mistake, don't care	suggestion during the dance /movement practice				x
move your center from the impulse	verbal indication of the teacher on how to improve a physical movement	x	x		x
how my breath could support the movement	task for student	x	x	x	x
while dancing I am taking decisions	task for the students	x	x	x	x
working on the connection between the movements	suggestion of the teacher	x	x	x	x

take care of who you are now that you are tired	suggestion of the teacher	x	x	x	x
my body creates the tension my body release s the tension	verbal indication of the teacher on a physical and mental condition	x	x		x

Chart 3: Frasson, Elisa (2019), Experience with German Jauregui.

Appendix D

Complete Fieldwork Notes. Ultima Vez Company (Brussels February 2017)

<u>First Day [February 20th 2017]</u>

- *At the beginning of the rehearsal, Vandekeybus starts giving specific indications on movement sequences and how to prevent injuries and the work on the balance, as he suggested the use of a proprioceptive board.* —> This board is a specific prop used in physical therapy and other practices to improve proprioception, the body position awareness. This suggests that the choreographer is mindful of the internal and somatic relation within the body.
- *Speaking of some specific movement sequences and piece of choreography, Vandekeybus says: "we choose, we go for it and we go for it", and as to clarify the current rehearsal situation he exclaims "it could be as the hell in the next days".* —-> This are precise voice instructions by the choreographer acknowledging firstly the determination to reach for the goal, and secondly to sum up the creative confusion determined also by constraints due to production timing.
- *Kolegova teaches a warming up class open to all the company members, dancers and actors, a warm up dedicated on the full body. They start moving from the starfish position, with the body spread out on the ground in a form of star; the performers explore movements such as spirals, circles, leg swings from knees and from the hips, allowing different kind of weight transfer in-between the transition. In the meanwhile Vandekeybus — who is participating in this warming up class — is taking care of Gharbi, the blind dancer, accompanying him in the movements through caring touch and voice.* —> These warming up exercises are preparing the body to be reactive and ready for the rehearsal day. Movements and elements such as starfish position, spirals, and the use of touch are connected to somatics.

- *I notice that the warming up has a very fast pace from the very beginning. Despite their quite different movement backgrounds, the performer group is strongly in accord. The choice of proposing this speed at the beginning of the class seems deriving from a familiarity of the performers with the movement vocabulary proposed by Kolegova and a mutual knowing and trust between them and her.* —> This warming up is strictly connected to the quality and high energy required later from the dancers and performers in the choreography. This preparation is central to reinforce internal and external physical connections to enact the choreographic scores.
- *Kolegova is repeating "try not to relax but to reach" —which is a sentence often expressed also by Vandekeybus himself and his teachers (Inaki Azipillaga and German Jauregui) in order to activate the dynamics and the focus of the movements.* —> The use of the term 'relax' versus 'reach' means the looking for a constant tension for action. Relax here is understood as a complete disuse of the muscular force and a loss of movement flow.
- *She proposes some released stretching in a yoga style — such as the 'warrior pose' and 'baby pose' in Yoga, giving some images such as 'dive out from the water' and more specific physical clues — such as 'feel your lower back extend'. The movement sequence increases with more specific physical tasks — push ups, hands support — turn from the head into the space. Simultaneously, Vandekeybus, who is still participating in the class, gives physical indications to all the members such as: 'reach up, push yourself up'. Kolegova continues with proposing a stretch involving different parts of the body.* —-> This represents a fusion of practices close to somatics vocabulary such as the use of the yoga movements, different kinds of words and sentences referring to imagery, connection of physical body parts to spatial connection. Dancers are responding physically to verbal indications. These clues keep the dancers on track.

- *They then move into a sequence of: half roll over, seated, squat, half way up, full way up, jump, as if coming out from the water, grand plié in first and second position and stretching on the side. They pass to a walk from the side with small steps and jumps and slides. The class prepares the body to work on diverse levels — according to Laban's definition: high, medium/central and deep/low.* —-> From these movement sequences we understand the full range of movement and levels used in the class and later in the choreography.
- *They conclude the warming up with a movement sequence that they were constructing in the previous days, based on movement such as slides, turns, kicks in the air, falls, change from the foot as a support to a hand. This sequence is part of the choreography and has as a image to contrast the figure of the enemy.* —-> The enemy here is intend to be an imaginary one; as explained before, these characters are living in a constricted space and are waiting for something evil to happen to them, or better they don't know their future. So, they have to confront an enemy, a psychological enemy even more than a physical one. This final sequence is relevant because it shows the direct relation with the choreography, both thematically and temporally.
- *In the meanwhile, Vandekeybus gives the following indications "drop your head down and slide on the side", "you have a tv on your belly and you show it to the front". Also Kolegova gives physical and spatial inputs to Gharbi, and he touches the body of the teacher to understand the movements. She explains the relevance of controlling the body movements: "you don't throw yourself whatever instead you control yourself in the space". Vandekeybus gives more explanations on one movement in the sequence, the run: "we have to change really the run - now that we know the movement sequence…running into space, we need the speed"*. —-> This is still related to the 'enemy sequences' ; in how to make it more real.

- *After the movement sequence, the warming up finishes with a high impact sequence of push ups, abdominal exercises and jumps maintaining a high rhythms and counting together. When the class is finished, everyone practices his/her own parts and Vandekeybus follows the work of everyone.* —-> The final movement sequence is necessary to stay more focused on the energy level. Vandekeybus is working independently with one dancer/performer at time to work on the details.
- *Later, they rehearse the full choreography structure, starting from a 'kung fu' inspired scene. Vandekeybus gives feedback on the walk: "this is not contemporary dance, when you go you go", meaning that they have to look for the real action of the pedestrian movement and not an imitation of it.* —-> With some humour in regards to the common idea of what could be contemporary dance, the choreographer is stimulating the performer to be real in performing their pedestrian action.
- *After, Vandekeybus works on the concept of remembering with the texts written by the actors and dancers. The last rehearsal part is focused on clarifying the dramaturgy, based on a text about a ritual, on people who have been waiting for a long time for the arrival of a Messiah.*

Second Day [February 21st 2017]

- *On the second day the warming up is led by Vandekeybus. He introduces the movements, demonstrating them and describing them with voice. They start positioned in a circle, with a full body stretching, rolling on the side, half and complete somersault, front and back. They move toward the center with an unilateral movement and coming back with pushing from the feet. Maintaining at the side of the circle, they transfer the weight from a plank position, rolling on the side to another plank position, following the perimeter of the circle. Then, they connect to a partner to roll together, adding a push up and a shaking mutual hands. Still in the circumference of the circle, they alternatively jump and walk with bended knees to the center of the*

circle and back; then they move on the side sliding in a open second position of the legs, following up a dynamic stretching sequence. They tilt one leg at time from back to forward, still moving in the direction of the circle.They add to the jump a turn in the air starting form the spiral of the foot: the foot is being lifted and thrown into the air as the turn is happening. Then they divided themselves to work in couples on manipulation and weight transfer with a mutual push. After, they jump together, step and push, jump on the side, jump in the air and falling in the arms of the partner. During all the warming up class there is an energetic sound of a rock guitar in the background. The working climate between Vandekeybus and the performer is very relaxed. —> This very long movement sequence description shows the range of movements used and the technical complexity, all elements present in the choreography.

- *Without a specific end of the class, they pass to work on the choreography, demonstrating again the continuity from the class to the choreographic work. Vandekeybus suggests an improvisation on the song 'Each Man Kills the Things he Loves' by Jeanne Moreau.* —-> Dancers keep and bring the same movement quality gained in the previous sequence, into the new proposed improvisational movement.
- *Vandekeybus is looking for a new scene, searching for the specific role and function of each performer. He asks the performers to tell stories and to listen to each other's stories. At the end they use the improvisation to create a new movement sequence.* —-> Use of verbal clues, narrative, use of improvisation to create choreography, and construction of a psychological scene.

<u>Day 3 [February 22nd 2017]</u>

- *On the third day, I arrived when the warming up class was already finished. They begin from the previous day's theatrical scene based on the music Each man kills the things he loves. Vandekeybus explains how important is for him to look first at the*

physical actions in order to define the dramaturgical order of the events. This next physical action is based on how the performers are looking for connection and disconnection between themselves, trying to find a modality of resistance and holding each other, in a constant movement pattern. Vandekeybus' *image is 'coming together like a magnet' and he guides the movement saying "pushing millimeter by millimeter", he is showing physically with his body this work on union and separation.* —> The choreographer is pursuing an image of union and separation, and it is been working out through different verbal and imagery tasks.

- *D'Andrea is performing a text on Italian painter Caravaggio, as he is moving, the text is on attraction and repulsion. Vandekeybus helps D'Andrea suggesting him to feel more deeply his own presence inside himself and feeling as he is taking away is own skin*. —> This image is helping the dancer to stay in contact with the authenticity of his character;
- *Vandekeybus is also reminding the entire group that "it's important to feel that everyone is working on the same thing, even though you represent many different characters. You need to go into each other"*. —-> Looking for a common rhythm;
- *Nevertheless, Vandekeybus is very specific in the spatial placing of the performers and often he advises them likewise "I like your presence but you need a place where to go" and also he constantly controls the timing of the actions and the relations of the performers with their characters: "Let things happen: do not rush over it". —->* Timing of action concern.
- *There is a strong connection between the sound (curated by Charo Calvo), the scenic construction, and the general rhythm of creation, which is very high. After, they start to work on the diverse sections of the full choreography. Then a discussion in groups followed up, based on concept as 'follower, chosen, strategy, manipulation'. Vandekeybus focuses on the construction of a movement phrase based on pedestrian*

movements, kung fu movements and articulate spatial interlaced movements, 'a love duet', with Liu and D'Andrea. —-> Characterization of the characters: developing it through diverse kinds of movement.

- *Vandekeybus remembers continuously: "when performing you are creating a mood, let the things grow from the inside before putting them out". After they move again on working on the text, Vandekeybus and collaborators are looking for a story who keeps surprising, '"the story is good when it keeps surprising". At the end, they did a full run out of the raw material.* —-> This image of 'letting things grow' is again an example of a clue used to maintaining a strong connection between the internal feelings of the dancers and the external choreographic score.

<u>Day 4 [February 23rd 2017]</u>

- *The day starts with a warming up class directed by Kolegova, similar to the one of the first day. From the ground, from the starfish position, rolling to reach for the seated position, and turn. There is an increase of the movement rhythm, to change position and arrive standing on arms and legs. Kolegova proposes some movements to carry the body on a lateral crossing with hands on the grounds, throwing feet in the air, arriving on balance on one leg. Then some other kinds of lateral jumps follow, back and forward. Again, the exercises proposed has a very rhythmical and spatial sense. On the trace of a circle, Kolegova proposes a run in couples maintaining the same level, descending towards the ground and returning up, always keeping eyes' contact. The warming up class is always useful to prepare the body-mind and is dedicated to everyone. Kolegova explains to the dancers that "when one thing move, all the body move", encouraging them to feel their bodies in a released way. The warming up class ends with a very high energy thanks to a series of push ups, jumps and squats.* —-> Movements are again close to a release dance vocabulary and they are the same kind of the one used later on in the choreography.

- *After a small break, they transit to the performance piece. Vandekeybus stays focussed on the ritual, the 'ritual of the heavy hands and heavy stones' and asks the performers to create a movement sequence on 'image of the heavy stone that guides your movements, your rhythmic movements'. He further explains: "this is a ritual: you have to enjoy nicely to suffer". He looks for the unison in the movement phrase. The choreography is rather geometrical, the choreographer gives an indication and construct movement sequences. He looks for the performers individual differences. In this 'fake' ritual construction, they experience a lot of fun, specially in throwing bodies into space and hugging themselves*. —-> Ritual is considered as a mind state, a theatrical element, and a mood creator.

<u>Day 5 [February 24th 2017]</u>

- *The day starts with a group discussion on the piece and on possible/eventual use of props. Vandekeybus again repeats as mantras "everyone is the same, everyone is different", "taking the time to let the thing grow"*. —-> Discussion on time and struggle also with the production's timing: theatre and dance making need a time which is not always the same of the production.
- *Then Gharbi (the blind dancer) leads the warming up with focus on 'taking time'. They start walking on different levels — half point, bended knees, opposition leg arms — maintaining a consistent rhythm. Then they change position, and transfer to the ground with push ups, and abdominals. An integration of pedestrian movements, such us walking, running, running with high and low knees, push ups, ads, and shoulder rollings followed up. To these succeed a high impact series of runs, body shifts and crossings, interrupted by stops and 'sit and run'. After these, Gharbi proposes different kinds of exercises to reinforce the full body like push ups, lateral abdominals, and lifts of the legs together, and again different kind of jumps, rolls together with a push up, high jumps with a reach for the feet from behind, rolls and*

push up from one side, rolling under one arm, lateral jumps with hands claps, and rising alternately a knee with a faster rhythm. Then, he passes to stretching from the standing position with a roll down, bending forward with hands under the feet, feeling the lower back realising and not pushing, let the back drop; with a *transition to a lateral stretch, positioning the right hand on the left knee and vice versa. To conclude with the starfish position on the ground, rolling from supine to prone, bringing the knees towards the chest, stretching the psoas with one knee at a time toward the chest and the other leg extended, and stretching of the gluteus. A small walk on the sit bone towards the front and back and side and other kind of stretches like the warrior in yoga help to realign the performers bodies. To really finish the class, Gharbi proposes a strong series of abdominal exercises, push up and jumps.*—> In these exercises, he connects different functions of types of movement.

- *Then, they start the rehearsals with a discussion on the dramaturgy and on the concept of cruelty on the specific issue of the baby girls killed as newborn. After they move to the next scene which is situated clearly in future. Vandekeybus gives the context on explaining who is the character of the kung fu girl, who is this child arrived to rescue them. He asks to make an improvisation on each individual character in relation to the king fu girl. Vandekeybus specifies that in this show they represent values 'that are not only good or bad' and they are working as 'making a movie'. He also explain to what extent it is important for him to know the individual states and difficulties experienced by everybody, "I need to know, I need to listen to everybody".* —-> In this general discussion, we can see the specificity of the psychological skills.
- *After the lunch break, they start again to work on the ritual scene. Vandekeybus encourages them to take the time they need to feel the scene and at the same time to take the risk to explore new possibilities. After a long run of the full creation,*

Vandekeybus gives some feedbacks: "in a lot of things here is much more important to listen, than to makes things happen; listen to the things from the inside, the dances are like a breathing, like a breath". He is still looking for some specific qualities of the characters. —-> Listening as a way to connect the internal to external structures.

- *A discussion on how to proceed follows up; Vandekeybus: "dance has to transform itself to another level, I need some days where I start to work on things; it means I need to enter on the material already present without the pressure to create something else. Everybody can bring energy. It has taken to me a long time to understand what is this piece. I feel your struggle, believe in yourself, believe in things you are proposing."*——> The choreographer is encouraging through verbal cues the dancers, who feel themselves in a fragile moment of creativity.

End of the rehearsal diary.

Appendix E

Sample of Interview Questions

Sample of General Questions

- Could you introduce to me your dance background and training?
- How did you enter in contact with somatics?
- Which aspect of somatics is more interesting in your practice?
- How would you define somatics?
- Could you define this specific terminology: touch, journey, layers, imagery, agency, function, body-mind entity?
- How do you perceive the changing in the perception of somatics during the years?
- In your opinion, which are the difference from 1980s till nowadays in perceiving somatics in relation to dance and vice versa?
- What is your opinion on the position of somatics in the academic field nowadays?
- What is mainly informing your practice today?
- Could you suggest to me a book and/or a music track in relation to your practice??

Sample of Specific Questions
To Kirsty Alexander

- How does the idea of the *Journal in Dance and Somatic Practices* has started?
- From which necessity the *MA/MFA in Creative Practice* has started?

To German Jauregui and Iñaki Azpillaga

- Which kind of training did you undertake during your work in Vandekeybus company?
- How would you describe Ultima Vez movement vocabulary?
- Do you think we can speak of somatics in relation to Vandekeybus' work?
- Do you consider somatics a relevant part in the training of the dancers?
- To what extent and in which ways do you think Vandekeybus has influenced your work, as dancer and choreographer?

Appendix F

Credits of the works by Gaby Agis (*Close Streams* and *Shouting Out Loud* and their reconstructions) and by Wim Vandekeybus (*What the Body Does Not Remember*, original and revival, and *Roseland*).

Close Streams (1983)

Choreographer: Gaby Agis

1983 Dancers. Gaby Agis, Helen Rowsell

2016, 2018 Dancers: Gaby Agis, Eeva-Maria Mutka

The 2016 performances at Turner Contemporary were supported by The Bryan Robertson Trust

Shouting Out Loud (1984)

Original 1984 Cast: Emily Barney, Claire Bushe, Lucy Fawcett, Lindy Flowers, Sue Glasser, Johanna Godliman, Jane Hansford, Ann Herdman Smith, Jessica Loeb, Mary Prestidge, Helen Rowsell, Catherine Tucker, Sian Webber

Choreography: Gaby Agis

Music: Ana Da Silva and The Raincoats

2014 Cast: Natasha Beauchamp, Joy Esaya-Mukuka, Lucy Fawcett, Rachel Gildea, Jessica Loeb, Jessica Murray, Katja Nyqvist, Florence Peake, Mary Prestidge, Amaara Raheem, Susanna Recchia, Rosalie Wahlfrid, and Megan Elizabeth Williams

Project Manager: Silke Arnold

Funded by Arts Council England and Roehampton Dance

What the Body Does Not Remember (1987)

Original Performance 1987

Directed by Wim Vandekeybus

Performed by Charo Calvo, Marian Del Valle, Yves Delattre, Patrick Dieleman, Maria Icaza, Dorothée Morel, Caroline Rottier, Simone Sandroni, Eduardo Torroja, Wim Vandekeybus

Also Performed by Nicolas Crow, Muriel Héerault, Lieve Meeussen

Also Performed by (Revival 1995) Florence Rougier, Thomas Lehnart

Music Thierry De Mey & Peter Vermerrsch

Played by Maximalist!

Assistant Direction: Eduardo Torroja

General Assistant: Octavio Iturbe

Stage Manager: Pascal Joris

Production: Ultima Vez, Louise De Neef, Nadia Cornelis

Coproduction: Centro di Produzione Inteatro Polverigi; Festival de Saint-Denis; Festival d'Etè de Seine-Maritime; Toneelschuur Produkties Haarlem

With the Support of Vlaams Theater Circuit

Roseland (1990)

Direction: Walter Verdin, Wim Vandekeybus, Octavio Iturbe

Choreography: Wim Vandekeybus

Music: Thierry De Mey & Peter Vermerrsch

Editing: Octavio Iturbe, Walter Verdin

With: Assumpta Arques Surinach, Jabi Bustamente, Nicolas Crow, Charo Calvo, Maria Grazia Noce, Muriel Hèrault, Peter Kern, Shannon McMurchy, Lieve Meeussen, Simone Sandroni, Eduardo Torroja, Wim Vandekeybus

Musical Conduction: Georges-Elie Octors

Musicians: Géry Combier (percussion, double bass), Thierry De Mey (percussion), Dirk Descheenmaeker (bass clarinet, clarinet), Jean-Paul Dessy (cello), Jean-Luc Fafchamps (piano), Vincent Jacquemin (clarinet), Michel Massot, Alain Pire (trombone), Georges-Elie Octors (percussion), Jean-Luc Plouvier (piano) Eric Sleichim (sax, clarinet), Peter Vermeersch (saxophone, clarinet)

Recording:Daniel Léon (studio Cathy – Brussels)

Stage Manager: Pascal Joris

Light: Octavio Iturbe, Pascal Joris

Costumes: Isabelle Lhoas

Set Concept: Wim Vandekeybus

Floor: External Use

Camera: Danny Elsen, Sergne Erverdepoel

Camera Assistance: Alex De Backer, Sam Coeckelberghs

Light: Wim Vandekeybus, Octavio Iturbe, Walter Verdin, Danny Elsen, Serge Everdepoel, Pascal Joris

Sound Recording: Chris Laureys, Yvan De Beer

Sound Assistance: Anke Pesh

Assistant Director: Catherine Van Dorsselaer, Sonia Gasparini

Electricians: Pascal Joris, Patrick Dams

Engineers: Guido Vandervelpen, Dirk Buseyne

Recording Manager: Daniel Demoustier

Mixing: Hans Helewaut, Walter Verdin

Postproduction: Audiovisuele Dienst K.U.Leuven, ACE Editing

Production Manager: Sonia Gasparini

Realization: Walter Verdin

Production: Beeldhuis nv

Co-Production: Ultima Vez, BRT, Audiovisuele Dienst K.U. Leuven and Alice From OO Center, Twin Cities Public Television Inc.

Based On: *What the Body Does Not Remember* (1987), *Les Porteuses de Mauvaises Nouvelles* (1989), *The Weight of a Hand* (1990)

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