

Introduction to Part 2

Choreography goes beyond the production and performance of dance. Money follows choreographic paths in its endless exchanges from person to person (Peter Stamer and Daniel Aschwanden have tracked its choreography in *The Path of Money*, 2008). Information forms choreographic patterns in its spread. A car engine is choreographed by its designers. Religious rituals give rise to collective choreographies. Smartphone users execute the swiping and tapping gestures choreographed by their devices. Thoughts move around in choreographic – improvised or not – circles, jumping from one idea to the next, in a cognitive interiorisation of the hyperlink. Groups of fish migrate, water flows, and air forms currents in an endless choreography of nature. This entrance of choreography into diverse, expanded domains is recognised by multiple voices in the dance field. Gabriele Brandstetter asks:

What could a choreography beyond dance look like? [...] Choreography – a moving arrangement of bodies in space and time: the formation and movement of a procession or parade, the decoration of a gala dinner, the curatorial organisation of space for an exhibition's visitors, or the ebb and flow of people in a city's streets and public spaces.¹

Susan Foster provides another possible response:

Sometimes designating minute aspects of movement, or alternatively, sketching out the broad contours of action within which variation might occur, choreography constitutes a plan or score according to which movement unfolds. Buildings choreograph space and people's movement through them; cameras choreograph cinematic action; birds perform intricate choreographies; and combat is choreographed. Multiprotein complexes choreograph DNA repair; sales representatives in call centers engage in improvisational choreography; families undergo-

¹ Brandstetter, Gabriele: *Choreography Beyond Dance: A Dance Promise*, in: Basteri, Guidi & Ricci: *Rehearsing Collectivity*, p. 45.

ing therapy participate in choreography; web services choreograph interfaces; and even existence is choreographed.²

This expansion of choreography is not only a metaphorical activation, but symptomatic of an interrogation of choreography's boundaries, applicability, and relevance. One response to this interrogation is the insistence on the physical and kinetic nature of choreography in continuity with its recent history. This is supported by responses to the 2007 CORPUS survey that suggest choreography is 'organization of movement in time and space' (Tim Etchells), 'the arrangement of movement in space' (Michael Stolhofer), 'the organisation of elements in space-time, that is, the organisation of movement' (Thomas Lehmen), 'Operationalisation of Body Movement' (Claudia Jeschke), 'a set of rules which organises body movement in time and space' (Julia Wehren).³ These definitions consider choreography to be a physical and kinetic practice that may or may not participate in fields beyond dance. Another response takes the path of widening, through choreographic expansions, what the posited "dancerly", "kinetic", or "physical" nature of choreography may be – what *counts* as dance, motion, and a body. After the years-long debates in which the European dance field engaged with (and critiqued) such terms as "conceptual dance" and "non-dance" – insisting that dance encompass (what is normativised as) its Other, incorporate non-human performers, or engage with immobility – the expansion of choreography contributes to a diversification of the very terms that form part of choreography's essentialised definition. Inversely, another response is to negate the necessity of choreography's relation with corporealities and motions, as reflected in the programmatic Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA) text that pushed the term "expanded choreography" into the discursive forefront and claimed that (expanded) choreography was becoming 'disconnected from subjectivist bodily expression'.⁴

Nevertheless, beyond such an interplay of choreography expanding as a corporeal, kinetic practice, or in a negation of that very practice, a multiple choreographic history is a reminder that choreography is not only defined in relation to these notions. This implies a step away from applying existing conceptions of choreography to new kinds of entities and contexts – to objects and thoughts, urban spaces or architecture, animals or information – and from

2 Foster, Susan Leigh: *Choreographing Empathy: Kinesthesia in Performance*, Oxon/New York: Routledge 2011, pp. 2–3; see p. 219, note 1 for the sources from which these terms come.

3 All quoted in CORPUS: Survey What does "choreography" mean today?, 2007, <http://www.corpusweb.net/introduction-to-the-survey.html> (Archive copy from October 2015).

4 Expanded Choreography. Situations, Movements, Objects..., Conference presentation, MACBA 2012, <http://www.macba.cat/en/expanded-choreography-situations> (August 2020).

negating, in a closed-circuit dialogue, those conceptions. In other words, a multiple choreographic history invites consideration not of the expandability of a stably-defined choreography, but the expandability of what choreography can be, how it can itself change. Part 2 of this book seeks *this* expanded choreography, by allowing non-dancing, non-moving, and/or non-human bodies to trouble what choreography itself is and does. Choreographic history is a reminder that if choreography changes, it does so in a non-linear collection of diverse and, at times, synchronous paradigms. Correspondingly, looking at expanded choreography from the perspective of a multiple choreographic history implies looking not for a new-but-stable definition, but for multiple, small or large shifts. Thus, Part 2 explores the diversity of “what else” (expanded) choreography may be – its multiple, coexisting, and interlinked (but not identical) expansions.

An understanding of choreographic history as multiple also reminds us that different historical configurations of choreography do not linearly succeed each other, but, rather, recur, adapting to new cultural, artistic, and aesthetic contexts. Current expansions cannot be understood as ruptures, or new “chapters” of choreographic history that replace previous ones. Rather than being disconnected from previous models, they are, in their contemporary specificity, relatable to choreographic histories. In effect, if a reading of Saint-Hubert, Raoul Auger Feuillet, Domenico da Piacenza, and Guglielmo Ebreo da Pesaro through an expanded choreographic lens prompts the development of alternative choreographic histories [Part 1], it is also true that contemporary expanded choreographies – gazed at parallactically⁵ from the past they help conceive – can appear both as challenges to dominant and entrenched choreographic models, and as parts of these alternative choreographic histories. In this sense, Parts 1 and 3 of this book are the result of an expanded choreographic perspective, while also feeding into view(s) of the present developed in Part 2. This bidirectional connection between the present and the past does not imply a history of continuities, re-creations, or exact reflections; what today’s choreographic expansions perform are *other* responses to questions that historical expansions pose about the necessity of a dancerly, kinetic, physical choreography.

Part 2 fleshes out these responses through three case studies that illustrate contemporary, theoretical and practical, shifts in choreography and their historical relatability. Chapter 4 examines a series of videos made with a Kinect camera by French artist Mathilde Chénin – pieces where the moving human body appears in the process of production and then disappears, to be replaced by lines and planes on a screen. Drawing from contemporary choreographic

⁵ Foster, Hal: *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*. Cambridge/London: MIT Press 1996, p. xii.

theory – including Stamatia Portanova's view of a radically-disembodied choreography resulting from digital culture and Mårten Spångberg's programmatic views on the media expansion of choreography – Chapter 4 seeks the choreographic within the videos and their digital-creation process. Arguing for an ontological multiplication of choreography in diverse materialities, Chapter 4 constitutes a potential contemporary response to Feuillet's construal of choreographies as more-than secondary, peripheral, documentary elements [Chapter 2]. Chapter 5 looks at a stage work by Spanish choreographer Olga Mesa, in which the choreographer/performer's moving, dancing body is caught in a multimodal network of sounds, texts, objects, screens, reflections, music, and light. Here, contemporary activations of assemblage theory in the analysis of choreography – by Petra Sabisch and Rudi Laermans, among others –, Ana Vujanović's identification of the choreographic between (non-dance) media, and theorisations of choreography's proximity to dramaturgy, allow present reconfigurations of Saint-Hubert's ballet's problematics [Chapter 1] to appear. Finally, Chapter 6 considers a public-space installation created by U.S.-born choreographer William Forsythe, embodied by apparently-immobile plants and water. Referring, among others, to concepts of Deleuzian philosophy that Erin Manning introduced in the analysis of (his) choreographic installations, the chapter reads Forsythe's work as an ecology performing virtual motion – thus branching out to Domenico and Guglielmo's non-anthropocentric, non-primarily kinetic, choreographic compositions [Chapter 3]. Like their historical counterparts, these chapters move beyond choreography's general expandability – for example, as a result of its association with omnipresent motion – or an undifferentiated description of its being – for example, as a result of its negative definition as *not* (only) dance or *not* (only) kinetic – towards a collection of distinct, but interrelated, specificities.

Chénin, Mesa, and Forsythe's works are related to choreography in diverse ways; in some cases nominally, by being referred to as choreographic by their creators; in others contextually, by being related to choreographic training and pedagogy, having been presented in choreographic institutions and venues, and being related to other choreographic works; conceptually, by being related to ideas relevant to choreographic practice; and/or practically, by being produced by artists engaging with choreographic praxis. Based on the heterogeneity of expanded choreography and its non-authoritative function as a term, the selection of these works was not limited to pieces that are called "expanded choreographies", thus resisting the transformation of a malleable notion into a stable grid or a categorical "labelling". These three works illustrate three different modes of being of (expanded) choreography – as a stage performance (Mesa), a physically-present but not-theatrically-framed installation (Forsythe), and a (digital) screen

work based on a mass of data (Chénin) – thus also illustrating the multiplicity of choreographic expansion.

Since these works were available to be watched or visited, Part 2 shifts the focus of analysis from written documents (treatises) to choreographic works. Nevertheless, the possibility of “directly” experiencing these pieces troubles notions of liveness and physical co-presence as bases for accessing choreography – while Mesa’s work is a performance and experiencing Forsythe’s piece means visiting the installation, walking around it, touching it, and being in it, in the case of Chénin, there is an “indirect” experience of watching the work online, in a small web-video window. The chapters that follow are therefore not construed as analyses of staging or performance (as opposed to analyses of text), but engage with the works’ different materialities and medialities, including text when relevant (e.g. in Mesa’s piece, text is spoken). In these non-exclusively performative or corporeal sources, what follows identifies the relationality of the present with a past whose paper and textual sources are as much indicators of an embodied dance praxis as they are illustrations of a choreography that outflanks it.

