

Reflection paper  
MA dance  
Spring 2023

*to the sides of this body*  
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**TO THE SIDES OF THIS BODY**

DANCE

TIME AND RECOVERY

WORK

DREAMS AND LOGIC

TWOSOMENESS

THE PAPER

THEORY TO PRACTICE

METHOD THE MATERIALS

WORKING ALONE

COLLABORATIONS

DIRT IN THE WRONG PLACE

EPIC LANDSCAPES

AFTERMATH

FUTURE

This text is composited as a collection of islands, formed from topics and words that have served as both starting points and recurring themes throughout my MA in dance, as well as in the creation of 'to the sides of this body' with Marlene Bonnesen. It traces a journey over the past two years, that examines the 'before', 'during' and 'after' of my studies.

Rather than following a chronological structure, the text is organised around categories wherein I unfold my findings. In sharing my current reflections on these islands, I invite you to read between the lines and draw your own connections.

My exploration of the concept of intuition has led me to create some of these islands through automatic writing exercises (writing non-stop with a timer), while others have been edited, pulled apart and crafted. I aimed to approach text creation in a way that mirrors our process of making 'to the sides of this body.' Where some parts required more compositional attention, questioning and revisiting, while other pieces were allowed to exist as immediate responses in their raw form.

The word 'dance' became a prominent feature of my daily life, as a student in the 'MA Dance' program, particularly juxtaposed with 'MA Choreography.' This gave me the opportunity to delve deeper into the meaning of dance, my personal connection to it and where I position myself on the spectrum between dancer and choreographer. When we view 'dance' as a verb and 'choreography' as a noun, it immediately highlights something essential about dance - it is available, present and attainable in all living bodies.

*I LIKE THE IMMEDIACY OF DANCE and to play with that. In structuring and planning. One can only plan so much. It is not like this text that will remain the same physical text that has been cut and refined. In this case it is the body reading and digesting this that is changing. The meeting between the dancing body and the observing body in dance performances is unique in the certainty that things will never be the same, even in a rigid structure. So, how could we make a structure that entertains the immediacy of dance, that welcomes the new attempt and the daily body that is always slightly different. Leave the door open, for dance to saunter in.*

*-from my log, sometime in March 2023*

During the creation of this piece, I rediscovered that my primary interest lies in the act of *doing*. I am fascinated by the sensation of moving within a structure, the logic that the body inherently possesses, the act of creation from within, the relationship between myself and Marlene, the soundscape, the space and the audience. This had to be my approach to choreography. It needed to happen through the body and we needed to indulge in that, using our skills and logic to craft the composition from within.

I will share some insights from the process in the form of written words. I want to emphasise that my perspective is only one side of the story and there are other aspects that I cannot fully capture. 'to the sides of this body' is a project that explores what is already there, that we carry, those we collaborate with, what is present in our lives and what we consider important matter to be shaken and bent in the process.

*Soft note: Logic arrives in time.*

## DANCE

| *Automatic writing* | This is the medium I work with and the name of the MA program I am studying. Yet, this is challenging to put into words. When does one go from not dancing, to dancing. In some way I would argue that this is a decision made in the mind, now I am dancing. Simple. I say that sitting on a chair, typing on the keyboard is now a choreography from mind to fingertips, into the computer, or rather on the computer. Writing about dancing, in the past and now, always bring awareness to my body. Questions start to float and they never land in folders of right and wrong. I have colleagues who come out of dance performances saying they miss the dance, or have a feeling that dance is sometimes lost. Then I think; so, what is dance to you? Sometimes I also agree. That was not “dancing”.

Dancing for me, is awareness of the body in relation. The body in relation to music, to another body, to space, to air, to one’s own layer of skin or organs. Dancing might be balancing on the border where relations happen and one is aware and playing with one or more of those relations through moving the body in relation to those things. Sometimes dancing also happens as a reaction, to music, or to other bodies moving. It passes the body as a memory or interference with the present relations. Sometimes the dance just happens and most times I initiate it. It has a million entry points and the entry point into the dance is crucial for what it becomes. It can sometimes transform into other forms through the change of a music, a sidenote, unpredictable sources, new scores, the meeting with a body. It can also be set, choreography, or going from one side of space to the other, which can be strictly set or improvised. What keeps me interested in dancing is the combination of possibilities and impossibilities. The reliance on one’s own body and other bodies to get anywhere.

## TIME AND RECOVERY

The importance of doing an MA was for me to make time for my own investigations. The past two years have flown by and now they almost feel too short. The MA has allowed me to dive into new collaborations and curiosities, with the time and space to do so.

On February 5<sup>th</sup> 2022 I suffered a severe injury in my right ankle. Two ligaments were completely torn off and one was partly torn. Time went from being something passively following me from the side-lines, not so much interfering with my processes, to be a constantly nagging concept.

This was my first severe injury in my professional career. The two years of being a student suddenly released some time. Allowing me to be occupied with something and to find other ways of working with this “new body” in the company of my peers. In the first months it opened a new curiosity. To not waste the potential findings that hides in a body that is recovering. I was learning that there were always other ways of working within the original idea or body. Possibilities revealed in the body that cracks open or breaks down. It was a truly demanding process, where my mind and body were in a constant negotiation process rather than flow. Posing other questions than the more wholesome body-brain. I began breaking certain lines of thoughts and learnt patterns, however, it was hard to build a set approach to ways of working with an injury that would work every time.

It was a process of construction and deconstruction, of habits, of knowledge, on many levels all at once. This time I was lucky to have a freedom through the study, providing an opportunity to reflect and work with continuity, with the pressure to produce and perform in new ways. Outside of school projects, I had to be very selective about my commitments due to the extensive planning and the need to secure a replacement. This made me feel unimportant and exchangeable, making me reconsider my own limits of investment. How do I provide for myself and how much do I give away in processes where things no longer belong to me once given away? In these moments, the dancer feels like the replaceable figure that spins on the sellable structure.

The experience of navigating injury as a dancer shed light on how challenging and precarious this profession can be. Requiring resilience and motivation to work through physical and mental exhaustion. Unfortunately, dancers in this position often lack the necessary support, leaving us to take on the burden of rehabilitation alone. This experience prompted me to reconsider how I value my profession, with the realisation that alternative paths perhaps could be worth exploring. Pursuing a dance career requires a deep commitment and an acceptance that failure is inevitable. The real possibility of permanent injury and the need for advocating for one's own needs means that working in this field depends on working smarter, not harder. I had to understand how I am the only one who really knows my own body, feelings and limits. Having seen what may happen if I didn't speak up about my needs re-manifested the importance of self-care and self-assessment, continuously, in all aspects of my life.

## WORK

The word *work* is often central in my ways of thinking and working with dance. Both Marlene and I found it necessary to investigate the relation to- and between the worker and the dancer. We would more often say we were embracing the idea of letting matter arrive through *physical work*, rather than saying through *dancing*. As we started exchanging thoughts around what work mean to us in our process, we were in many ways unfolding our interest in the role as dancers.

Work can be many forms of effort put into something over an amount of time. The word *work* brings a certain distance to material. I see a pile of something, I am outside looking in at something to be done, that I would have to go through. The word *worker*, in its active form, invites references to manual labour, heavier work and physical effort. With the word *worker*, I see a body, past, present, future, going through something physical again and again. A title to be earned. A *worker* vs *work* separates to some extent the continuation of practice. Or perhaps embodiment. I find the dancer both in the *worker* and in the execution of *work*. We are operators and the tool.

Working with the idea of making an ‘aesthetic choreography’ during my MA has not been appealing to me. Rather, I was interested in challenging the body in a way where the matter in the work could, hopefully, be an effect of what I went through physically. Much of what I am interested in thematically, already exist in each body, often leaking out in the act of negotiating physical boundaries. As one way of working inside-out.

Our shared interest in *the worker* became either initial starting points to materials or acted as a layered approach. The part in the performance that we call ‘waiting for the right moment’, one of the first materials consisting of repeatable patterns, came from this idea. We deciphered our genuine interest in the bodily effort of the farmer, the factory worker, or other working fields where physical effort is or was required. Now that the body is outdated in the light of technology, we wanted to find a way where embodiment and hard physical work can feel important. We experimented with movements that puts more emphasis on continuity, patterning and endurance.



We have had a long process of preparing and crafting our overall structure, resulting in a framework we could revisit again and again. If we zoom in on the ‘phrase-material’, the set choreography, it welcomes specificity and practice. Small improvisations can happen and perhaps errors occur, but we always work within the trajectory of the phrase, moving forwards. The set choreography also values durational effort through practice over time, or in the action of pacing of oneself along the phrase, lasting approximately ten minutes. This material required time, patience and a was a different approach to the concept of work. Crafting towards embodiment. Repeatable, but never the same, through the (im)perfections of a body.

There can be many examples of work, but mainly, we were curious about the body that doesn’t necessarily receive praise for the action, a body that is providing for more than oneself. We attempted to put that effort into ‘waiting for the right moment’, where the single-body-effort is nothing without the other. The choice of material was never an aesthetic desire of displaying something looking like ‘hard work’. Rather, it was about the experience of going through the action and what that could possibly do, to us and to the audience. ‘Waiting for the right moment’ works as an accumulative figure, but our physicality could never keep a promise of forever. What remains is the kinaesthetic transference of physical effort over an amount of time. Without a logical fade, questions like “why do they put themselves through this?” and “how long will they keep going?” could appear. This material is about something more than the singular movement, ex ‘the punching of a hand’. It’s about hitting the air with the same rhythm and force again and again. In the impossibility of that lies the beauty of effort.

## DREAMS AND LOGIC

*I bring them into the studio and call them dreams.*

*Or maybe desires*

*Dreams can be tacky.*

*Dreams lie in the future.*

*Dreams are impossible.*

*Dreaming is moving towards something.*

*Dreams are changing with every step.*

*Dreams are helpful.*

*Dreams can be guiding.*

*Dreams are misleading, if mistaken for reality.*

*Dreams are only supposed to reveal possible worlds.*

*The dream is not the dream.*

*The dream seldom works.*

"I had a dream about some material" is how I often introduced an uncertain idea. These 'ideas' usually manifest visually to me anywhere outside the studio and they bring a challenge in becoming excessively straightforward when put into words. We all have these dreams or momentary flashes in varying forms. However, these 'dreams' have acted as gateways to some of the materials in the piece. We have trusted that there is something valuable in the gut-feeling they often provide.

*Logic arrives with time. Planned logic might be revealed as faulty and sometimes when dancing, logic is the aftermath of following the immediate. Sometimes the presumed logical ideas dismantle us and what is found between us, in the shared agreement of following a gut-feeling, can reveal magic moments unforeseen.*

*-March 19<sup>th</sup> 2023*

I would like to allow for a glimpse into how Marlene and I collaborate and balance each other out. Generally, I am a dreamer, presenting vague ideas without clear solutions or directions, often creating a landscape. Marlene, on the other hand, serves as a crafter, building upon the ideas, layering them with different possibilities, bouncing them back and then we find ways of making them work. This approach is not always identical, but in many cases, we are letting visual ideas meet the concrete body and adjust and manipulate that exchange from all sides. My fondness for working with dreams stems from the intangibility of its nature. The potential in the exchange of ideas, mistakes and what it triggers in the person on the other end.

The visions I refer to as dreams can manifest as fleeting bursts, recurring patterns, glimpses, or even vivid, colourful spaces that resemble something tangible.



Photo by Yaniv Cohen

**The folding material**, which is the final duet in the piece, has been ‘dreamed’ over and over before finding its place. Early in the process I remember having glimpses of moulding into each other as the audience came in. I imagined people coming from all sides, we were one blob of fleshy matter rolling around. There was light hitting us from one angle, through huge doors. The rest was quite dark, it was like we had already been moulding as a two-part entity

for a decade. We were existing in our own world, no longer human, only this matter looking like two bodies in one. There was loud noise from the doors and a loud echo of the space, that sounded sampled and played back as music. Everything intra-acting. (ref. 1)

The dreams throw me straight into the mix, not knowing how I got there. They play out in *epic landscapes* where all is possible and everything always works. They could perhaps be described as ‘artistic utopias’, where the appeal of trying to capture their essence lies.

Pursuing those unattainable possibilities often opens doors to new opportunities, allowing us to take more risks and stretch beyond our physical limitations. Through the exchange with collaborators, dreaming drags us back and forth through these potential worlds, expanding possibilities both in the shape of the performance and in what we imagine when working inside the structure.

## TWOSOMENESS

*You tell me about me, I tell you about you.*

*-From notes.*

When we started working together, I assumed that Marlene and I were very similar. We are both ‘two dry ladies’ as Marlene says. We often prefer to have things in similar ways. We get joy from order and cleanliness in our lives and in our physical spaces. We both like to keep on top of things, appreciating efficiency in communication, giving time to process rather than the practical tasks that simply needs to be done. I loved meeting another person that wanted to have similar structures around work.

It was easy to look for the similarities as reasons for why we should work together. We both shared experiences of being the ‘tall female dancer’ and we had a similar muscle tonus. The moment I first did contact improvisation with Marlene is like a crystallised sensation. I found a body that touched me in a way that I touched back. I also knew there was a lot to learn from Marlene. I was curious about her straightforwardness, her experiences and knowledge, that seemed to offer a slightly different angle to mine.

When we began our process, all these subtle, yet distinct differences started appearing. I was experiencing myself as a less structured person in comparison. Also, the way we moved and responded to improvisation tasks was often with different qualities. In our sharing in November 2022, people remarked “You’re both so different to each other” reminding me that we were not similar movers. By doing the ‘phrase-material’, the same choreography side by side, our individuality became enhanced. I was intrigued and curious about how we could further embrace and challenge these constant variations.

In ‘to the sides of this body’ in March 2023, one of the people pointing at our differences in November said we had become ‘one’. I’ve discovered that by working with the premise of twosomeness over time, made us move as two individuals *together*.

We also had days of frustration during our process, of not feeling like the other was patient enough or understanding. As we worked with a horizontal structure and on equal terms, it could be challenging when we needed different things as different times. Some days one of us would be rested and wanting to dive deep into parts of the work, while the other one was feeling rough, ill, or injured. There have been instances in our process where both of us have

had to deal with a body “shutting down”, unable to push further. We joked about a backup plan of having two coffins on stage while Lars was playing our music for 45 minutes, though hoping we would not need that dramatic scenography just yet.

The honesty and generosity that we've been able to share with each other has made this process invaluable. We have never let miscommunication and bad energy settle. It's been important to let the other say the brutal truth at times. To hold up a mirror to ways we could both be challenging in a process. Always with respect and love. With this premise we could both 'take it', enriching the process.

By making our performance, we understood that this work is not measured in 'good' and 'bad', it does not excel by speed, it does not work with 'the singular artist' and you can't outrun the other. The work was at its best when we were calm and patient with each other, when we pushed the other from beneath, not by making the other catch up. What made this twosomeness, for me, was that through trust and care in maintaining our relation, the relation itself became the foundation that could carry the structure.

## THE PAPER



Photo by Lars Takla

| *Automatic writing* | This has been a growing placeholder of our research since ‘Writing as an Artist’ course in the autumn of 2022. This was when we started to share our theoretical interests that were possible to tie to our physical interests in dance. This was the first concrete thing we could touch, hold and edit between us. It was a way of mapping. To make the conversation visible and sharable. It worked as an open door where both of us and other people, could perceive and understand the research without the filter of our wordings and preferences. So that everyone could point at and reach for their own interests. For me, the paper has certain points where I return more often than others, where I find questions and connections that push me into dance.

The paper consists of cut-outs of text, drawings and pictures put in order according to what we in the moment thought belonged together. We worked with what I would call intuitive logic, without dwelling and discussing what would go where. And that created connections between the previously unconnected material consisting of theoretical texts, self-written texts, poems, pictures, both private and found on the internet, drawings and sometimes drawn lines between where it made sense to highlight a connection.

The paper is something that has grown, becoming increasingly rough around the edges through being handled a lot. It even went to France.

The paper is a place that welcomes the lost body, the frustrated and sometimes uninspired artist. It works as a reminder of what is already there. It allowed us to zoom in and be specific when things became too general, or to make connections to other materials from specific points when that was needed.

When adding new material to the paper, we put things at the bottom and extend it vertically. It works as a timekeeper of when in the process different material was introduced and makes it easy to see a trajectory from the writing course to the premiere. We call the performance a 'first attempt' of a structure. We both agreed that there were hundreds of potential directions we could go and that the path we followed this time led to 'to the sides of this body'.



## THEORY TO PRACTICE

For the ‘Writing as an Artist’ course in the Autumn of 2022, I looked for theoretical texts where I could sense choreography in the written material. I found *Extrastatecraft (2014)* by Keller Easterling, who writes about infrastructure and architecture in a way that I, as a body reading, had a physical sensation of space through words. Here is an example of how she writes about infrastructure:

*Infrastructure space is a form, but not like a building is a form; it is an updating platform unfolding in time to handle new circumstances, encoding the relationships between buildings, or dictating logistics. There are object forms like buildings and active forms like bits of code in the software that organizes building. Information resides in the, often undeclared, activities of this software—the protocols, routines, schedules and choices it manifests in space. (Easterling, 2014)*

Easterling sparked my curiosity in working with the visible and invisible infrastructures that surrounds us. We played with ideas around an architectural design in our approach to making the performance. To make space for physical embodiment of the idea of moving inside the (in)visible architecture (choreography/framework). Reading Easterling’s written work has allowed us to perceive infrastructure as a tool that supports performers, rather than solely being a by-product of it. To not think of performance as merely a consequence, we aimed to actively re-imagine what it means to be handling new circumstances in real-time(improvisation), to adapt and transform (processing) within the form(choreography).

We began experimenting with choreography as architecture, as one type of design and infrastructure as the action of performance, unfolding in time. In this process of making, desires for ways of moving often came first, then arrived constrictive form and later the pleasure of the rigidity of the form. In performance, simplicity in the form(choreography) allows a surplus of attention that can go somewhere else than on building the form in real-time(improvisation). ‘To the sides of this body’ embraces the action of operating the already designed architecture.

Another text that stayed with me is *Performativity (2016)* by Judith Butler. They write from a queer perspective, looking at performance and performativity as something unavoidable, something we do by existing in social worlds. This text expanded my idea of performativity.

They talk about how no one ever really performs alone and how we live in a world that is supported and depends on supports. That there are bodies behind and to the sides of our own body, that will inevitably inform and transforms us. Making me look to the sides and behind more than only looking further into the tunnel. It posed questions about the power of the outside perspective. Retranslating choice and awareness from a different point of view. It informed the process in ways of organising our material, understanding that what we do will be supported by other means regardless. This was something we wanted to acknowledge and work with.

## METHOD

*I am trying to get somewhere. And I am trying not to edit backwards, I can only regret my decisions and make them make sense later. Or, rather, make up for them by means I will discover. (Undated, notes from the process)*

Our collaboration was not found in a shared desire for a specific thematic, but in the desire of working *together*. With that as our starting point, we used methods for sharing our archives and curiosities to better understand where our desires meet and where they clash.

- Early in the process we started **alternating days of facilitating**.  
Marlene often came with a concrete plan, a praxis, or a method of working that she was either fond of or something she knew to some extent. She clearly had much experience in sharing her ideas and was thorough and incredibly attentive.  
I, on the other hand came with a curiosity, a *dream* or something we would have to decipher. I was more spontaneous with my approach in comparison.  
This was a positive part of our meeting, something to work with rather than against.
- **Allowing for what is needed**, to give space for various physical or mental states.  
Ex. to walk and talk outside, to laugh away most of the rehearsal, to craft and develop material, or to dance for two hours. This provided more ease in the hard work.
- **Check-ins**. A method suggested by our mentor Siri Jøntvedt, where we one by one talked for seven minutes, without interruptions or acknowledgements. This was one of my favourite things in my daily routine. I find it too rare to have the chance to only listen to someone's thoughts without the detours a conversation provokes.
- To produce text and to reflect along the process we used **automatic writing** with a set timer, to allow time for own reflections within the shared space. This could often propose new ways of seeing what we were working on. Unedited and raw, like the one's I have put in this text.

- We placed trust in **continuity** in this process. To meet up all the days we had together, regardless of desire. Encouraging adaptation and fluidity in our process, not only welcoming the inspired and the recovered body.
- We worked with the idea that **all is welcome**. That both moments of crisis and humour is part of the working contract between us. We imagined that what we allow in the process will eventually be part of the performance in some way. If not in the material, it would exist in the relation.
- Overarching our process, we encouraged methods of **recycling and using waste material**. A way of working with what was already there, to revisit the old, or to extract bits and desires from existing concepts.

We worked with curiosities in the studio, including what was on *the paper*. We aimed to pull and manipulate materials in various ways. We had a fluid process, with concrete holding points when things spiralled into places of lostness. Under follows examples of entry points to materials in the piece:

**Recorded improvisation:** I suggested that we learn a recorded dance on one of my days of facilitating. It was proposed in the form of an apology as I hate learning material from video myself, but I wanted to test it and Marlene was up for it without hesitation. In the video from September 2022, I am dancing out of frustration in our shared room at Performing Arts Forum while Marlene is sharing her dance praxis in the room next door. As expected, this learning method was quite demanding for both of us. This dance eventually became the ‘waste material phrase’.



Images from recorded improvisation at PAF 2022

**Voice work:** has been a part of this process since our first sharing. In our performance we open with a song that Marlene made by collecting and composing notes from our process, combined with a melody she used in her first feedback session, before we started working together. The other melody towards the end of our piece is from a video recording where I am attempting to sing instead of dancing after I had the injury. A way of working with the body when not being able to stand on my foot. It was considered waste and it was only due to our approach of ‘welcoming all the waste’ that I dared sharing it in the first place.

**Improvising and observing:** Often providing a framework for the one improvising. We both could seem quite safe and comfortable in our own improvisations, so our mentor suggested that we tried to find ways of luring the other out of familiar territory. I often wanted to push Marlene into ‘romantic dancing’ as I call it. Where squareness and repetitions are left out and the less “collected” version is embraced. Marlene often pushed me into singing, knowing that would invite a softer, less stable side of me. It was good to experience where our insecurities lie and how we approach less comfortable landscapes.

Applying overarching methods for working together, putting as much importance into caring for the relation as for the material, the conditions of the relation could even provide the material. Existing already, somewhere between us.

*“Trust that the good idea already exists in the cracks of the original idea. You may surprise yourself and trust in that to arrive through work.”*  
*-Theodor Barth during a lecture in 2022*

## THE MATERIALS

Under is a “performance survey” I sent to Marlene two weeks or so before the premiere. This is my take on the material then, in its raw form. It had a different order, but for now I put it in the order the material ended up being in the performance.

### What does our material want:



Photo by Yaniv Cohen

**Our song:** This is air and sound leaving the body, being projected into space as something that enters bodies through ears where own references and experiences can dictate its meaning. It is letting go of something, something not contained by the body and instead something that re-enter bodies, in various ways. It leaves another type of meaning, semantic worlds. It is a tricky one, harder to transform, or a different type of work.





Photo by Yaniv Cohen

**Waiting for the right moment:** To me this says something about the work we need to put into the things we desire to do, without knowing exactly when it will happen. It speaks of continuance, endurance and belief that there will come something out of physical work. It might be something immaterial, like energy being contained and leaking out of cracks. This is material that makes me think of balance and how the unequal patterns create a balance in the equality of effort put into it. Not always physical effort but intentional effort though feeling the other body and weighing what is needed. A radiant machinery where two bodies work as one.





Photo by Yaniv Cohen

**Waste material phrase:** This is something to enter; a framework. This speaks to *execution* and that there is no way around it, we must go through it. To be particular, to measure, to reveal the present state of things in the body, the mind, the surroundings. It can provide space for recognition and for questioning. Using patterns and proximity. Being two bodies, it reveals our mutual dependencies and the phrase. Of remembering, doing it in a specific way, where faults or mistakes are not hidden and where crafting become visible through the execution and through doing it side by side. It speaks of practice, of maintenance and choice. It goes away from the instant composition and places trust in a different kind of practice. It is freed from the pressure of productivity. It honours the past by having planned the future. It transports the present moment in the moving body.



Photo by Yaniv Cohen

**Doughy imprint:** This material is a work with desire and understanding of capacity. The frame is both inside my body, my way of moving my structure in dialogue with space through imagination. It allows for another way of seeing the thinking body, its curiosities and negotiation with what is already there. It creates an interplay with imagined space, the possible density of air and possible fluidity of the body. The body attracts space, pulling the walls in towards my body, extracting my body outwards and compressing it into shapes of space. It is a place where attention can go to a singular body and moving the relationality that was between me and Marlene into other types of relations. Possibly.



Photo by Yaniv Cohen

**Folding duet:** This is a moment where I can be curious about another body-surface using mainly my hands. Touching that other body that is similar to mine, while also allowing the body that looks like mine to touch me back. It takes focus away from the space and surroundings into that other body. I no longer see things around this body and it becomes relational in a different way than “the body working next to mine”. I am testing and figuring out ways this body can fold. It is accumulative through shared curiosity in the moment. It cannot be planned in the patterns and it speaks about the immediate, the meeting. The patterns and its imprint happen through and within the doing, in the specific moment. The word possibility has a different tone in this part of the work, it is endless but also restricted in between the bodies and inside the space.

## WORKING ALONE

*“It’s an illusion that we are working alone. Things keep feeding in all the time. From relations, the surroundings, the internet, from existing in a social world.”*

*-From my notes while working with Marlene*



I applied for the MA with expectation of working solo. It never crossed my mind that I would get the opportunity to make a duet, to find someone in our small group who shared the interest of working together. I have become used to seeing solo-works and I’ve created a few myself prior to the master program. However, there has always been a desire for collaborations in my ways of working. In my notes I wrote about the ‘invisible partner’ - the imagined relation that pushed me into dancing, that questioned my choices and who suggested places I could go. This other person was always an abstracted version of me, the one who dared taking space and that pushed me further. I used to talk to myself while dancing, as a way of continuing and negotiating. When I write this, I can imagine what you imagine this to look like and it was not exactly like that, I believe it was a more subtle. One could not really hear the conversation

and it was not always very sporadic and fast paced. I was longing for something to interact with, without wanting objects to be the interaction point.

When I worked alone, I was exploring the physical act of pushing surfaces in the space. I worked with poetry and scores. I wanted it to be very physical, the music to be big. the space to be 'clean' and to use text. I will never know how the solo would have turn out, these were the concrete elements I had begun playing with.

In hindsight, I was likely attempting to find a person to fill that space. In our society we are "sold an illusion" that it is more efficient to act alone. We are taught that efficiency "is gold". In some ways it could probably be easier working alone, however working in a relation, tearing and being torn, learning how to be with oneself in company of others, is much more rewarding.



## COLLABORATIONS



Photo by Yaniv Cohen

Our process was enriched by individuals who contributed and delved into our research with us. Our musician, Lars Takla, deserves credit for daring to take on this project with our limited time and ambitious goals. Using Ableton Live, Lars created the music for our performance by sampling sounds from our bodies, the school environment and found objects we had an impulse about utilising. Despite a having a busy touring schedule from January to March, Lars worked intensively with us during weeks 8 and 12, as well as three to four independent sessions and was also there for all our performances, queuing the music.



Photo by Lars Takla

As a trio, we were all eager to invest in this project and have fun with it. During week 8, we experimented with various ways to create and manipulate sound based on our material and *the paper*, while keeping an open mind. Lars was initially slightly stressed about this approach, well knowing of the time it takes to create music in the way we have chosen to do it: not just looping samples, but building layer by layer, carefully composing it. However, “keeping an open mind” allowed us to uncover unexpected and interesting materials. During this week we used rather banal ideas together with found objects in the process of recording sound. We screamed into pipes, played with a bow on a bicycle, collected metal from the bin outside, sang self-made melodies and more. Lars processed these sounds and experimented with various structures, while we listened, improvised or explored our set materials physically. In week 12, we aimed to establish a more defined musical landscape while keeping an open mind for the parts still missing. Till the very end, we continued insisting on our methods of reworking the material that didn’t quite fit instead of disregarding the whole idea. We aimed to let the music meet or rub against the dance, creating harmony or dissonance, making sure the dance wasn’t obedient to the music, but that they were two entities working together in the same room.





Photo by Lars Takla



Furthermore, Siri Jøntvedt played an important role as our mentor and outside eye. Being involved from the beginning established a great trust in her observations and perspectives. Bojana Cvejic asked essential questions throughout the process that informed our decisions. Snelle Hall contributed on several occasions with observations and suggestions for working methods. Theodor Barth showed interest in our work and has been a partner in conversation and reflection. He also included us in some of his written research material after our project was finished. Additionally, our peers and colleagues have sometimes said the right thing at the right time, providing material into our research. All these talks and exchanges have been important contributions to how this project turned out.

## DIRT IN THE WRONG PLACE

*Make the matter work. Endure it, tweak it and test it. Take the tacky impulses seriously and turn it into gold. There is always potential in the waste.*

*- From my notes*

Our approach of listening to the impulses, gut-feelings and to let the matter emerge between us, has been a process of looking back, leaning on our archives, while instantaneously looking forwards into production. It has allowed another strategy of examining while producing. In the exchanges of dreams, cringe-worthy moments, dry facts, samples, notes, jokes, images, we have taken ownership of our own garbage and put it into action. We played with the idea that one could potentially put “anything” on stage, if one is convinced about the material having worked through its faultiness. We approached our own waste material from an angle where it didn’t yet work and attempted to craft it into something new and exciting.

The concept of ‘dirt as matter out of place’ became a useful strategy. The idea that something may be labelled as "good" or "bad" simply based on its location, rather than its inherent nature. (Douglas, 1966) We have explored the notion of recycling and repurposing existing material, rather than constantly striving to generate new ideas. To facilitate this approach, we created a pool of shared interests and references, including *the paper*, which we could draw from and decode into new shapes and forms.

In exploring these concepts through dance, our waste material has been in the form of personal recorded dances, self-written songs and melodies, notes, humour, music and old tasks. The key has been to look for connections and to find ways these elements could be repurposed. Working with the materials that already exists asks for new ways of approaching the matter. I found Stephanie Bunn’s text *Materials in Making (2011)* particularly interesting here. It proposes a specific meeting with the material, inviting a mindset of crafting, care and touch. If not literally touching, it asks for attentiveness in the meeting between the body and the material.

*“(the ‘idea’ of making) becomes a goal-oriented process with the end product being the main objective. This ignores the action of making, which is a working with rather than a doing to.”*

*- (Bunn, 2011)*

In this process we aimed to reorganise and find ways of making the seemingly disparate elements or sounds come together and find its placement by exaggerating qualities or embracing ambiguity. We wanted to reframe waste materials as a valuable resource, to challenge the standards of production and use recycling and re-design as methods.

## EPIC LANDSCAPES



Photo by Yaniv Cohen

The BIG, BOLD, ENLARGED, a juxtaposition to intimate studio work. I am bringing this idea along in my writing as it has often been referred to our process. ‘Epic landscapes’ have provided a dichotomy to the *worker*. Taking the rather ‘dry’ movements somewhere else. We often worked with pop-music in the process, giving a sense of drive, a trajectory with points of peaking and reasons to keep pushing. Working with the idea of rigid structures and repeatable patterns can potentially translate to the process of composing a pop-song.

I find that a good pop-song has the ability to lift us off the ground; to turn a tired body 'on', to make us go just a bit further. It's intriguing to work with. In this process, especially while working on the music, we have been exploring how to upscale the “ordinary”, or to enhance something specific. To give space for the ‘epic landscapes’, we've worked with a stripped scenography, to have the space as big as possible, creating a sense of vastness.

We did not want the pop-culture references to be visible and clear in our final performance. Therefore, as soon as something sounded too familiar, we attempted a new approach to the material. It was often a struggle to find a balance, for elements not to tip over to either ends of

a scale, or becoming too self-absorbed, not providing space for ambiguity or questions. By working with simple ideas and clean structures, our mission was to find ways of making small disruptions in the material.

We also attempted to take something 'epic' and transform it by entering the material from another angle. One example of this approach is our use of Coldplay's "Fix You" in our 'folding duet'. We were inspired by a YouTube clip of Marlene at Roskilde Festival in 2009, passionately screaming the song. We incorporated a fragmented version into our music and worked to push the 'dry' folding of each other, allowing it to escalate together with the new soundscape. In theory, this idea didn't sound great, however by approaching it with curiosity and determination, we were able to make it work. It was important that the experience we included in the music was personal or something from our process, rather than an idea that 'sounded good'.

## AFTERMATH

I find the image of moulding clay together a good representation of our process. Getting to know Marlene, experiencing myself through our relation and masters project has been extremely rewarding. Throughout this process we revisited the question “what is important to us?” and through this question we have made a performance that is staying true to our current curiosities and desires. This may be the first time I’ve been so proud of a creation I’ve made, as it was not just about me. It was about everything I found around me, my past and my present together with Marlene, someone I didn’t know existed two years ago.

Watching the video footage of our performance, I see many things that could be improved and details that require further attention. I get an overview of what worked and sometimes it was the things I was a bit unsure about from the inside. Similarly, some of the things I thought I was doing was not exactly how I envisioned while doing the material. Seeing the doubling of the material through two bodies confirmed how the matter was also existing between us and not only in my body.

In January of 2023, I wrote in my log that I had a disinterest in solely creating work that was deemed impressive without much substance. In this process I wanted to take risks. Not be occupied with being liked, or being lukewarm, as I wrote then. We hoped to generate dialogues and inquiries about our work, aiming for it to be thought-provoking and meaningful. We wanted audiences to have more to say about it beyond initial impressions. By producing something that held significance for the two of us, we hopefully inspired some curiosity about the work.

## FUTURE



Photo by Sanghoon Lee

As we move towards the end of our current process, I have many questions that I don't expect answers to right away. What remains with me is my eagerness to explore the performance materials further and discover new ways to integrate and experiment with them.

Looking back, I have overarching questions like how we would approach the process if we started over with the knowledge we have now and more specific questions like how our set phrase-material would be different if we were learnt movement material from one of Marlene's improvisations. Many of my questions centre around the consequences of not staying open to new inputs and ideas throughout our process. Did chance play a significant role in our outcome?

Marlene and I have already been talking about the potential of exploring individual sections of our performance or extending the length of the overall structure. We are curious about how it would translate in different environments and spaces. We want to find ways of utilising *the paper* further, to develop practical methods that can be shared or even transformed into a

workshop format, where more people could contribute their own unique approaches to the material. We also want to create a more accessible documentation of the paper.

Moving forward, I am curious about working outside of an institution, with less flexible time. Financially we will need support to be able to work together over time. Working between Copenhagen and Oslo will require another way of working together, possibly new roles and more planning. We have started the process of applying for funding, which means we also must look at our work from the outside-in, making our approach working from the inside-out readable.

During the MA, I began to question how to be a dance-maker and not a choreographer. How to gain sustainability and trust, in that our work as dance-makers is worth attention. Even though we invited what felt like the whole field and despite all performances of 'to the sides of this body' reaching its full audience capacity, few to no curators, artistic directors or programmers from institutions came to see our work.

I believe there is still a clear hierarchy and value system between the dancer and choreographer, which is something that we need to work with and around to change.

This last island, that I chose to call future, mostly provokes questions I have at this point. I do not need answers to them now. I enjoy the idea of working with or towards them. "If we ignore the central role of materials in making, the 'idea' of making becomes a technique, or a technology, where something is done to something, the materials, in order to make something, an object" (Bunn, 2011) Over the past two years, I've come to appreciate not rushing to conclusions, but to churn in the matter between known and unknown. It is in this space where I find hope, curiosities and reasons to keep going.

*Soft note: All the things that are not present will always be more than the things that are present.*

*-Anders Paulin in lecture in 2021*



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### **LINK TO THE PERFORMANCE *TO THE SIDES OF THIS BODY*:**

<https://vimeo.com/815026786?fbclid=IwAR3YevLJqhZK13kmb7zKaHwy5YZyI99Xc30gE5y2r7TPX0O4k5g4kXJMuMQ>