



Reflection paper on the MA project *to the sides of this body*

Would it not make more sense to remove the wool from over our own eyes than to wrap the rest of the world up in it?

- Tim Ingold

Prologue

In mid-July 2021, a heavy rainfall hit the border region between Germany, Belgium, and France. Several days of unrelenting downpour had created a massive flood which ended up killing more than 500 people and damaging 10.000s of houses and whole infrastructures in this region of Central Europe. At that time, I was only 50 kilometers away from one of the villages in West Germany where the flood had crashed and destroyed the town. I was trying to find a way to go back to Denmark as fast as possible since my grandmother had just passed away in the early morning of July 17th. No trains, no connection to the airport, nothing. After hours of phone calls and finding failing alternatives to go back home I was driven to Hamburg by car with my partner and sister-in-law and managed to find a train connection to my hometown so I could hold my grandmother's hand for the last time.

I still remember her body, lying peacefully in the bed, getting stiffer and colder, but still with an unbelievably soft skin surrounding the whole her. I remember how much I cried, and how empty everything felt. Like something literally was pulled out of me; a sensation that I have never experienced before. It felt like a big empty hole between my stomach and the chest, ending around my heart area, had opened. The weeks after that I was in a strange blur.

A month later, August 22nd, I was sitting in a bus on my way to Oslo. Crying again. Leaving Copenhagen somewhat lost, thinking to myself how insanely ignorant of me moving to a city that I have never visited, studying a MA in dance at a school I have never been to, temporarily saying goodbye to my partner who at that time was in a deep and long-lasting depression, and leaving friends, family, a dance collective, and everything I connected to safety. My solid foundation suddenly felt shaky and uncertain, but somehow the shake couldn't be compared to the loss I had just recently experienced.

20 months later I'm sitting here, scrolling through my notes. One says: *But buildings are just as solid as humans allow them to be*. This note I wrote during a rehearsal with Emilie. It was related to the architect Keller Easterling's book *Extrastatecraft*¹. In our master research we had for a while been occupied with infrastructure space, how different spaces suggest different usage and in which way they have their own agency. I found an equal amount of fear of and fascination in big scale, almost inhuman, buildings and the forces that destroy them. The invisible, undeclared spaces in between buildings made me think about what it actually is that holds these buildings together. I have realized throughout my master research that I have been juxtaposing building with body, and I have been interested in seeing what maintains after an earthquake, and how much the skeleton of the building can hold. And taking my experience two summers ago into account, how fragile they appear to be after all.

Several encounters the last year and a half, both professionally and personally, have brought me to a state in my work as a dance maker where I have become more eager and confident in binding my deep interest in corporeal practices to theoretical inputs in order to bring new perspectives to the work I make. I have found ways and tools to expand my entry points to generate dance material and to contextualize what I do with dance in a world of unforeseeable destruction, beauty, and emotional ambiguity. Some of these entry points and tools will be elaborated and shared in this text.

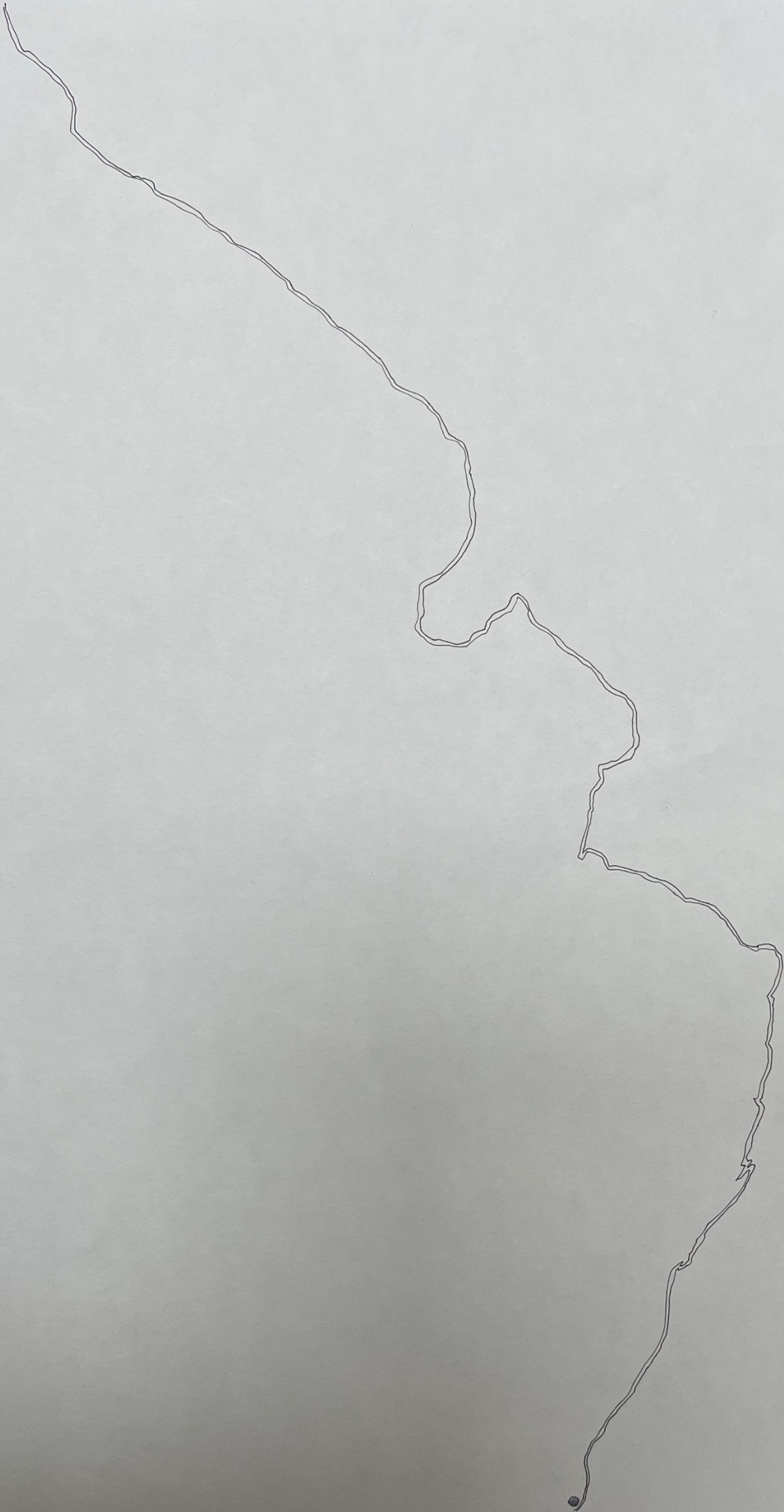
I will describe the process and methods used and developed during the creation of my final master project *to the sides of this body* made together with Emilie Karlsen, fellow student at MA in dance. A work which was built upon the notion of letting the matter of the work occur in the making of the material. Meaning, that this project didn't embark from a preconceived idea or fixed theme as such,

¹ Easterling, *Extrastatecraft*.

but from a sincere interest in physical exploration, collaboration, and practice sharing between Emilie and me. Being two dancers coming from slightly different training experiences and approaches on how to enter a studio space, the work has been held by our common interest in the core work as dancers: Working through, working with, working together within the material. Finding a partner-in-crime with so much care, respect, patience, trust, and awareness has enriched this project, and I am grateful for this meeting and collaboration between the two of us. In this paper I will unfold how the collaboration has been based on intuition, what we call *craftswomanship*, and how we together looked at the ability to ‘take’ or ‘carry’ a lot even though outer or inner circumstances suggested us doing the opposite. The text will outline some of the questions, struggles, and challenging encounters we had throughout the process. How do we start working? What friction points occur when you work in a duo constellation? Can we hold on to the idea of letting the concept of the work appear in the making of the material? It will guide the reader through my search for ‘the third object’, a dance not made in solitude, and it will bring the reader both into the dance studio and elsewhere to show how the physical material was explored and developed.

It consists of fieldnotes, illustrations, self-made drawings, and references to artists and works of others that I find relevant. It will also link to some of the fruitful and informative questions and conversations that we had with several people throughout the process: our external mentor Siri Jøntvedt, internal mentors prof. Bojana Cvejic and prof. Janne-Camilla Lyster, our musician Lars Takla, choreographic out-side-eye(and-inside-heart) Max Wallmeier, Ph.D. fellow Rosalind Goldberg and Prof. Theodor Barth. It will draw from thoughts from theorists that I find important in this context. My key references are anthropologist Tim Ingold’ concepts and claims regarding the process of making, creating, and being with the material from within, architect Keller Easterling’s writing on the complexity of infrastructure space and human bodies placed in them, and the notion that we never really perform alone as elaborated by critical theorist and philosopher Judith Butler, amongst other relevant sources.

At last, this paper is dedicated to my beloved grandmother, Agnete Hansen.



Working from the inside out

*The living work of art, however, is not an object but a thing, and the role of the artist is not to give effect to a preconceived idea but to follow the forces and flows of material that bring the work into being. To view the work is to join the artist as fellow traveler, to look **with** it as it unfolds in the world, rather than **behind** it to an originating intention of which it is the finale product.*

- Tim Ingold

Throughout the MA program I have been asking myself ‘what is my role as a dancer?’, ‘with what (material, idea, or concept) do I enter the studio space? And how do I start working?’. The answers to those questions might seem strangely obvious since many assume that dancers can start from wherever since they have their working tool with them constantly: the body. But just because we have our tools with us, it doesn’t mean we can start working right away. Many years of training, developing, and working on an idiosyncratic movement language, finding collaborators, and forming different bodily experiences determine how we work in the studio – and also what paralyzes us. I can relate to the observation that dramaturg Jeroen Peeters makes when he says that ‘*over the past two decades, a ‘conceptual wave’ has stirred up anxiety around discourse overwhelming processes of dance-making and ‘artistic research’ has become a dominant paradigm in art schools.*’² This coincides with a tendency in the artistic production field where elaborative funding applications, increasing expectations of clear objectives, methods, and production plans are required from the artists. We are asked to define and know the details of the work even before it has begun. We are asked to predict a future for funding bodies that we haven’t even articulated for ourselves yet. Another way of phrasing today’s regime of production and the hunt of being ahead can be found in my old teacher and dramaturg Sergej Pristas’ more poetic statement: *This constantly projective temporality focusses on the production of the new ‘new’, but this ‘new’ never becomes the ‘now’, a part of the present. It’s either in progress or it’s operating in the future anterior*’³

As dancers, we often spend more time on administrating, reporting, and filling out forms than working in the studio, not being present with the actual work. For me, the frictional point exists in the gap between ‘just enter the studio and move’ vs. ‘know the concept and don’t deviate from it otherwise you fail’. I don’t buy the binary premise of ‘either-or’; I think they can co-exist, overlap, and companion each other. There is nothing wrong with departing from a concept or clear research question. It is in many ways preferable to a problem I see in the contemporary dance market; works in which form-based movement vocabulary is composed and executed with a specific expression to fit to a theme which is then put on top. What Ingold suggests in the epigraph above is, as I interpret it, an attempt to stay present with the process and look at the flows and forces of the material that bring the work into being. Whether the work arrives from a prefixed idea or not, I do believe that shaping the work along the way is required in order to stay in dialogue with the material.

In my MA-project I wanted to return to the body, looking at the skills and knowledge that we obtain over years of practicing, asking myself ‘what is already there to enhance?’, and nurture my curiosity as a dancer in the hard work of continuation. The work of digging, searching, practicing physical states and tasks that over time will result in *something*. And while doing so, all kinds of conditions - tiredness, pain, mood -and energy swings, big life events - are part of the voyage which will inform the material.

² Peeters, *And Then It Got Legs*.

³ Pristas, *Exploded Gaze*.

Strategies of working

The third object

Since Emilie and I didn't depart from a research question or concept, we had throughout the process been asked to search for 'the third'. What is in between us? What is at stake here? Being thrilled about finding someone alike (similar body tone, working ethics, artistic preferences) would not necessarily count as a strong objective. We both entered the process with different weaknesses and strengths: Emilie, being a sharp mover, guided and led by her intuitions, always being excellent in improvisational tasks, and me, having years of experience working in collective structures, knowing how to organize and facilitate the daily frames, bringing theory and other type of references to the table. One thing we were certain about was our common stance for physical research. For a while, I defined 'the third' as all the shared material in between Emilie and I: Exercises, tasks, and suggestions that we both took from past experiences and interests and put into the common pool. Later, I abstracted and expanded my idea of 'the third'. Not just the concrete proposals we shared but the unforeseen and unplanned materials (themes, concepts, and emotional textures) that emerged from our meeting.

The kite, the flyer, the air

In the book 'Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture', Tim Ingold asks: *Why should people think with artefacts alone? Why not also with the air, the ground, mountains, and streams, and other living beings? Why not with material?* Through an experiment, which Ingold did with some students in anthropology in Aberdeen, he touches upon the 'third factor' involved when artefacts are becoming 'alive'. By making kites from matchstick bamboo, newspaper, twine, glue, and sticky tape (making an object that didn't stand out as something out of the ordinary), the students were asked to run with the kites outside. Not surprisingly, the kites began to leap around due to the wind, but what stood out in this experiment, and what I am curious about as a dancer, is the *corresponding link* between the artefact (the kite) and the person (the flyer). The material and the body. 'The third party' in this explained case would be the air. It is through the air that the kite ripples and shakes down the string to the person who holds it and runs with it, and it is through a sensed experience, also known as the sense of movement, that we become aware of this action. In my search for our 'third object', I tried to draw out different 'triangle constellations' inspired by this example to see which one would fit Emilie and me.⁴ None of them resonated fully to my experience of our collaboration. They were neither accurate, nor incorrect.

Continuing this search for 'the third', Ingold would find 'a snag' in his own reflection on 'the third party'. This has to do with agency. According to him, the idea of agency '*is the corollary of a logic of embodiment, of closing things up in themselves. But air cannot be closed.*' Air, he would argue, is the antithesis of embodied agency. And it is not that you need air to interact with a kite; rather you need a kite to correspond with the air. He differs between 'the dance of agency' (the threesome where all parts are interacting with one another, and if you remove one component everything falls apart), and then the 'the dance of animacy'. The dance of animacy would be:

"... the mindful or attentive bodily movements of the practitioner, on the one hand, and the flows and resistances of the material, on the other, respond to one another in counterpoint. As with any dance, this should be read not laterally, back and forth, but longitudinally as a movement in which partners take it in turns to lead and be led or – in musical terms – to play the melody and its refrain. In the

⁴ See appendix image #1

dance of animacy, bodily kinesthesia interweaves contrapuntally with the flux of materials within an encompassing, morphogenetic field of forces”.

This talks into a continuous dialogue in constant flow. The idea is illustrated in the image of the ‘transduction and perdurance’, directly inspired by Ingold’s example. The image is drawn out on the same page as mentioned above in the appendix. I have tried to place this image between Emilie’s and my collaboration, and my perception of (the occurrence of) the material during the process. How we appear as the flyers, and the material as the kite. It illustrates the two bodies (Emilie and I) - running down one line, and the material flow (practice sharing, scores, in-log, time – all the shared things between us) running down another. The perdurance (persistency over time) is a parallel line of itself, indicating time - and the corresponding flow between the two lines is the transduction, the coupling across. In between the two lines, the point of correspondence, that is where the unforeseeable material, less graspable elements occur – “the air” – which in the end gives texture to the work. It is through this constant corresponding to one another’s ideas and suggestions, and our ability to embody and give them agency that this image resonates with my experience of making material together with Emilie.

The paper

Working with a big white sheet of paper where I can map out and design my own threads, has often been a strategy for me to create an overview and connect things. It often documents important concepts that I still haven’t defined yet, and then realized (or clarified) later on in the process. One could argue that the big paper sheet became our common physical ‘third object’ in the duo constellation⁵. It was a concrete element that served the purpose of gathering thoughts, images, ideas, texts, blurbs of stuff that were important for us, but not necessarily manifested in the body. It became a fellow friend between us that hosted our differences and made a thread between our ideas and associations. When we gathered around the paper it was a way to get an overview of our conversations, and a way to contemplate and figure out what was at stake. We sat around the paper with scissors, articles, text material, and glue, and found snippets of theory, images, words that we have stumbled upon, messages that we have shared between each other, and then we cut stuff, mapped it out and made dots and lines between them. Tiny, not necessarily coherent and important things were collected on the paper. From the outside, it could look more or less arbitrary. As one audience member told us after our performance:

“I enjoyed your paper outside, but I must admit that it was too overwhelming for me to dive into. I somehow expected to see a very fragmented and ‘process-based’ performance that illustrated the messy and fragmented logic of the paper, but to my surprise, it was so clean and sharp”.

‘The flat work’, as prof. Theodor Barth named the paper, revealed one side of our working methods, and it accompanied, documented, and supported us in the studio. It informed us visually, thematically, theoretically, and contextually along the way since we constantly were in dialogue with it. It helped us thinking *with* the process. At times, it also informed us physically since we used it as our ‘score producer’. In the appendix⁶, I have referred to a score that was made by pointing at things on the paper which we then moved and created a certain movement landscape from. At the end, some of the flat images, snippets of texts etc. were materialized and activated in our dancing bodies, which created a corresponding effect between us and the paper.

⁵ See appendix image #2

⁶ See appendix image #3

We kept extending the paper, so it vertically got longer, and in the bottom of the paper, the day before the premiere, we wrote **‘first attempt: 28th-31st of March 2023’**. To me, this states a certain dedication to a process, and that the paper contains “several pieces of work”. Meaning, that the amount of information and references placed on the paper could be articulated and realized into many other future projects. It has a longevity and a potential continuation which speaks into productive sustainability. Maybe these other “pieces of work” will land and get processed through time. As one of my feedback notes from the first semester stated: How can time be used as a *constitutive force*, how can our ideas have a longer lasting effect?

Scores and circling in

One tool we utilized extensively was the tool of making scores and putting layers onto the score, which could be seen as our ‘transducer’. Early in the process we established a rotational system between us where one would facilitate the rehearsal every other day. In that way, the act of corresponding to ideas the other brought to the table and elaborate on something the other did the day before, became a natural part of working together.

In my notebook⁷ the 10th of October 2022 I have sketched out a score we did in the studio that day. It suggests three steps of moving:

- 1) Shake, move, touch the space, the architectural structure. Take the room in as the room takes you in. Meet it, visit it. It has its own agency.
- 2) Take the form from this shake, touch etc. Move with this into the space, integrate the structure into your body.
- 3) Look at the sources in the space → screen, music, the other body. Copy, imitate, steal. Make it all connect into your own logic.

I would like to highlight the two first steps of this score. The idea of shaking and touching the space was something we initiated in the beginning of our shared rehearsal time. We had just finished the course ‘Writing as an Artist’ facilitated by Bojana together with Prof. Theodor Barth and Prof. Mike Sperlinger. During this course we had both been reading the introduction of *Extrastatecraft* by architect Keller Easterling. In this text, in short, Easterling points at architectural standards and models of buildings that pop up all around the globe; construction work that all looks the same. She critiques these standardized models since, she argues, they create and accumulate an invisible power. People are operating these architectural standards from far distances (Silicon Valley etc...) and are importing data which aggregate even more information and knowledge about civilian activity and behavior. This calculated business is camouflaged in ‘public space’, an infrastructure space we pass through every day, but is often highly privatized and closed around itself. The activity we do in these standardized spaces is traced, surveilled, and stored as useful data. This happens quietly and constantly. What is being sedimented from the gathered data is hard to see, and this ‘invisible sedimentation’ was something Emilie and I were drawn to. It made us raise some questions about our bodies in relation to each other, the space we share, and how different materials sediment over time. We started to accumulate some questions for ourselves:

- What type of viscosity does the infrastructure have? (Viscosity was a physical quality we both enjoyed working with)

⁷ See appendix image #4

- In what ways does ‘the public’ exist in the space?
- Can the invisible inform you more than the visible?
- Do we link infrastructure to movement research?
- Do we think that experimenting with infrastructure can inform the movement research and us as dancers? Is that desirable?

We used these questions as a movement source. By physically touching and shaking the walls, floor, mirror, speakers, barres in the studio, we started to map out our common surroundings and, in retrospect, by doing so we started to circle ourselves closer to one another. In the end, we were completely entangled, wrapped up, folding each other’s body parts which came from slowly establishing a relation to the space we were swimming in together. Later on, this movement material became the basis for our ‘folding’ part which we used in the final performance.

Lars

Another definition of ‘the third object’ could be personified by Lars, our musician. Sound became a crucial element in the work, since we were seeking a layer that could disturb, interrupt, and support us in the physical material; a component that had its own agency and which potentially could function on its own, but by placing it next to or with the movements it served a double purpose. We had some sessions in his studio where he recorded random sounds, melodies, and songs that we made. We would collect objects like iron tubes, bicycles, and other material tools and record sounds from the objects. For us it was important that we knew from where the music was developed, and that the sound was part of the process – sampled, distorted, and made through physical things that Emilie and I made. Lars often played little snippets while we were in the space together with him, and we could think together through sound and body. By insisting on that, we felt that the elements were connected, but not necessarily depending on each other. The sound would play and refrain, both being attached to and detached from us. Having a musician who followed us and the project for a longer stretch of time, who took part of the artistic conversations, and was dedicated to the material as well, created a soundscape that turned into its own industrial, forward motioned, and strangely epic texture.

In-log

‘Kos jer med materialet!’ It was almost always certain that our external mentor, Siri Jøntvedt, would remind us to have fun with each other and with the material. She had a sharp eye for relational matters, connections, and the tension/play between us. At the end of the day what holds the work is our presence and attention to one another. Looking back, I do believe that it was the small glimpses, internal signs, humor, and logics that we established between us that gave the material its own significant life. Jøntvedt gave us a concrete tool to check-in and start the rehearsal when we felt lost or less inspired: ‘in-log’. There are different variations and steps, but what Emilie and I did was to set a timer to 7 min., and while one was talking freely about anything and nothing specific, rambling or sharing associations or anecdotes the other was just listening – not commenting. Sometimes we did in-log while walking around the studio, sometimes while lying on the floor, other times we did it while biking on the school gym’s bikes. The in-log opened an unfiltered, personal gate into Emilie’s concerns, thoughts, frustrations, and history. It was a way to cleanse the mind and invite the other into the corners of one’s thoughts and worries. It helped me to understand some of Emilie’s patterns and tendencies which was useful in order to trace her logics and choices in the physical work. It opened a window to a more private and intimate sphere where we both sauntered in, which created a layer of emotional connection – our own way of getting in contact with ‘the air’.

Voice and writing

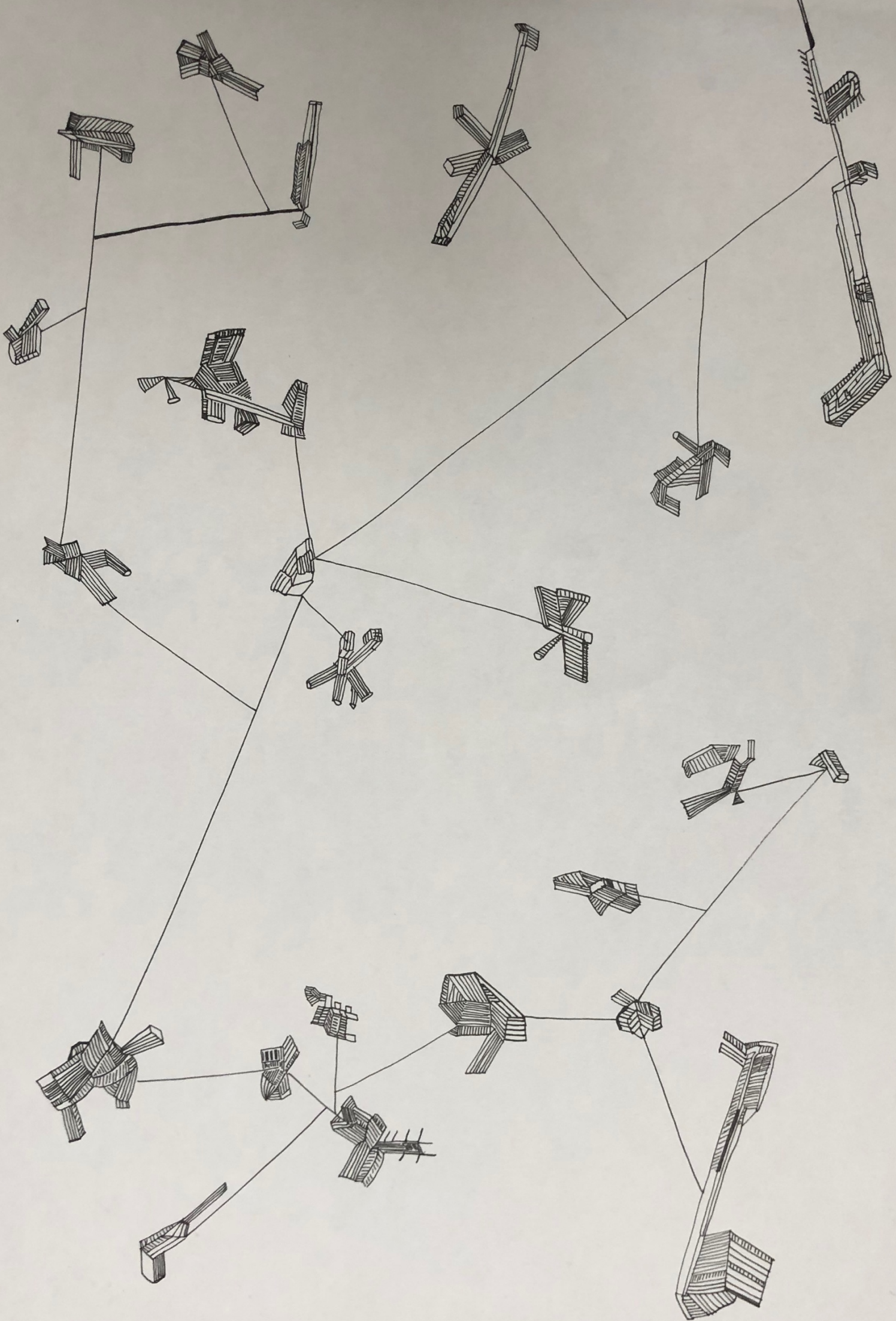
Another way of cleansing was the daily practice of writing. Throughout the studies we have been introduced to several methods of writing and producing text both as documentation, notation, and as a material generator. Some of Janne-Camilla's tools of writing – and looking at notation as an expanded practice introduced by artist Nikolaus Gansterer – informed our ways of producing text and drawing material. Simple frames and tools as setting a timer both for writing and for moving or dance to three songs were ways of structuring our entrance to the rehearsal. Eventually, we started to send each other longer or shorter self-written texts which the other would reply to, spin off from, or speculate with. We created an extended world of fictional, dry, juicy, and incoherent texts that we used to imagine landscapes, actions, and situations from. By materializing a fictional world through words, we entered a shared imaginative universe that first and foremost informed visual desires, states of moving, and certain 'atmospheres' that we wanted to enhance.⁸

It was not only the instrument of writing and moving, but also usage of voice, that defined our way of working. From a note taken the 10th of January 2023 I wrote:

... we tapped into our voices. Emilie shared some thoughts about the 'soft, vague' voice that comes from the throat. The insecure one. The one that annoys me, but also fascinates me in some ways. We used some words Emilie wrote down on a piece of paper 'Starting, becoming, opening, falling, curving, leaning, leaving' – a lot of different -ings. Those, we could investigate physically while using the voice softly -and vaguely. It created a beige landscape; we were creatures that were moving awkwardly in this reedy fog. A contrast to all the solid and concrete material that is grounded in two robust bodies. This introduced something we were less sure about.

To me, using the voice has always been an integrated part of using my body. Coming from a strong tradition in community singing and making folklores, I use the medium of singing and speaking as a performative tool that can highlight a situation, support a physical idea, or invite people into a common space. It took a while before Emilie was convinced of this, but the further and deeper we got into the material, the more she surrendered. Where she could be direct and pokey about set material, I could guide her into unknown territories of using the voice. This opened a slot of fragility and sensitivity in the material and led to some of the most personal encounters between us. We sang songs, samples of footnotes, self-made melodies or just made sounds. At the end, the voice was added as an extra layer to either welcoming the audience or emphasizing a state of being. The intention was never to express something in a direct or explicit way, but rather let the words and sentences create a poetically strange dimension to the movement material or gestures.

⁸ See appendix image #5



The movement material in *'to the sides of this body'*

waiting for the right moment

Throughout the process Emilie and I have been discussing what captivates and motivates us as dancers. One common interest point is the need of maintaining a certain quality or state of mind over time – and the labor that is required in doing so. We were both longing for an everlasting, steady, and physically demanding task, that required effort, attention, and hard work. One day Emilie showed me an old solo work of hers where she was moving with a certain viscosity and resistance. We tried to simulate that physical state, imagining ourselves as engines in a machine; we had to stay in a circular, repetitive mode, and putting real effort into the movements. I often tapped into the image of sitting in a rowing machine or preparing myself for a 100 meter-run, waiting for the gun to fire. When we discovered this material, we named it 'epic Susanne', since we always rehearsed it to a very dramatic and grand track by the Norwegian singer Susanne Sundfør. This was also a way to stay with it, it needed a certain push and force from sound. It represented the muddy, earthy, and greasy work we have to go through from time to time, but it also worked as an on-going energy exchange between us, and it served a kinesthetic purpose for the audience. Whenever we shared this material to out-side-eyes they would comment on the 'affect' of it. How it made them move with us. Over time, we defined different variations of the movement so we could alternate between 'a pendulum', an 'either even or accumulative'-version, an 'inner circle' or a 'brush/stroke'-version. By alternating between these four variations, we produced a 'workers' landscape', a place where we knew the procedure, a state of physical exhaustion, and an inner logic between us where we exchanged energy, flow, positions, and levels in space next to each other.

In addition to the kinesthetic affect, two different images would occur when we shared the material along the process. Our classmate Fie mentioned the monumentality of the material. Moving monuments that are fixed to their duties. The notion of 'labor' and that there was *no way out but through*, stood out as a clear image. Another reference, given by Rosalind Goldberg, was the work of the Romanian choreographer Alexandra Pirici. Though, a lot of Pirici's work is placed in a site-specific context (public spaces, open squares, buildings, museums), the action of bodies placing themselves next to, in-between, side to side, or on top of each other, creates what she would define as a 'moving sculpture'. Something that unfolds in time and doesn't have a narrative which makes it possible to enter and leave whenever you want, functioning as a working loop. This idea of a loop corresponds corporeally and aesthetically with *waiting for the right moment*. By placing human bodies at borders and squares with historical importance, Pirici explores long durational performative actions that point to politically potent topics. Our intention was to maintain the state of working in a repetitive pattern, exhaust, and 'wear out' the material. The exhaustion of executing this material also played an important dramaturgical part. We placed it in the very beginning since it was the one that would make us physically tired – and therefore ready – for the next step of the performance.

waste material

'waste material' was established relatively early in the process. It came as an intuitive sidenote from Emilie, who asked me to learn some material from a video of her dancing in a tiny room at PAF in September 2022. She recorded the video out of frustration and emotional restlessness while the rest of us were participating in other activities at PAF. At first, she wanted to delete the video, didn't see it as useful or interesting, but we started to learn and embody the improvised piece of material from the video bit by bit.

It slowly started to function as our common framework, something we both liked to see as our 'infrastructure' where we could hang out, specify, adjust, and eventually let the bodies move through

something recognizable: A clear pattern where we know exactly where things belong. We both find a strange satisfaction in executing movement material in a precise and clear way, and are interested in the skill of learning sequences, repeating a procedure in the studio, and working through physically demanding tasks. 'Waste material' allowed us to embrace our common need of precision, repetition, and structure. Along the way, it also provided a space of recognition, working with people's gaze and wondering minds (are they doing the same? who is following who?), and it worked with its own logic of patterns, proximities, and dependency. Doing this synchronically with Emilie was like entering an echo of my own movements, but through another body, and it both exhibited our clear differences, individuality as movers, and how forms change every time you revisit them. For those reasons, it became one of our anchor points and main materials in our process.

I like to see our 'waste material' as something that at first felt 'out of place' or 'forbidden'. In Mary Douglas's famous theory of dirt, Douglas defines dirt as 'matter out of place'⁹. Meaning, that dirt is only defined as dirt because we have decided upon a particular system or classification of things. Nothing is dirty in itself, but in relation to something else, it appears untidy. Take for instance her mundane example of shoes: shoes are not dirty in themselves, "*but it is dirty to place them on the dining table*". And as she states: *Dirtiness is less a property of things than it is a contextual label attributed to them*. So, in order to 'fix' or 'place' the labeled dirt we try to structure or organize it in certain ways. The matter of 'waste material' was evident: It was generated from an intuitive urgency from Emilie's side but was never meant to be looked at as something productive. Frankly, she might have been a little embarrassed by its simplicity and asked me to join her in embodying it. But by actively looking at the 'dirt', taking it seriously, as something that had purpose and matter, we - with supreme help from Max Wallmeier - dusted of the dirt, organized it, and turned it into something valuable for us.

doughy imprint

The pragmatic word 'dough' has been an ongoing term in our common vocabulary. At first, we referred to each other's bodies as 'doughy material', treating each other's skin and body parts as something moldable. It added a certain 'carelessness' to our hands-on-approach, not treating each other like fragile objects, and it kept a certain rough -and straightforwardness that we both appreciated. But within that there also lies a huge sensitivity, trust, and care for one another. We discovered that this material was ambiguous and double-sided. It was the sensitivity, through hours of working intimately together, which eventually created 'doughy imprint'. The focus of the material transformed and changed into many different shapes and forms along the way, and maybe that is the potential of this material's nature: it is alive and ever-changing. Maybe the sensation from our hands-on-approach and the physical touch created the trust that was needed in order to invite ourselves deeper into the material. Every time we touched upon this muddy, diffuse state of moving the sensation of it would have changed. We loaded this landscape with our emotions and lived feelings as a way of making a contrast to all the firm, precise, and clearly executed material that we had made so far. In 'doughy imprint' we imagined that we were somewhere else. As slightly animated characters, still present in all our forms, we were contemplating, meeting the space as the space met us. The space contained all our struggles: injuries of all kinds, pain, loss, heartache, inadequacy, jealousy, and dark thoughts. In a sense, it functioned as a bodily and emotionally infrastructure. Concretely, I worked with the sensation of making an imprint in some sort of imaginary landscape such as a grass field swimming in dough. Goey, sticky, but breathable. At times I would tap into the

⁹ <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/374514/374521>

memory of the day before I lost my grandmother. That day, I was visiting a late 19th century tower in West Germany, looking out along the horizon. I remember the breeze, the temperature, the grey-colored clouds, and the fresh green leaves in the forest around the tower. The memory would help me to recall a certain physical sensation that I could add onto the other layers of images. The action of moving within these layers could be interrupted by quick changes into more ‘form-based-figures’, positions that can be tilted, twisted, and turned in space. On top of that we selected, from our archive of text material, few sentences and words that would support or add another flavor to the landscape. In my notebook from March 16th, 2023, I wrote:

Doughy times: Breath. Let the breath guide your movements. Don't hold the shape too long, otherwise it will lose its crispness, its strange form, play with it and give space to one another. The words should be chosen with care and attention. 4-5 selected words that we return to, that both matters, but also have the capacity to puncture.

wasting

wasting time

leaking from behind

17th of July

nothing special about day

dirty hands, dirty crimes

rocking side to side

14th of July

nothing special about that day

never really mine

valentine

like a baby

never mind

it's folding time

folding

As mentioned earlier, ‘folding’ was developed from a desire of being physically rough, concrete, and entangled. It was something we physically couldn't establish alone, which sheds light on our dependency in this work. One entry point of making this material was to direct our attention from the space into one another (described in ‘scores and circling in’), but it also came from other practical exercises that we did. One approach was to fold a piece of paper¹⁰: we curled it, folded it, wrapped it, disturbed it. Next step would be to do the same with each other's bodies. This would create an

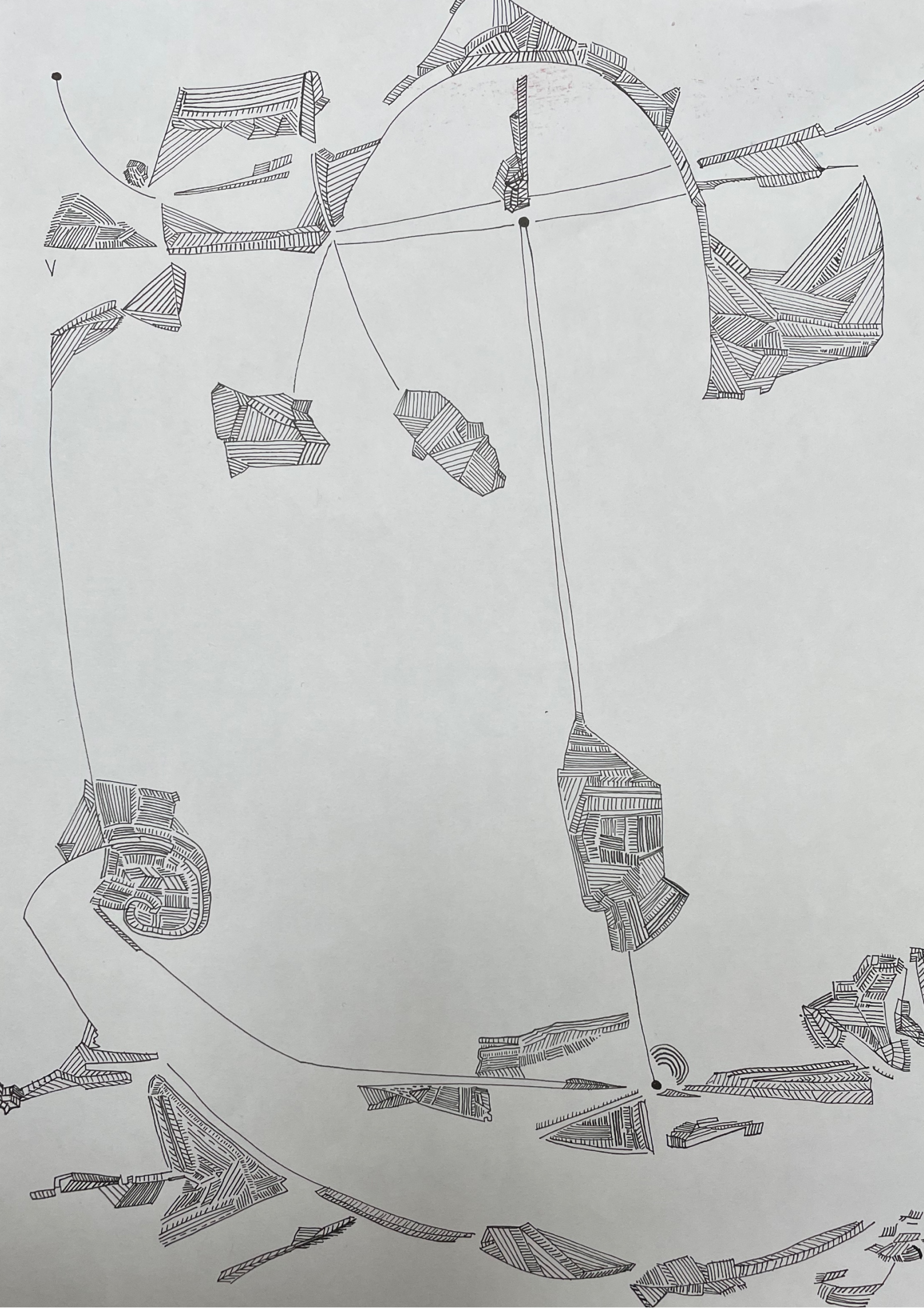
¹⁰ See appendix image #6

ambiguous sensation since it is both caring and not caring at the same time. It would not be possible to do if we were not hyper-alert and attentive, and on the other hand we also had to surrender, let go to give in.

In January I wanted to expand our movement research on this and initiated a week of wrestling with Emilie in Oslo Fight Center. If there ever was any friction between us it would have been during this week. I was eager to get out of the frames of KHiO, do something together in a different context. Emilie was facing a low point around that time, felt exhausted, overworked, and needed steady working hours at the school. Eventually, I went to one Brazilian jiu-jitsu class by myself, being energized from the class, but a bit disappointed to go on my own. This point of disagreement was an important moment and an exposure of being in a collaboration where you need to negotiate, listen, pull, and push. It was wonderful, because we came to terms with how to set boundaries and share our expectations with one another. To me, it shows the strength in working with others: When you face something you can't avoid addressing, and when you are so dependent on a compromise to make the work work. The co-dependency and shared responsibility that I seek in my work, must come to the fore. A text that has returned to both me and Emilie along this process is the short essay *Performativity* by Judith Butler¹¹. In this, they circle around performativity as an expanded interaction, and they argue that '*...no matter how individual and fleeting any given performance might be, it still relies upon, and reproduces, a set of social relations, practices, and institutions that turn out to be part of the performance itself*'. This entanglement of relations determines us as social beings. As subjects we are not just grounded nowhere, acting alone. Or as Butler phrases it '*There are bodies behind, and to the side of this body, and they are working together, even when plurality sometimes collapses into the figure of one (...)*'.

Emilie and I could fold, braid, and bend each other in all kinds of directions without being too concerned with 'can she take this or that much?', 'am I going too far now'? Through a shared experience of touching, knowing each other's body tones, we disappeared into a common world of holding each other in a strange robust-friendship-way (a term lent from Bojana) which emphasised the commitment, trust, and dependency we have established over time.

¹¹ Admin, 'Judith Butler'.



The aftermath

What the work does

March 29th, 2023: 10 minutes writing about yesterday's performance

Sore muscles, my jaw is uneven, and my toes are bruised. It feels like a bear has beaten me up and left me in the forest amongst leaves and old bark, dissolving, melting to the ground, composting. My body is composting. Exhausted from the effort of moving and throwing Emilie around. The premiere went well. I felt energized by the presence of the audience, the attention, and the questions afterwards. Emilie and I kept it together, even though the music to waste material was double speed. It didn't matter because our material appears to be bullet proof. We know exactly what to do and what to work on in the infrastructure that we have made together, and it turns out to work. We were solid. Ellen told me afterwards that the dramaturgy of the piece evolved in a sneaky way. During the performance she had a sensation of loss. The piece dealt with loss for her. It was so present, she said. This made my heart sink into its right place since I dedicated the evening to you. You are with me in every step, every effort, every word. And this piece was made during a grieving process. Both for what we have lost, but also for what remains, changes, and can't be undone. It shows how processes turn things into something – and every day is different. It seems like the work we have created only works when we work through it. There is no way around it, no cheating, no deviating, no marking. It is only by executing it and being fully in it that it does something to the world. This is for me important. That the material needs a certain effort and attention, like all the life processes and projects we embark on – they need our full attention if we want them to become something above the ordinary. Though, being ordinary is also fine. Hilde also mentioned the cleanness of the work. With that, I interpret, that the material stands out as a raw, simple thing without any decoration or 'extraneous'. She mentioned the era of postmodernism¹² where things were peeled into their bare rawness. Maybe it is a style, taste, or preference, but I can relate to that tendency in my work.

I wrote this in the morning after the premiere. After months of producing, moving, and circling around areas of topics, in retrospect, the work stands out, and felt very much, as a response to the conditions – emotional state, grief, a growing friendship - we made it under. Hearing people's thoughts and associations after a sharing is always an interesting meeting point. Mostly because it is out of my hands, delivered to the world, ready to live its own, unpredictable life which is why making art is a precious thing, a democratic goods, and a place to discuss different opinions and interpretations. What leaks out and is carried on by others?

The sensation of grief, which was not explicitly a 'theme', but a state of mind working from, oozed through for one of the audience members. For me, this confirms a significant reminder: Crafting from a less defined thematical point of departure can still bring some of the most essential ideas and textures to the foreground. The act of paying attention to the physical and emotional conditions you are in while staying present with the daily work and following the flow of the material can have an enormous impact on the outcome. This without intentionally forcing it as a topic. Another, maybe more obvious observation, was the notion of togetherness: Seeking collective solutions to face common problems and questions. In a hand-out text called ASSIGNMENT¹³ by Prof. Theodor Barth, he noticed after witnessing both our process and the performance: (...) *After having presented the item in these terms, they extended this communicative interaction unto dance: at this point, it became clear to us how different Emilie and Marlene were as dancers. After more work and an extended*

¹² Here, referring to the post-modern dance in the times of Judson Dance Theater

¹³ See appendix ASSIGNMENT by Theodor Barth image #7

*period tests, previews and hard work practicing. In the final show they danced as one—more a pas-de-uns than a pas-de-deux—leaving suspended a tension: who was in charge? And who would have the last word? In phases of struggle grounded in contact impro, they both invited and dismissed this line of query: we were left with being-one in struggle’. The image of being-one in struggle responds to a clear felt sensation of being inside the work. It was always in relation to Emilie that I moved or placed myself in space. It was through her trajectory in time and space, lines of movements, touch, and gaze that I was guided and held in the infrastructure. Hours of exchanging, checking-in, and listening to suggestions that don’t fall into place right away, collectively moving side by side, body to body - and if I may juxtapose body with building -, reconstructing a collapsed building in collaboration, created this logic of bodily entanglement. Or as Barth puts it: *In the aftermath, both dancers claim that in order to assimilate the problem of their research it would have to pass through the body, in order to be fully investigated.**

The remainder

What remains? In a note I wrote the 7th of May 2023:

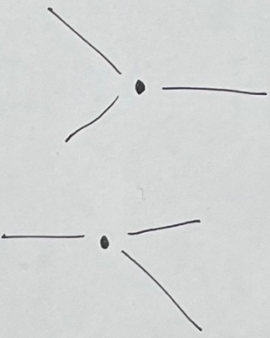
Today I watched Ellen Jerstad’s second part of her MA project in Theatre. It was a great experience. I was really moved. She was strangely distanced to something so deep and close to her, and it was so well performed and delivered. Her take on grief was something I could relate to. Though, her relation to grief was directed towards the question of all the things we consist of but will never fully grasp. Or in her own words, when she finds her grandfather’s notebook filled with undiscovered notated dances: I was hit by grief. A whole life he lived, that I wasn’t part of. I had strong flashbacks to Lars Von Trier’s Dogville, references to Nature Theatre of Oklahoma and so on. Anyways, what I was thinking about when I entered her performance today was the potential of our paper. The continuation of it, and how it can serve a purpose further on. We have worked with the image of ‘sedimentation’. That the paper follows a chronological line or curve downwards. But what if we deconstructed the paper? Cut it into pieces and placed them in random orders, mapped the pieces out differently, and started from another angle or point of view?

to the sides of this body was the beginning of a continuation. I don’t necessarily see a final completion, since I imagine this work having a longer life than what has been shared until now. I believe that there is a strong need and interest in our field to look deeper into the dancers’ processes of making material. What does it mean to sense, move, and develop ideas through a felt experience from the inside? What else is hidden on the paper sheet? What does it mean to allow and enhance the days where you feel stuck, lost, uninspired? How can that be turned into something useful and eventually productive? I want to continue questioning our roles as dancers, our core work, function, and skills as performers. I do believe that this work still has so much potential since it talks into many corners of my interest as a dancer, and it has established a strong bond between Emilie and me. I feel seen in her company. Duplicated and recognized. I take this collaboration and notion of working from a less preconceived state of mind further into the future with her. This means concretely that we are looking for places and opportunities to present the existing work, but also brewing on other types of collaborations and investigations with colleagues in the field that can help us to expand and elaborate on our established partnership. As my dear classmate, Sang, wisely noticed, Emilie and I are:

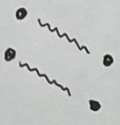
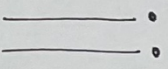
*A collection of body parts fitting together to manufacture a complete structure. And. A complete structure manufactured by fitting together a collection of body parts*¹⁴.

¹⁴ See appendix image #8 and image #9

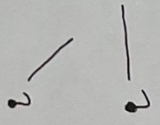
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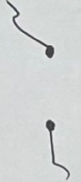
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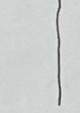
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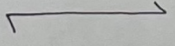
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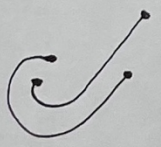
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<https://www.thehighline.org/videos/high-line-art/alexandra-pirici-threshold-a-high-line-performance/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UoHtaPRFoPo>

Link to the performance *to the sides of this body*:

<https://vimeo.com/815026786?fbclid=IwAR3YevLJqhZKl3kmb7zKaHwy5YZyI99Xc30gE5y2r7TPX0O4k5g4kXJMuMQ>