

Chapter 2: Body-Biographies: A Novel Methodology for Body-Reflexive and Participatory Dance Research

In “Reshaping Dance through Time” (2009), dance historian Alexandra Carter observes the growing “self-reflexivity” of dance history writing, revealed in “books that not only present the [historical] narratives but that also tackle the methodological nature of their construction.”¹ My writing in this chapter accordingly turns to the subject of methodology, elaborating on how the body-biographies presented in Part II achieved their form and theoretical focus. Although these texts (Chapters 3–6) may appear as polished interview transcripts, they are, as I shall justify in this chapter, better understood as written performances of life review developed cooperatively with their protagonists. Explaining this novel and interdisciplinary methodology is my focus in this chapter, with the intent to offer other scholars tools to begin their own body-biography projects and to further innovate methods in dance studies.²

This writing on methodology contributes to the expanding domain of interview research within dance studies. The exciting prospect of interviewing a dancer or choreographer is already a common way in which Western stage dance is framed and mediated, through program booklets, advertising, journalism, and social media. As discussed in the previous chapter, dance oral history collections are growing in number and international scope; furthermore, the dancer-as-interviewer is an emerging field within artistic research and dance documentation.³ However, this growing domain of dancer interviews has yet to be fully examined and systematically

1 Carter, “Reshaping Dance through Time,” 44.

2 See Williams and Bendelow, *The Lived Body*.

3 Some noteworthy examples include, *The Dancer as Agent Collection* by Chrysa Parkinson, http://sarma.be/pages/The_Dancer_as_Agent_Collection, last accessed June 26, 2025; interviews from Marlon Barrios Solano and other artists on the online platform Dance-Tech, <https://dance-tech.net/videos>, last accessed June 26, 2025; the podcast “Sleeping Giant Dreams” by Eleanor Bauer, <https://open.spotify.com/show/09QKhRHNp1OMOFZ7yisZ67>, last accessed June 26, 2025; and the podcast “Movers and Shapers” by Erin Carlisle North, <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/movers-shapers-a-dance-podcast/id999896565>, last accessed June 26, 2025.

reflected upon, considering best practices of production, theoretical interpretation, research ethics, and formats of scholarly publication. Nor are there widely available curricular materials for teaching dance-specific interview methodologies in higher education.⁴ While drawing upon established interview research from other fields, specific frameworks for dance studies are also needed that recognize interviews as performative, embodied dialogues. This chapter begins to address these gaps, proposing methodological innovation for dance studies with broader relevance to disciplines in which bodies matter.

My writing unfolds in four sections: First, in the section, “Outline of Body-Biography Methodology,” I introduce my research through a concise overview of the research phases. In the second section, “Background: Interview Research,” I contextualize this participatory and embodied research within debates in interview scholarship, referencing the work of sociologist Fritz Schütze, life story scholar Robert Atkinson, feminist oral history scholars Kristina Minister and Kathryn Anderson, anthropologist Sarah Pink, and dance oral history scholars Julia Wehren and Jeff Friedman, among others. In the third section, “Making This Book,” I expand on the interwoven phases of my methodology outlined previously. Foregrounding dilemmas in transcription and publication, the descriptive detail of this section should appeal to graduate students seeking in-depth introductions. I conclude with the section “Theoretical Interpretation,” in which I examine the interplay between interview practice and interpretation—through narrative and movement analysis—drawing on the scholarship of life story scholar Daniel James, dance scholar Jeff Friedman, and dance anthropologist Sally Ann Allen Ness, among others, to synthesize these remarks. Together, these sections sharpen the embodied dimensions of my methodology and refine self-reflexive and performative components specific to dance studies analysis.

My arguments throughout this chapter will foreground the ethics of research cooperation with living dance artists. I present an epistemological framework for interviewing that is neither positivistic nor procedural, but rather empathetically adaptive and uniquely shaped by each protagonist. Like my understanding of bodies, body-biography methodology is relational, sensual, emplaced, dynamic, contingent, curious, vulnerable, and extended in time. Merging sensual ethnographic interviews with life review practices, body-biographies involve the

4 Related examples in the broader field of artist interviews and oral history include: Diers, Blunck, and Obrist, *Das Interview*; Imhof and Omlin, *Interviews*. In dance studies, articles by scholars addressing methodology include: Kraft, “Private Lives in Public Places”; L’Hotellier, “The Bennington Summer School of the Dance Oral History Project, 1978–1979”; Friedman, “Oral History a Go-Go”; Friedman, “Spiraling Desire”; Gore et al., “Eliciting the Tacit”; Wehren, “Écouter les mouvements de la mémoire de l’autre”; Wehren, “Oral History”; Wulff, “Instances of Inspiration.”

bodies of both interviewer and protagonist ontologically, rather than erasing them or reducing them to carriers of oral history. Instead, body-biographies are kinesthetic exchanges: narratives as dialogic social performances. Rather than research that prizes distance and objectivity, body-biography enables intimate dialogues to gradually become thoughtful performances of life review for a broader public, creating archival traces and scholarly texts that allow for this knowledge to propagate: becoming rigorous through exchange and critical triangulation. In sum, this chapter encourages dance scholars to continue innovating ways of bringing dancing bodies sensitively into their research methodologies.

Outline of Body-Biography Methodology

The term “body-biographies,” like “oral history,” refers both to a research practice and the written product resulting from this methodology. As in oral history research, I espouse that “practice and theory—doing and interpreting—are entwined.”⁵ Body-biography is a body-reflexive approach to life story research. It is a flexible and holistic practice that fosters collaboration between interviewer and interviewee. Each body-biography is contextualized by the scholar’s commentary and left open-ended, documenting artists’ lives and making available rich sources for further theoretical analysis. Whether published as a single example or brought together as a small case study as I have done here, body-biographies are a new opportunity for theoretical inquiry within dance studies, and, more broadly, as an exploration of bodily lives, cultural expression, and embodied history.

My body-biography research can be modeled as a process with six stages. In my practice, these stages of inquiry overlapped and blended over time, a dynamic that I will clarify later in this chapter. The outline below is intended to give a generalized overview, not to be reproduced as a procedure. In practice, this process is highly creative and adaptive.

Stages of Body-Biography Research

1. Inquiring and Designing: The first stage of research develops the author’s questions related to embodiment and autobiography. This process may include explorative life-writing focused on the researcher’s body-biography. At this stage, the selection of a narrator or small case study of protagonists is made, with careful consideration of theoretical, ethical, and technical aspects of the research. Contact with a repository for archiving interviews is advised, as is preparation of a legal agreement (see Appendix A). Additionally, background literature should be reviewed in

5 See Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, 1.

preparation for the interviews, and a research trajectory for all six phases should be anticipated.

2. *Interviewing and Participant Observation*: Beginning with a pre-interview, the interviewee (or interviewees, hereafter singular) is introduced to the project topic, timeline, and publication vision. The interviewer extends an open invitation, such as: “I would like to conduct research together with you reviewing your life as a dance artist. I call this body-biography to highlight the special knowledge that dancers acquire through their decades of work with their bodies in the performing arts. We can move or dance together during these interviews. We will have ample time to formalize these stories for publication together.” A legal form is exchanged and signed explaining the intended archival recordings and transcripts of the interviews.

The life review process unfolds over multiple sensory interviews, integrating conversation and dance practice. The interviewee chooses a comfortable location for these conversations. These sessions are deliberately spaced over an extended period—at least several months to a year—to foster rapport and facilitate exchange. This extended timeline also gives opportunity to assess narrative consistency, coherence, and the intimate dimensions of body-narratives. The researcher takes the role of an active facilitator and empathetic listener, dialoging and dancing with the protagonist. Through this process, the relationship between researcher and interviewer grows closer, and the boundary between theoretical inquiry and personal engagement becomes fluid. Recordings serve to structure and demarcate the process.

The formal body-biography interview conversations are conjoined with activities that blur the boundaries of research and daily life, i.e. “participant observation.”⁶ This is comparable to the manner in which extended anthropological fieldwork and life history collection may be brought together for cultural study, exploring individual experience and its cultural context. In this approach, the researcher’s own body and self are tools for inquiry. As demonstrated in my research on the four dance artists featured in this study, participant observation may include activities such as: witnessing the artist’s choreographic work and teaching, improvising together in a dance studio, receiving mentorship, studying historical sources relevant to the artist’s practice, and reviewing the artist’s personal documents from the past (e.g., photos, press clippings, video recordings) and the present (e.g., professional or personal websites). These activities should be

6 Participant observation is a practice in anthropology, in which the emplaced researcher makes observations while participating in their fieldwork. The embodied nature of this engagement has received considerable attention. See for example, Okely, *Anthropological Practice*, 75–106; Okely, “Fieldwork Embodied.”

conducted compassionately, with time set aside for self-reflection and writing field notes. Beyond building rapport, they provide helpful situated study of the processes that transform dancing bodies over time—both materially and in terms of symbolic meaning. The researcher is thus engaged in a dual process of self-reflection and attentive observation of the interviewee's evolving body- and self-narratives.

All interviews and participant observation should be documented through detailed field notes, as is common in ethnographic practice.

3. Transcribing and Verifying: Reflexivity deepens through the process of reviewing the interview recordings. The first step is producing precise, word-for-word transcripts. These transcripts are then shared with the interviewee for verification, improving their accuracy—including the names, dates, and titles of artworks. At this stage, the researcher may invite the interviewee to retell certain life stories—particularly those that were fragmented or recounted differently across interviews—or to fill in notable gaps in the life story narration. Keeping a research diary or field notes during these review sessions is recommended, with attention to both the interviewee's evolving narratives and the researcher's own embodied engagement.

4. Drafting Life-Writing: In this stage of the research process, the focus shifts from participating in embodied life review to producing life-writing. How can the published body-biography not only represent, but analytically develop the embodied and personal exchange of life review? How can the publication present a refined and rehearsed conversation, as if performed for an audience? The researcher initiates this writing process by carefully condensing and editing the transcripts into a written dialogue. It is recommended to preserve as much of the original narrative material and sequence as possible, ensuring authenticity and demonstrating the narrator's authority.

Alongside drafting, the researcher engages in interpretative analysis of the entire collection of research materials, including recordings and field notes. This analysis informs the ongoing writing process and marks the beginning of an intensive phase of feedback and revision. Maintaining the distinct voices and theoretical perspectives of the interviewer and interviewee is critical; the researcher's voice is foregrounded in sections such as the introduction and movement analysis within the body-biography.

5. Feedback and Editing: The final stage of life-writing involves refinement and closure of the written body-biography process with the narrator. This necessarily slow process provides an opportunity to carefully negotiate how life review becomes a public text, ensuring mutual agreement on the content, tone, and style of the publication. Ample time should be allowed—ideally six months to a year—for multiple revisions and discussions. Depending on the interviewee's preferences,

collaboration may take various forms, including oral dialogue, written annotations, or co-writing.

Through these activities, prior traces of the interview drafts become cooperatively refined—even transformed—into a public script for performance of life stories. The scholar should preserve their voice, speaking beside and with their protagonist, and refrain from imposing or ghostwriting for the interviewee. Using their knowledge of dance history and biographical writing, they dialogue with the narrator on editorial proposals: selecting, cutting, and clarifying the life stories. While the protagonist remains central, the researcher's reflections—presented in introductions, footnotes, and analytical commentary—provide critical clues for interpreting and also appreciating this writing. To further integrate bodily experience into the text, movement analysis and/or descriptive vignettes from participant observation are appended. Triangulating the interviewee's story, cross-references with other historical records are added in footnotes, complicating the dance historiography and suggesting further potential for scholarly writing. Lastly, one should also dialogue about the inclusion of photographs and video stills, to bring the reader visually into the narrator's lifeworld. Because of this inventive and collaborative nature, each body-biography will take a unique form.

6. *Publishing and Archiving*: Beyond publishing the finalized body-biography, consideration should be given to the long-term preservation of research materials. This includes archiving interview recordings, transcripts, and metadata. One may also consider writing additional theoretical publications that delve into specific analytical aspects of the research questions and scholarly discourses. A performative project may also be undertaken, embodying the research materials and using choreographic techniques. In this final phase, the relationship between researcher and interviewee should also be reassessed, with regard to how it will evolve beyond the scope of the research project.

The theoretical writing that has influenced my decisions in crafting this methodology is presented in the next section, which focuses on debates in interview research.

Background: Interview Research

For this project of body-biography I drew upon my prior work interviewing dancers, as well as literature from ethnography, feminist oral history, narrative life story interviews, and sensory ethnographic interviews as precedents.⁷ What these paradigms share is an epistemological framework in which interview practice is

7 Waterhouse, *Processing Choreography*.

conceived as a *participatory* and *collaborative* process of knowledge production. This is emphasized in the citation below in the qualitative research guide *Doing Interviews* (2007/2018) by Svend Brinkmann and Steinar Kvale:

In an interview conversation, the researcher asks about, and listens to, what people themselves say about their lived world, about their dreams, fears and hopes; hears their views and opinions in their own words; and learns about their school and work situation, their family and social life. The research interview is an inter-view where knowledge is constructed in the inter-action between the interviewer and the interviewee.⁸

Life story scholar Robert Atkinson similarly finds that the interviewer and interviewee together are “composing and constructing a story the teller can be pleased with. As collaborator in an open-ended process, the researcher-guide is never really in control of the story actually told.”⁹

This viewpoint, embracing the social construction of knowledge, may be challenging to scholars trained to pursue objectivity and distance—raising questions regarding how they should address their own involvement and social entanglements in their research.¹⁰ For example, students without prior experience of interviewing, and who tend to view scientific work as fostering objectivity, might wonder if they should plan their questions verbatim and minimize their influence on the interview, in order to gather knowledge that is reliable, factual, and consistent. Should they avoid sharing their own views and expressing bodily signals that might bias their narrator to respond a certain way—or accept their subjective participation as inevitable? Will empathy and emotional involvement prevent them from interpreting the interview? What are their criteria for interpretation and evaluating whether the interview was “good”? I will draw out further differences among interview approaches and principles for crafting and evaluating interview methodology in my discussion in this chapter.

Because body-biographies are extended over time and involve both interview conversations and participant observation, they are similar to ethnographic interviewing. Sociologist Barbara Sherman Heyl describes ethnographic interviewing in a way that aligns with my methodology; such projects involve researchers, she writes, who “have established respectful, on-going relationships with their interviewees, including enough rapport for there to be a genuine exchange of views.” She adds that, in addition to this trust, there should also be “enough time and openness in the interviews for the interviewees to explore

8 Brinkmann and Kvale, *Doing Interviews*, 2.

9 Atkinson, *The Life Story Interview*, 9.

10 Reviewing sociological interviewing succinctly, see Pink, *Doing Sensory Ethnography*, 73–76; Brinkmann and Kvale, *Doing Interviews*, 19–20.

purposefully with the researcher the meanings they place on events in their worlds.”¹¹ Ethnographic interviewing typically contrasts with the brevity of oral history and other forms of life story interviews, in which dialogue is limited to one meeting. Instead, body-biography interviews are conceived as a complex and participatory process of knowledge production incorporating discussions, dance practice, archival holdings, and textual publication.

The longevity and rapport of my preexisting relationships with “Hilary,” “Christine,” “Chris,” and “Marcus” were therefore integral to my body-biographical inquiry. As is expected in ethnographic work, I continued to foster and negotiate these social ties throughout this research. Between 2022 and 2024, we engaged in a “genuine exchange of views”—not only in recorded interviews, but also through informal conversation, movement practice, and collaborative manuscript editing.¹² Recognizing, as feminist oral history scholar Kathryn Anderson has written, that “traditional historical sources tell us more about what happened and how it happened than how people felt about it and what it meant to them,” I facilitated a research process designed to cultivate trust over time. This allowed for deeper discussions of the “feelings, attitudes, values, and meaning” at the core of telling life stories, creating theoretically richer and more complex narrations of embodied experience.¹³

Both ethnographic interviewing and feminist practices of oral history emphasize the ethical role of the researcher as a listener who must balance their research interests with the ethics and dynamics of live human interaction. Listening attentively creates space for rapport, and rapport adds depth and nuance to one’s discussions. Respectful transparency with one’s interviewee necessitates sharing background information about the project, its outcomes, and legal rights regarding ownership and use of interview materials. While planning questions is often advantageous, the dialogue should also be open to the emergence of new and unforeseen topics. In contrast to this, oral historian Kristina Minister describes androcentric precedents of oral history, and the negative effects that these may have in interviews:

The standard oral history frame—topic selection determined by interviewer questions, one person talking at a time, the narrator “taking the floor” with referential language that keeps within the boundaries of selected topics—denies women the communication form that supports the topics women value.¹⁴

11 Sherman Heyl, “Ethnographic Interviewing,” 369.

12 Sherman Heyl, 369.

13 Anderson et al., “Beginning Where We Are,” 109.

14 Minister, “A Feminist Frame for the Oral History Interview,” 35.

Minister critiques androcentric oral history frameworks where the historian dictates the conversation's flow, signaling when the narrator should speak and guiding the topics of discussion. She contrasts this with women's conversational styles, which tend to be affirming, socially connective, and empathetic—characterized by eye contact, turn-taking, responsive “hms,” affirmative “yeahs,” laughter, and joking. In agreement with Minister, I sought an interview format for body-biographies that would respect and integrate the communication strategies of my narrators as dance artists—not only with respect to gender but also the unique conventions of dancer talk.

To give one example that helps substantiate my argument: A memorable instance reminding me of dance communication conventions arose while making this book, on a morning off from the university during which I gave the company Bern Ballett their morning ballet class.¹⁵ Before the class, several dancers and I were sharing a large studio with mirrors on one side. The dancers were getting ready for their day: warming up while talking. Some were introspective, others engaged in animated conversation. They greeted each other warmly with smiles, small talk, and embraces—including hugging me as their guest teacher. Throughout their conversations, they stretched, fidgeted, and used bands, balls, and other fitness devices. They often looked at themselves in the mirror and even had conversations while making eye contact through it.¹⁶ Emotions were visibly shared. They laughed together and consoled each other. At one point a dancer plugged his smartphone into the speaker system and gave the room some electric dance music; the mood of music infiltrated the conversation.

This example of studio interaction among young professional dancers in Switzerland highlights that dance settings have distinct norms for communication, which of course vary depending on context and dance style. Instead of androcentric oral history conventions, professional dancers—accustomed to spending extensive time together in groups in dance studios—engage in conversations attuned to attentional, sensual, and spatial dynamics. Nonverbal aspects of communication, or paralanguage, are critical for building rapport. Instead of sitting down, dancers position their bodies dynamically in conversation and use them both as fidgeting tools and thinking resources. Unlike conventional oral history interviews, where participants sit still and engage in frontal, directed conversation, dance workplaces encourage embodied, fluid interactions. Though dancers are certainly familiar with traditional interview norms from television and social media, their everyday communicative practices emphasize what Minister calls “intersupport.”

15 This company, under direction of Isabelle Bischof, has a repertoire of contemporary dance works. The dancers' daily training alternates between ballet and contemporary dance technique classes.

16 This is described similarly in Wulff, “Instances of Inspiration,” 167.

In these interactions, overlapping remarks, sounds of encouragement, laughter, and gestures become a social form to collectively move the conversation forward, enhancing social bonds as topics become clarified. This contrasts with androcentric conventions, “where utterances from those not possessing the floor are regarded as attempts to take it over.”¹⁷

Anthropologist Helena Wulff, who trained in ballet, observes similarly that ballet dancers exhibit distinctive communication patterns compared to nondancers she has also interviewed. She remarks that having a dance background as an interviewer can also be advantageous. I quote at length:

So there we were, me asking questions and a dancer responding in an attentive yet flexible tone. Contrary to most other interviews I have conducted, I could sense the dancers’ trust and how they reach out for me. There was a give and take and exchange just like in dancing. They were trained in partnering. . . . When I was interviewing ballet dancers, many of them, again, related to me *as if we were dancing a duet* together. For me, Bourdieu’s (1977) body hexis was activated, and I was reminded of my bodily memory of having danced classical ballet. It is important that the dancers were aware of this as dancers see themselves as different from other people, often misunderstood. My dancing past made them trust me and accept me as a part of their setting.¹⁸

Similarly to Wulff above, my own memories of dancing also resurfaced in my body-biography interviews. As my case studies will illustrate, I performed these memories rather than holding myself still, reinforcing the co-constructed nature of storytelling. These embodied dimensions of the interview process are theoretically valuable for dance scholars, as they highlight how dance practices shape the sensual field of interviewing. Like Wulff, I argue for viewing the inter-action of the interview through the lens of performance and dance, as a narrative interweaving the logics of practice-based dance knowledge as well as the surrounding storytelling discourses familiar to the narrator and interviewer.

Another scholar who has drawn attention to these kinesthetic dynamics is dancer and dance oral historian Jeff Friedman. Like Wulff, Friedman has argued that interviews with dancers should be analyzed regarding how their embodied storytelling relates words and body language.¹⁹ He has also highlighted the documentary value of using an interview framework as a context to record dancing practice and performance. Friedman fully embraced his own bodily participation in his life story interviews by dancing with his informants and choreographing performances that reflected on these oral history conversations—an advancement

17 Minister, “A Feminist Frame for the Oral History Interview,” 33.

18 Wulff, “Instances of Inspiration,” 167. (emphasis in original)

19 See in particular Friedman, “Oral History a Go Go,” 182.

that guided my own approach. Like Friedman, I recognized the improvisatory nature of oral history and its potential for including movement. When my interviewees danced, I also moved with them. I attuned to their pauses and energy shifts, recognizing moments where my own life review might elicit theirs. While the time-intensive nature of writing body-biography absorbed me, leaving no time to choreograph a lecture-performance, my work considers the page as a place for performative life-writing, as the examples of body-biography in Part II substantiate.

Beyond pioneering dancing together with his interlocutors as a foundational component of dance oral history and dance documentation, Friedman has also advanced dance studies frameworks for interpreting oral history interviews. Overall, he has argued for understanding dance oral history “AS performance, FOR performers, IN performance”; theoretically, this entails scholarly attention to oral history *as* embodied performance, i.e. as knowledge created dynamically *in* performative cycles of embodied dialogue and interpretation, and, as a practice of knowledge production relevant *for* dance artists, not only dance historians.²⁰ Spiraling into these analytical threads, the final section of this chapter unpacks how Friedman’s performative turn to oral history informs the theoretical apparatus of body-biography, in particular through movement and performance analysis. Given its importance, this topic requires an expanded treatment, better accomplished after this introductory section of literature review. Having highlighted the participatory and collaborative nature of interviews and outlined the specific challenges and affordances of collaborating with dance protagonists, I shift now to other recognized narrative approaches to interviewing that focus explicitly on autobiographical testimony.

Autobiographical Narrative Interviews

This section focuses on the autobiographical narrative interview approach developed by German sociologist Fritz Schütze (1983) and *The Life Story Interview* (1998) research of American developmental psychologist and scholar Robert Atkinson, respectively.²¹ While differing in their theoretical backgrounds and practices of interviewing, both have significantly advanced research on autobiographical interviewing in German- and English-speaking contexts.

The narrative interview method, established by Schütze and further developed by scholars such as Roswitha Breckner, has played a significant role in shaping German oral history research and underlies the work of my archival partner, the

20 Friedman, 192. (emphasis in original)

21 Schütze, “Biographieforschung und narratives Interview”; Atkinson, *The Life Story Interview*.

Oral History Projects at the Swiss Archive of the Performing Arts.²² Schütze's methodology centers on oral narrative rather than embodied dialogue of the kind I have explored in this project. The interviewee selects a location where they feel comfortable sharing their life story. At the outset, the interviewer reiterates the research goals and process steps: explaining that the project aims to document biographical narratives, inviting the interviewee to describe, in any manner, what has shaped them into the person they are today. The interview can either cover the entire life story or focus on specific phases relevant to sociological inquiry.

The interview unfolds in three phases. First, the interviewee is given time to narrate their life story without interruption; the interviewer provides only nonverbal affirmations—small facial gestures and sounds of listening—without directing the conversation. Once the interviewee concludes, the interviewer moves to the second phase: follow-up questions designed to elicit further narrative, but not yet analysis or interpretation.²³ These questions advance through close, interpretive listening: inviting elaboration, for example, when narration thinned or stopped suddenly, or in response to stories that appear “vague” or “opaque,” or even events when there was a “lack of plausibility” or, conversely, over-justification. Schütze instructs the interviewer to be alert for abridgements or omissions by the speaker intended to avoid matters that are “painful, stigmatizing or problematic in terms of legitimation for the narrator.” Schütze is conscientious that while the speaker's evasion of certain themes may be deliberate, narrators may themselves also be searching for meaning and can benefit from having multiple opportunities to rephrase their narratives.²⁴ The third phase of the interview shifts toward reflection and analysis, as the interviewee is asked to interpret their own life experiences.

The narrative interview is a rigorous process that demands exceptional interviewing skill and the ability to build rapport with strangers. Before reflecting further on the values of this approach in relation to my own research, I will first examine Atkinson's methodology.

While also invested in the narrative potential of interview research, Atkinson's focus on life stories is more holistic than Schütze's and allows for greater flexibility and researcher involvement.²⁵ The outcome is not instrumentalized for sociological analysis but incorporated into counseling and archival collections, in addition

22 See Wehren, “Kleinteilige Strukturen und globale Einflüsse,” 94–95; Breckner, “Von den Zeitzeugen zu den Biographen.”

23 Svašek and Domecka, “The Autobiographical Narrative Interview”; Schütze, “Biographieforschung und narratives Interview.”

24 Schütze, “Biographieforschung und narratives Interview,” 285. Translation by the author.

25 Atkinson, *The Life Story Interview*; Atkinson, “The Life Story Interview as Mutually Equitable Relationship.”

to scholarly research.²⁶ The interviewee selects a comfortable setting, and the conversation unfolds with frequent friendly prompts from the researcher. Atkinson describes the interviewer as a “guide” and “listener,” allowing the protagonist to take the floor but assisting with gentle prompts such as “Where would you like to begin the story of your life?” or “What did that mean to you?” and “How did that make you feel?” His book includes an extensive list of potential questions to facilitate storytelling.²⁷ Atkinson insists, however, that these interviews are not conversations in the conventional sense. The roles of interviewer and interviewee remain distinct: The researcher is there to listen. They should ask questions purely in the service of the other person’s life narrative. In the publication phase, only the narrator’s words are printed, ensuring that their life story takes center stage. Still, Atkinson sees the process as a “mutually equitable relationship,” emphasizing that the researcher also undergoes personal growth through their role as a custodian of life review.²⁸

Both Schütze and Atkinson provide effective frameworks for gathering life narratives in one or two sessions. Their methods may offer psychological benefits to interviewees, including catharsis and self-understanding. What the narrator will share or “perform” for an interviewer is influenced by the prevailing atmosphere of the interview and level of trust achieved, as well as psychological and identity factors—for example the influence of the scholar’s perceived gender, age, social class, education, values, etc. Because the timeframe of these interviews is limited to a few hours, the narratives are highly condensed, placing pressure upon the speaker to select themes and create coherence. Schütze’s follow-up questions engage directly with discontinuities. Yet in such limited frameworks, will narrators have the time and trust to report truly sensitive stories or reflect anew on life’s ruptures and paths not taken? I had doubts about the efficacy of these methods to record complex and unconventional stories, especially about personal matters pertaining to dancing bodies. The briefness of these processes, however, do render them efficient for explorative research or larger studies involving an extended group of protagonists.

Drawing upon these precedents, I conceptualize body-biographies as a significantly slower, extended, and more intimate approach to autobiographical narrative interviewing, informed by the embodied trust of existing relationships based on dance transmissions. Rather than eliciting life stories in a single session, I worked over multiple interviews, included participant observation, and extended the study into processes of cooperative life-writing. The three stages of Schütze’s rigorously interpretive model were stretched into a multiyear process; Atkinson’s ample questions were extended into a series of conversations. My involvement

26 This archive is at The Center for the Study of Lives at the University of Maine. Atkinson, *The Life Story Interview*, 5.

27 Atkinson, *The Life Story Interview*, 31. See the questions on pages 43–53.

28 Atkinson, “The Life Story Interview as Mutually Equitable Relationship.”

in these narratives was undeniable: I was entangled in them through my own past and present relationships. This positioned me uniquely to interpret bodily knowledge and specialized vocabularies that conventional interview techniques might overlook. Furthermore, I used my observational skills as a practicing dance artist to elicit embodied knowledge and memories in the framework of the interview.

Would Schütze and Atkinson's methods even uncover embodied narratives? And if they did, how would they support their interviewees in making them public? My research design allowed for deeper engagement with stories of bodily experience—particularly those that signified or challenged identity through injury, vulnerability, shame, and trauma. Such narratives required time, trust, and a collaborative approach towards the generation of coherence. Additionally, because bodily experiences are often relational and articulated through shared memories, a more extended and participatory methodology was an advantage.

As a dancer interviewing my own teachers, I worked carefully. Asking the question of how they became the person they are today with the body knowledge that they currently possess, I remained open for all sorts of answers. It was clear to my informants that I did not enter this relationship with therapeutic competence, only an empathetic ear. Interviewer silence, as required by Schütze, would have been counterproductive. It would have stifled conversation and obstructed memories that were inherently relational and embodied. But what kind of listening did I seek?

Rapport Between Bodies Listening

Dance scholar Julia Wehren brings extensive experience of interviewing dancers into her particularly sensitive approach to oral history. Working in partnership with the Swiss Archive for the Performing Arts, Wehren has predominantly interviewed dance elders with whom she had no prior relationship, in conversations informed by Roswitha Breckner's narrative interview protocol.²⁹ Using the formality of a video-recorded interview as a structured space for listening to an elder's autobiographical performance, she achieves deep rapport. Wehren has described her approach to listening as an interviewer as follows:

Sometimes, memories only emerge during pauses and moments of silence. As a researcher, I try to understand why the interviews took place the way they did. I listen with the utmost concentration, while maintaining eye contact and sensitivity. When I talk to the dancers, my attention is focused on the movements of their thoughts, the paths and logic of such a personal narrative, the gestures and mimicry, the reactions to my listening, the choice of words, the tone, the melody,

29 See footnote 22.

the narrative arcs, the strategies of the performance in which I'm involved. I hear how words flow, reverse, stop, interrupt, circle, wander. The mutual trust of the whole team involved is essential if the spirit is really to be one of sharing.³⁰

Like Wehren, I prioritized deep listening, but I also embraced embodied participation. When my interviewees moved, I moved with them. I attuned to their pauses and energy shifts, recognizing moments where my own story might elicit theirs. In contrast to an asymmetric one-sided interview conversation, my experience aligned with oral history scholar Alessandro Portelli's concept of a "deep exchange." He describes this as: "the multiplicity, doubling, and role reversal between observer and observed, interviewers and interviewees, narrators and narratees, in a multivoiced dialogue."³¹

Being sympathetic as a listener is vital. As oral history scholars Kathryn Anderson and Dana C. Jack argue, a sensitive interviewer listens not only to what is said but also to the "moral language" of the narrator.³² This means attuning to the values embedded in their storytelling: the justifications and critiques they offer, and the emotions woven into their voice and body language. I applied this principle by listening to the content of my interviewees' stories while also paying close attention to how they narrated their experiences with their voices and bodies. When did they use moral language? Why did their voices waver, speed up, or change in intensity? What gestures punctuated moments of vocal pause? What stories or events most activated their bodies? Why did their gestures shift into a different movement repertoire or change significantly in their dynamic qualities? When did they consciously demonstrate dance? What other movement repertoires reoccurred and permeated their narratives?

Beyond these embodied observations, I also paid attention to the structure of their storytelling. I listened for temporal shifts and time leaps: for example, when they commented on the past from their current perspective. I paid attention to "meta-statements," moments when interviewees stepped outside their own narratives to comment on their life stories.³³ I listened to how the narrator judged and offered explanations of their reasons for action or for others' behavior. I noted inconsistencies or gaps—places where a thought seemed to be circling back, as if trying to find coherence. At times, my own interruptions inadvertently disrupted a narrative flow; in reviewing transcripts, I recognized instances where I had clearly misunderstood or prematurely shifted the direction of conversation. These moments of imperfect listening, however, underscored the inherently dialogic

30 Wehren, "Écouter les mouvements de la mémoire de l'autre," 7. Translation by the author.

31 Portelli, *The Battle of Valle Giulia*, 73.

32 Anderson and Jack, "Learning to Listen," 24.

33 Anderson and Jack, 22.

nature of storytelling. Interviews, like dance improvisation, are co-created in real time. A conscientious listener learns to participate in their partner's storytelling: listening, prompting, and responding—imperfections and all.

Wulff's interpretation of dancers' interviews as duet-like echoes my own observations. Dancer talk, as I have emphasized previously, draws upon competences learned in dance practice. Interviews activate dancers' trained capacities to be alert, present, and to sense others' attentional attunement. The attentional give and take—the lead and follow of duetting—was palpable in the interview; my first interview with Lechner was even enriched by his curation of partnering exercises.³⁴ Based on my own training as a dancer, I applied this dancing knowledge to be a sensitive interviewer. My task was to firstly to initiate (i.e. lead) conversation through questions, but then to actively follow (i.e. listen and respond to) the life stories of my interlocutors: As in dance partnering, this can be described as a processes of “leading-following.”³⁵ Unlike the strict silence required of the interviewer in Schütze's narrative interview framework, I valued the role of a leading-follower: giving priority to the narrator's storytelling, while actively keeping the improvisation going, through my nods, embodied participation, and turn-taking. Our shared attention and presence could also then emotionally transform into various moods, following the energy of life review processes and their extensive demands on both interviewer and interviewee. Developing a framework to fine-tune the sensory and kinetic dynamics in the interview, in the following section I elaborate further on the potential of sensory interviewing.

Situated Sensory Interviews

Both Schütze and Atkinson recognized the importance of place in autobiographical interviewing, underscoring that the setting should be comfortable for the narrator. Other scholars have furthered this involvement of sensation and place more explicitly, especially anthropologist Sarah Pink. In *Doing Sensory Ethnography* (2009/2015), Pink devotes a chapter to rethinking the precedent of the interview as a recorded verbal conversation. She highlights that, regardless of whether the interview is conceived of as sitting or in motion, both the interviewer and the interviewee, “*continue to be* active participants in their environments, using their whole bodies, all their senses, available props and the ground under their feet, to narrate, perform, communicate and represent their experiences.”³⁶ Pink advocates that the researcher harness the full sensory potential of the interview by

34 See “Chapter 6. Chris Lechner,” in the section “A Movement Lesson,” 302–7.

35 I have written elsewhere about this term, adapted from the writing of dance artist and philosopher Erin Manning. See Waterhouse, *Processing Choreography*, 166.

36 Pink, *Doing Sensory Ethnography*, 78. (italics in the original)

communicating to the participants that they are not required “to simply sit still and talk.”³⁷ This reminder is especially important when interviewing dancers.

Meeting in a location of movement practice and changing into dance clothes are simple rituals that help to break the convention of interview stillness. As I have demonstrated through my example of dancers warming up at Bern Ballett, communication in artistic contexts is inherently multimodal and interactive; it draws upon the space, objects, music, and especially the physical presence of other bodies. These serve as prompts to memory and expression. For this reason, for the project of body-biographies I chose to let my narrators choose places where they would feel comfortable: in a dance or yoga studio, or in the case of Marcus Schulkind, in his acupuncture office. A movement studio facilitated the emergence of verbal and nonverbal dialogue (including dancing, teaching, demonstrating, or marking) and provided space for these interactions. The room itself could also serve as a prompt for storytelling—for example Schulkind’s discussion of the photographs of dance and specialized imagery for acupuncture on his office walls.

I was interested in examining how dancers narrate the development of their sensual capacities over the course of their lives. From my studies of dance and yoga with these artists, I had learned firsthand how to feel my body and attune to the environment, in manners that go beyond a five-sense model—including modes such as the sensation of breathing, internal perception of anatomical landmarks, perception of body-temperature, proprioception, and buoyancy or weight-sensing in gravity. Their classes had already produced my body with sensual attunement to these possibilities. The life story interviews afforded further opportunity to discuss these embodied experiences. I took time and offered my body and memories as a resource to develop this knowledge in words.³⁸

This dynamic approach to interviewing not only deepened the trust between me and my interlocutors, but also expanded the kinds of knowledge that could emerge—in contrast to the sit-down interview and its pressure to speak coherently. Where Schütze’s structured narrative elicitation might have prioritized narrative coherence and sociological categorization, and Atkinson’s guided storytelling might have supported personal meaning-making, a sensory approach created space for embodied, affective, and relational forms of knowing. By extending the interview process over many months and by participating bodily in the exchange, I was able to explore not only what my interlocutors remembered, but how they remembered—how memory lived in their bodies, in their movement, and in the shared intercorporeal space between us. In the following section, I will examine how this approach informed the process of translating these embodied narratives into

37 Pink, 79.

38 For comparable discussion of sensory ethnography outside of the field of dance, see: Pink, 80–81.

writing, and how the interplay of movement, memory, and storytelling shaped the final form of the published body-biographies.

In summary, across this section, I have examined diverse theoretical approaches to interview-based research, focusing particularly on life story narratives and sensory ethnography. Drawing on Schütze's sociological method and Atkinson's flexible life story interview frameworks, I have highlighted the ways in which narrative emerges within the specific constraints of an interview setting. My approach, however, differs from these "disembodied" models by incorporating embodied, participatory, and sensory dimensions—a critical shift when working with dancers whose life stories are deeply entangled with bodily practice. The methodology of body-biographies, as I have argued, necessitates a slower, more immersive process than other interview techniques, cultivating long-term relationships of trust and mutual exchange. As in ethnographic interviewing, I also use interviews in conjunction with participant observation. This process is care-intensive, extended in time, and personal, which also makes the research process challenging to evaluate and formalize in writing. Drawing on Jeff Friedman, I have highlighted the performative dimensions of oral history conversations and the potential for considering life-writing as a performative text. Having theoretically motivated my interview research of body-biographies, in the next section I shift focus from doing interviews and making participant observation to the process of publication.

Making This Book

At the start of this chapter, I provided a general sketch of my methodology, while stipulating that this "procedure" was highly interpretative and adaptable. In this section, I dive into the minutiae of making body-biographies. Not only was my research emergent to the specific protagonists involved in this project, it also dynamically generated research materials and media—in the sense of audio-visual interview recordings, interview transcripts, and fieldwork notes—as well as experiences perceived through my dancing and aging body. By creating and reflecting on these traces of life review, the embodied life story dialogues with my teachers were gradually assembled and cooperatively inscribed into print. In this section, I deepen my reflection on the interweaving phases of making this research.

Interviewing and Participant Observation

The life story interviews for this book were conducted in Bern, Paris, and Boston between September 2022 and April 2023; these were followed by collaborative life-writing and feedbacking until September of 2025.³⁹

Following best practices in oral history, I provided each narrator with a legal agreement permitting the interview recordings and transcripts to be archived at the Swiss Archive of the Performing Arts (SAPA).⁴⁰ After the interviews, I also distributed a survey to collect basic biographical data that had not emerged organically in conversation—such as family history, as well as residential and immigration timelines. This was done after the interview to ensure that these details did not bias the narrative.⁴¹

My approach to interviewing involved thorough preparation, beginning with research into my interviewee's life and the development of a questionnaire. While I deliberately never read verbatim from this questionnaire during the interviews, the preparation helped me to enter the conversation with greater confidence and directions for follow-up questions. To support my role as an interviewer, I also developed a general repository of life story questions for dancers, which is included in Appendix C. This expansive questionnaire was designed to frame a dance studies-specific approach to life story interviews. Modeled on Robert Atkinson's guide to life story interviewing, it adapts his questions to key phases of a dancer's life and career.⁴² Rather than adhering strictly to these questions, I prioritized open-ended prompts and allowed the dancers' narration to shape the flow of the interview, ensuring that each conversation unfolded organically and centered the speaker's reflection.⁴³

Each dancer's interviews generated five to seven hours of recorded conversation, supplemented by video recordings when permitted. To remove the need for an obtrusive microphone pack or electric cables, I used two light wireless microphones, commonly employed by fitness podcasters. This ensured freedom of movement while maintaining high-quality audio in the interview. To maximize intimacy, I worked without a film crew, opting for a low-tech SD video format. In retrospect, I would recommend lightweight smartphone technology with HD capacity, to improve image quality. My framing choices prioritized a wide shot that

39 The specific dates, locations of the sessions, and references for the recording and metadata are provided in the introduction of each body-biography chapter in Part II.

40 See Appendix A.

41 See Appendix B.

42 Atkinson, *The Life Story Interview*, 43–53.

43 While further elaboration is beyond my scope here, those new to interviewing may benefit from the comprehensive manuals produced outside of dance studies. For example, Yow, "Interviewing Techniques and Strategies"; Yow, *Recording Oral History*.

foregrounded the interlocutor while including myself in the frame, as seen in the screenshots included in Part II.

A defining characteristic of body-biography is the blurred boundary between interviewing and participant observation.⁴⁴ To support each narrator's process of life story narrative, I actively engaged with their ongoing artistic work and teaching. I participated in Cartwright's teacher training for Yoga Narada® and attended her Zoom lessons regularly; I attended Lechner's open classes in Bern; I took Schulkind's classes when visiting Boston, and danced with Kono when I visited her in Paris. By observing while immersing myself in their transmission processes, I was able to bring their movement vocabularies into our interviews and life-writing.

My research process also incorporated verification. I cross-referenced our discussions with dance history books, newspaper articles, and materials from the narrators' personal archives of reviews and photographs. While Cartwright, Kono, and Lechner had limited documentation due to the international nature of their careers, Schulkind—who had scanned materials for his job review at the Boston Conservatory—shared digitized reviews of his dance company, stamped with his company logo. Reading these together spurred additional memories. I also read Cartwright's autobiography, her Yoga Narada teaching manual, and her published testimony about the Royal Winnipeg Ballet.⁴⁵ Kono shared with me her teaching notes, and I uncovered some interesting articles about her teachers. Lechner and I reviewed his collected photographs. Additionally, I consulted their personal websites, discovering public biographies on these pages that I could further interrogate and integrate in our life-writing.

This multi-faceted approach—combining interviews, participant observation, archival study, and movement engagement—created a rich, participatory research process. Through these dialogues and embodied experiences, I found my own kinesthetic awareness recalibrating, and I poured this shifting perception into my fieldwork notes.

44 Referencing this overlap in other scholars' work, see Pink, *Doing Sensory Ethnography*, 76.

45 Cartwright, *Dancing for a Living*; Crabb, *An Instinct for Success*.

Transcribing and Verifying

Interview Excerpt: Chris Lechner and Liz Waterhouse, Bern, September 9, 2022

Chris Lechner [00:51:42]: But this game works beautifully with the center, too. That actually we are . . . (We practice, audibly sharing weight and breathing – 8s) Yeah. (We practice – 8s)

[. . .]

Liz Waterhouse [00:52:47]: No, I . . . We did [in The Forsythe Company]—Partnering was always the whole body.

CL: It is in the end then.

LW: Right.

CL: Obviously.

LW: And it was then . . .

CL: That becomes then intelligent. All over what we're doing just locally.

LW: Right.

CL: The brain here (points to head) spreads everywhere.

LW: Right. That was a big step from student to . . . (3s pause, we continue practicing)

CL: (Overlapping) . . . kind of advanced.

LW: (Overlapping) . . . professional.

Transcription was a crucial step in creating body-biographies. Producing accurate word-for-word transcripts is a labor-intensive, time-consuming, and subjective process—particularly in my interviews, where paralinguistic features and overlapping speech were significant, as demonstrated in the excerpt above. The scholar must define priorities and make interpretive choices. Oral history scholar Lynn Abrams reminds us: “it is rare that any one transcript will please all possible users.”⁴⁶ The transcription approach I utilized was developed in collaboration with my archival host, SAPA, and followed best practices in oral history.

Beginning with automated transcription using the online software sonix.ai, the transcripts were then corrected manually word-for-word.⁴⁷ All turn-taking in conversation was marked, with additional markers for overlaps and pauses. Direct speech was punctuated in quotation marks. We choose not to transcribe my overlapping sounds of encouragement—my frequent “hms” and “mms” were omitted—when nothing additional was said. We marked significant changes in vocal stress and volume. We recorded approximately 50 percent of paralinguistic

46 Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, 14.

47 I am very grateful to our project assistant, David Castillo, who transcribed these interviews. Castillo's background in sociolinguistics and dance studies was ideal for both the attention to linguistic detail as well as comprehension of the dance-specific terminology.

vocalizations, as greater accuracy is highly time-consuming for the transcriber and can be off-putting for the narrator. However, incomplete sentences were preserved, especially when they indicated hesitation or difficulty articulating a thought. Gestures and movements were noted very roughly using parentheses, as illustrated in the transcript excerpt above. In separate files, I described the movement interactions from memory with richer analytic language.⁴⁸ Triangulating to credible sources such as published books, journals, and encyclopedias, we verified the spelling of all referenced artists and artistic works, adding dates where possible to enhance accuracy.⁴⁹

Once the transcripts were completed, I returned them to my narrators for verification and follow-up discussions. This offered them an opportunity to review both the audio recording and the transcription. Naturally, this process led to new dialogue. We assessed the stories they had presented, revisited topics that had been overlooked or misunderstood, considered omissions, and reflected on the overall tone and narrative form. In this way, the interview dialogue organically extended into the life-writing process. Some of these discussions generated new stories, which were similarly recorded, transcribed, and integrated into the writing process.

The intensive labor required for transcription—far exceeding the duration of the interviews themselves—can lead to a scholarly attachment to these documents. I remained mindful that while transcripts were very important historical records and prototypes of body-biography, they were not the ultimate object of my analysis. My research involved a broader process of embodied life review, and the transcripts were but a means to this end. They served three valuable functions. First, lodged at the Swiss Archive of the Performing Arts, they provide an accurate record for future scholars to study my interviews on site, giving access to the unedited talk.⁵⁰ Second, they enable analytical interpretation: indexing themes, cross-referencing narratives, and examining narrative structures. Third, they functioned as provisional texts for further collaboration with the dancers in shaping our conversations into a book manuscript. Again, I was cautious not to mistake the transcript for the embodied interview encounter; it was just a representation, and an odd one at that. The quiet, disembodied nature of transcription had not evocatively captured the performative, kinetic, and relational aspects of our discussions. For this, my physical memory and fieldwork notes remained valuable interpretive tools.

48 Because of the interpretive quality of this writing, I chose to keep it separated from the transcript.

49 We did not footnote these references in the transcripts because of the time involved. These points could be considered in future projects.

50 Only Marcus Schulkind requested for two short instances of sensitive material to be removed from his recordings, which we complied with. The materials are otherwise complete and unedited.

After completing the transcription work for the SAPA archives, I transitioned into drafting life-writing. Passages of interview conversation, such as the one reproduced at the start of this section, were revised for clarity (as the reader can confirm by turning to Chapter 6).⁵¹ The complex decision-making involved in this editing is considered in the next section.

Drafting Life-Writing

Those familiar with interviews will know the shock of first encountering a transcript of what had felt like a coherent discussion. On paper, what emerges is often a fragmentary mess: incomplete thoughts, with rambling and stuttering elocution. The transcript is rarely flattering. The polished, full-sentence paragraphs we read in publications are the result of many editorial decisions. As Raphael Samuel writes in “Perils of the Transcript” (1972), “People do not usually speak in paragraphs, and what they have to say does not usually follow an ordered sequence of comma, semi-colon, and full stop; yet very often this is the way in which their speech is reproduced.”⁵² Samuel further cautions, “The historian ought not to impose his own order on the speech of his informants.”⁵³

While these cautionary remarks are essential for creating authentic transcripts that respect the narrator’s distinct voice, the messy nature of oral testimony also limits the readership of these narratives. My protagonists had no desire to portray themselves through the imprecisions of oral speech; I too was quite embarrassed to publish my own digressions and stammering. Samuel is correct to caution scholars from rewriting oral narratives to meet their own academic standards, without the consent of the speaker. When the narrator is willing to collaborate, however, I advocate using the transcript as a prototype and collaborating on revisions together—with readers of dance studies and dance historiography in mind. Linguists and other dance scholars seeking the authentic interview recordings and transcripts can still study them directly in the SAPA archive.

To create these body-biographies, I began by “weeding” the interview transcripts: omitting unnecessary stuttering, repetition, and connecting words such as “so” and “and.” I then corrected glaring grammatical errors and removed mitigating speech, such as “sort of” and “kind of.” When incomplete sentences seemed significant, I highlighted them for the speaker to revise themselves. Thematically, I preserved the order of narration while condensing and organizing the material into titled sections. Small, isolated anecdotes that were not repeated elsewhere were removed, though I kept a record of these extractions in case they

51 See “Chapter 6. Chris Lechner,” in the section “A Movement Lesson,” 302–7.

52 Samuel, “Perils of the Transcript,” 19.

53 Samuel, 21.

needed to be reinstated. Finally, I drafted paragraphs that highlighted anecdotes and thought progressions.

I imagined this work as akin to the delicate gestures of an archaeologist who, over months, carefully brushes away debris around a fossil without fully knowing its contents, origin, or shape. Through these micro-edits, the narrative shapes of larger life themes gradually emerged. Content became clearer, and some narratives could be slightly restructured—particularly those interrupted by my questioning or interwoven across multiple interview sessions.

As this storytelling gained clarity on the page, I returned to the audio recordings. Listening closely through my headphones, I paid greater attention to vocal qualities: How could I convey the sound of the interviewee's voice? What was its speed and inflection? What emotional undertones could I hear? Did a bright, energetic vocal quality signal excitement or hope? Did a dry, subdued tone indicate disappointment? Could I translate these vocal nuances more effectively into words? Borrowing from scriptwriting techniques, I added vocal annotations in brackets, enhancing the script with tonal intent and emotional inflection. I did this especially in cases where irony was present—when the manner of speech contradicted the literal meaning—subtleties that could not be captured in a transcript alone. An unexpected effect of this meticulous study was that I memorized their voices. I could read my first drafts and hear their voices in my head. The “grain of their voices” had been transferred to me and with this a sense of bodily empathy.⁵⁴

In developing the performative life-writing of body-biography, I questioned how to translate these vocal qualities, with their affective capacities and intensities, into the written text. Rhetorical shifts such as pauses, rhythmic phrasing, and repetition lent the narratives a performative or poetic quality. Speakers sometimes shifted from chronological or descriptive storytelling into more reflective or evaluative registers, using gestures or a change in vocal dynamics to underscore moments of personal significance. These devices were not merely ornamental; they served as embodied strategies for remembering. They also guided my attention as a listener and brought me into their narratives empathetically. Attending to these shifts helped me better understand how my protagonists shaped meaning in the moment, blending linguistic and corporeal expression to create a textured, expressive account of their dancing lives.

It was equally important to recognize when to stop drafting and instead return to my collaborators for feedback and revisions. While my ability to perceive detail in interpersonal communication was intellectually enriching, the life stories also needed to be shaped for the written page—a distinct medium with its own compositional tempo and energy. Ethically, it felt necessary to let my narrators shape

54 Barthes, “The Grain of the Voice.”

how this adaptation of their life review into writing would unfold. Similarly, oral historian Lynn Abrams cautions:

Without rejecting the need for accurate transcription, especially if one wants to undertake an analysis of linguistic and paralinguistic elements, one should not equate obsessive *accuracy* with the ability of the transcript to convey the *meaning* of the speaker.⁵⁵

Thus began a process of collaboration, finding a final form for publishing our embodied life review.

Feedback and Editing

In this section, I reflect on the phase of body-biography after the initial life story interviews have been made and transcribed. This involves theoretical evaluation of the material and collaboration on life-writing with dance artists. The guidelines I developed for this theoretical review are highlighted in the subsequent subchapter.

This is the most challenging phase in terms of care work and the ethic of collaboration: One has to balance adherence to one's research questions and agenda as a dance scholar with respect for the protagonist's knowledge and their desire to shape their own public self-presentation. Learning from a demanding experience of receiving feedback in a videoconference session—during which one of my narrators disoriented me by giving me cryptic feedback and then insisted on retelling their stories for nearly two hours—I began to develop a gradual process. First, I requested feedback upon short texts—one or two life stories at a time—to build rapport and to learn what my protagonists found important in print, in terms of content, tone, and style. How much authentic speech could they tolerate? Did they prefer to rewrite their testimony? How did these new life stories fit with prior tellings? I was not merely accommodating; I also explained why I thought specific sections should be included or omitted.

Immersing my collaborator in the writing process bit by bit, I allowed the draft to materialize in pieces before we examined it again as a whole. To gain perspective on the overarching life themes, we then engaged in sessions where we revised and refined the full text—including a final version with my contextualizing content. Depending on my interlocuter's preference and experience, feedback was given orally, through handwritten notes, or via digitally shared drafts. While disagreements arose, our gradual approach to shaping a print project made negotiations manageable. Perhaps this is also because I had taken the time to engage deeply with their lifeworlds—including physical dance and movement practice.

55 Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, 13. (italics in the original)

Dance oral historian Julia Wehren has undertaken a similar project, involving extensive collaboration with Swiss dance artist Fabienne Berger on a joint publication of her oral history. Wehren's recent article reflecting on this collaboration and reviewing her work interviewing dance elders in Switzerland is titled "Écouter les mouvements de la mémoire de l'autre" (Listening to the movements of another's memory) (2023). In this essay, Wehren explores the particularity of the domain of dance oral history.⁵⁶ She describes how joint evaluation of an oral history interview with the mutual intent to edit and publish within a scholarly framework may productively extend the dialogic interview dynamic over time. Wehren also observes how this collaborative labor blurs notions of a historical "source" and its process of historiographical evaluation—innovating her textual understanding of "sources" for dance history writing. Consequently, Wehren shares my regard of the importance of transparency within the research process: as part of the research ethics of maintaining rapport with a dancer-interviewee and also with the purpose of deepening historiographical evaluation.⁵⁷ Working similarly to Wehren through extended interview techniques that are alert to embodied narration, I value these remarks on how participatory and collaborative interview dialogues may blend into life-writing. Part of my work for *Body-Biographies* was to discover modes of writing that would allow these processes—and their contexts—to be more transparently published—while ensuring that my narrators' embodied storytelling remained central.

Another aspect of my work was bringing together different writing elements. The body-biographies in this book are presented as a constellation of texts, each composed of five elements: 1) an introduction in academic prose contextualizing the narrator's career biography, our relationship, and the process of life review; 2) an extended dialogue reviewing "life stories" that foregrounds the protagonists' voice in conversation with my own; 3) supplemental introductions and movement descriptions written in my own voice; 4) footnotes that provide references, clarify terminology, and explain significant collaborators; and 5) fieldwork vignettes, drawn from movement lessons and dancing together. This structure emphasizes the distinct storytelling and lived experiences of each narrator—as well as the individual creation process of life-writing. Emerging from interviews, participant observation, as well as study of various other documents of embodied history, these body-biographies can thus be interpreted as *written performances of embodied life review*. The scripts select and compose dialogues carefully from our rehearsal of life stories, polishing them like a creative act of preparing dancing for a public audience. The writing consciously develops a compositional tempo, dramatic energy, and

56 Wehren, "Écouter les mouvements de la mémoire de l'autre." See also Berger and Wehren, "Comment cette matière de vie devient autre chose."

57 Wehren, "Écouter les mouvements de la mémoire de l'autre," 8.

layered meaning, woven through gestures, words, and vocal nuances. These scripts give space for their narrators to perform their selves, while also allowing their secrets and modesties to remain private. As several narrators reflected, it was fascinating to see these texts mirroring their lives back to them. The stories would certainly have emerged differently if they had been told at another moment, or to another person.

As underscored in the acknowledgments section, I reflected on how to best recognize authorship in this collaborative work. By placing the four protagonists' names in the subtitle of this book, I highlight their contributions and enable their stories to be found. My position as an author indicates the theoretical audience of dance scholars and the responsibility I took in shaping this public form of biographic bricolage. Based on my prior ethnographic work, I saw my cooperation with my protagonists as a respectful form of working together, continued until both parties felt satisfied that our life review and publication had reached their course. I was a textual custodian, translating and assembling print and reviewing it together. Not mere editor, as Hilary Cartwright told me: I was pouring my heart into these texts.

Scholars reading this writing might still be questioning how I interpreted the interviews: according to which categories, theoretical questions and frameworks for analysis? In the final section of this chapter, I outline these interpretation strategies, showing how they permeated the different stages of my methodological process.

Theoretical Interpretation

In the introduction to my methodology that began this chapter, I underlined the extensive interpretive components of making body-biographies. My writing has emphasized that theoretical analysis and ethical relationships develop throughout the methodological process of researching. As in oral history and anthropological research, my study of body-biographies also upholds that theory and practice, documenting and interpreting, researching embodied practices and theoretical writing are entangled.⁵⁸ This creates numerous challenges for the researcher. Foremost among them, the extensive care work of live collaboration may prove difficult, as may gaining distance for the critical and inscriptive side of this pursuit. Researchers may also experience discomfort in reflecting theoretically on their own body and activities in their scholarly writing; they may also struggle with resistance from protagonists who are uneasy about exposing their vulnerabilities—where private themes and ambiguities in their self-presentation become subject to scholarly analysis and the public gaze. Bringing embodiment doubly into the

58 Ample texts substantiate this. On oral history, see Abrams, *Oral History Theory*. On anthropology, see Clifford and Marcus, *Writing Culture*.

analysis as topic and tool requires sensitivity and the expansion of scholarly frameworks.

Arguing that life story narration is embodied and performative, my work advances a dance studies approach to theoretical interpretation. I interpret dancers' life stories by interweaving sensual narrative analysis of storytelling in language and movement across sources of interviews, participant observation, and life-writing. Carrying this analysis into composing the poetics of life-writing, my intent was to reflectively shape an aesthetic form for each individual's body-biography—one that would evocatively describe our bodies and dance aesthetics within life story narration, while also showing the challenges in bringing embodiment into the foreground: the gaps, discontinuities, contradictions, imperfections, and obscurations. The following sections on narrative and movement analysis provide concluding perspective on this theoretical process.

Narrative Analysis

Telling anecdotes is known to be culturally and professionally determined, as well as heavily influenced by gender and age. Narrators grant oral history narratives coherence and composure by referencing existing storytelling traditions, techniques, and tropes appropriate to the topic—whether dramatizing, inserting, resisting, or contradicting existing narrative models learned through socialization. Historian Daniel James synthesizes:

Access to such models is generally assumed to come from the literary forms and genres found in the various expressions of popular culture and literature. More fundamentally, it has been argued that a repertoire of certain basic narrative forms is part and parcel of an individual's experience of the social world.⁵⁹

While Western dancers certainly share common cultural narrative forms that exist in literature outside of their professional field, it was my expectation that dancers would also tell life stories in ways specific to their profession—using storytelling modes learned within the communities of practice for certain dance styles, schools, and choreographic workplaces. In dance studies, there has been limited consideration of these topoi. In her pioneering research on dancers' autobiographies, dance scholar Christina Thurner observes that these texts offer complex self-descriptions of changing artistic identity; themes such as emancipation and freeing or fighting for the self may be staged, for example,

⁵⁹ James, *Doña María's Story*, 160. See also Chanfrault-Duchet, "Narrative Structures, Social Models, and Symbolic Representation in the Life Story."

through dramatization of the story of discovering dance.⁶⁰ Additionally, in my case studies I also observed the following themes pertaining to common career phases: first encounters with dance, the trials and tribulations of dance education, lessons from professional experience, finding a peer group, the pressure to gain status (as choreographer or teacher), lessons from injury and illness, challenges of work-life balance, changes of life vision in middle age, views of aging, and judgments on current dance practices today. Thurner also highlights in her theoretical research that dancers' autobiographies contextualize aspects of identity such as gender and race, as well as society's views on aging—providing perspective on how these change over time.⁶¹ This is also true in these body-biographies, in which I contributed to these important discussions as an interview partner.

In their body-biographies, my narrators intermixed chronological and associative narratives that sprang back and forth in time and place. Narrators jumped in time, from descriptions set in the past to talk about the present: comparing and reflecting, and frequently mixing tenses. This narration can be reflexively enhanced in subsequent life-writing, using guidelines such as those I have assembled here (Box 1). Asking narrators to reconsider these time leaps and refine them into more conventional print-narratives may add rich reflexive content to their stories.

Interpretation should also attend to the shadows within the story, in the forms of silences and omissions. Historian Daniel James underscores the importance of these tensions:

One of the richest interpretive veins that can be mined in studies of life stories lies in probing the relationship between key narrative patterns aimed at creating coherence and continuity and other elements that clarify, obscure, make more complex, or simply leave in the tension-laden coexistence of contradictory themes and ambivalent meanings in an account of a life.⁶²

One of the most challenging aspects of life story research ethics is balancing theoretical rigor and the care work inherent to the intensive collaboration to determine how to represent elements that obscure simple narratives—such as a coherent or favorable self-presentation—within the life-writing phase of research. In these four body-biographies, each dancer's resilience in phases of injury or illness became a theme enabling them to speak about the difficulties of their careers as dance artists—about pain, abuse, power, and vulnerability. Also, influenced by common narratives of aging and ableism, they described how they lived and

60 Thurner, *Erinnerungen tanzen*, 63–78.

61 Thurner, 223–79.

62 James, *Doña María's Story*, 165–66.

performed aging in relation to these conventions—whether resisting or adapting their activities. Extending life review in time helped to develop the rapport necessary to approach and hence to publish these important perspectives.

The extensive physical and familial toll of the lifestyle of being a professional dancer suggested unexplored topics in the shadows. These life stories contained gaps around the topics of family planning and having children. Some of my narrators left out or minimized the roles of important ex-partners who were also dancers and choreographers. Few stories foregrounded pain and bodily numbness, perhaps because these memories are too difficult to remember or too painful to retell. While each narrator brings these themes to light individually, together they reveal frictions between the ways that bodies are, on one hand, materializations constrained biologically and by socio-historical formations, and, on the other, emergent personal stylizations realized through aesthetic practice.

Finally, an important theoretical factor in life story research is the effect that the published life story will have upon other people. In an important sense, any self-narrative is not only a story of oneself; rather, it is a story produced through reflection on others and their actions. Biography is therefore an account that makes one vulnerable to the response of others, whether in critique or refutation.⁶³ While reference to famous others can bolster the status of one's story, narrators may also give thanks or lay claim to status that might have been disregarded. We may experience these tensions in the individual narratives of Part II, as the dancers reference members of dance history well-known in the canon while also trying to lend visibility to important others, whom they believe are less well-known, but still significant to their lives.

Bringing these theoretical topics into my research of body-biographies, I developed an interpretive matrix (see Box 1) that influenced my drafting and editing of my collaborators' life-writing. Above all, I highlighted the primary narrative themes I observed in triangulation between the life story interviews and my practice-led participant observation—while working with my narrators to include the difficult topics, contradictions, and shadows.

63 Gergen and Gergen, "Narrative and the Self as Relationship." Chanfrault-Duchet, "Narrative Structures, Social Models, and Symbolic Representation in the Life Story."

Box 1: Narrative Interpretation

Content

- What themes and topics are brought up in the life narrative?
- What themes and topics have been omitted?
- Are there explanations that the narrator focuses on?
- What explanations have I imposed through my questions?
- What conventions within this person's community shape their storytelling? How do they draw upon or rewrite them? Are there any contradictions?
- What are the themes that bring together different life phases and provide closure/continuity of the self? Conversely, what themes show ruptures, multiplicities, and discontinuities?
- What morals are illustrated? Through which emotional structures, or aspects of vocal and physical performance, are these morals performed?

Composure

- How are the anecdotes within the life stories structured to form the overall life story narrative? Is there a key narrative or model, for example a key issue in self-representation, that other stories continually adhere to or rebut?
- What vocal performance and embodied rhetorical strategies do the narrators use to draw attention to and illustrate their stories?
- What gives weight or drama to the story?
- Are there norms and/or stereotypes that the speakers draw upon that reflect the discourse of the dancers' communities, inflecting the telling/drama/ tone of their stories? (For example: That they must hold the interviewer's attention—that they should be “entertaining” “polite” or “intelligent”? That they should sit up straight and maintain eye contact?) What expectations do they project upon me as a listener/researcher and how do these norms also influence the telling?
- To what extent is there narrative coherence?
- How are the more difficult/painful aspects told? Do we see explanations or silences?
- Are there significantly misremembered aspects?
- In which ways does my invitation to explore the bodily/kinesthetic aspects of biography impact the narrator?

Movement Analysis

The previous section has explored how life story narratives recompose and creatively adapt the professional, gendered, and cultural conventions of autobiographical narratives. In this final section of my methodological review, I conclude with a broader discussion of how scholarly attention to embodiment may be enhanced within life story research with dancers. Drawing on dance studies analysis, I describe ways of interpreting bodies, movement, and performance within this research process. I also illustrate the benefit of cross-referencing interview analysis with participant observation beyond the interview context and composing autobiographical life-writing collaboratively. Throughout this chapter, I accentuate that the researcher's body and memories should be viewed as an active component of inquiry, not only sensitive to research ethics but also rendering embodied aspects of practice and history theoretically accessible. Here I build closely upon prior research by Sally Ann Allen Ness, Jeff Friedman, Sarah Pink, and Penny Summerfield, as elaborated below. My writing has three parts, exploring "Participatory Movement Analysis," then "Sensory Dimensions of Interviews," and finally "Embodiment and Laban Movement Analysis."

Participatory Movement Analysis

My approach to movement analysis drew upon existing scholarship by dance anthropologist Sally Ann Allen Ness. In Box 2, I summarize key principles of Ness's movement analytic framework, as I have understood and applied it, indicating categories of analysis and the tone of analytic writing that emerges from this standpoint.

Ness's interdisciplinary approach, blending dance studies and anthropology, constructively debates the difficulties and mistakes in scholarly writing about movement.⁶⁴ She views human movement as a cultural process that is temporally and contextually emplaced—consistent with a praxeological approach. She theoretically demands that scholarly inscriptions of movement are reflexively composed to discern movement's plasticity, precisely drawing on modes of writing that reflect the singular participation, context, and shifting social position of the scholar. Participatory movement analysis may include the practitioner's preferred oral language for describing their movement, while also opening a dialogic space for learning between the analytic standpoints and terminologies of practitioners and scholars. Therefore, unlike the goal of notating a choreography or describing a performance, the interest is to learn about the forces, contexts, and variations of praxis—about movement's ontology, epistemology, and axiology. Dance teachers are well equipped from their years of teaching to describe

64 See Ness, "Being a Body in a Cultural Way."

transformations of movement education that change and build skills, attitudes, and aptitudes—consistent with the participatory approach. I tapped into these competences frequently in my interview questions, listening carefully and learning through my body.

Box 2: Participatory Movement Analysis after Sally Ann Allen Ness⁶⁵

- The movement description is written in a “temporally complex or *plastic*” manner, not in a present-tense grammar without temporal context. Rather than using present perfect or declarative mode, the analysis should show movement’s plasticity: writing in a conditional subjective or even a futuristic mode.⁶⁶
- The movement analysis is contextualized. The movement is shown to reflect the specific context of its enactment, including other movers, space, clothing, props, onlookers, and materials.
- The movement analysis describes individual bodies and persons. It does not generalize or assume movement to be generic or originating in specific parts of “the” body.
- The movement analysis explores and differentiates aesthetic experiences of moving, co-moving, performing, and spectating. If appropriate, interpretation may describe all of these: inner sensations of movement kinesthesia, the movement’s dynamic form, and its affects.
- The movement description should not assume or conflate what individual movers think or feel while moving. Opportunities to dialogue with the dancers may give key testimony about their motivations and experiences of movement. Talk and experience are not assumed to be consistent; it is the work of the analyst to question how these fit together.
- Movement should be described not only teleologically but also in terms of its contingencies and causes.
- In addition to movement ideals in performance and pedagogy, the researcher should be equally interested in learning about possible difficulties, failures, and mistakes.
- The analysis may be written in a “how-to” character. This means interpreting not only how the movement appears but also how it emerges from a set of conditions and competences.⁶⁷
- The author should examine the extent to which movement is singular or generalized and abstracted in terms of general vocabularies or concepts for interaction.

Using the criteria of inscribing movement in Box 2, I embraced movement analysis to learn how dance practices have shaped artists' experiences of their and others' dancing bodies; in addition, I asked how dancing persons develop specific somatic and reflective competences to remember and describe dancing bodies as well as their bodies in daily life. My own autobiographical reflection with my dance teachers was seminal to sharpening these analytic dimensions—involving critically reflecting on their influence in constituting my aesthetic understanding of dancing and my body. My focus and criteria are further exemplified in the following sections, beginning with discussion of sensory registers.

Sensory Dimensions of Interviews

Over the course of this chapter, I have highlighted, after sensory ethnographer Sarah Pink, that interviews with dancers should be perceived as sensory contexts in which narrators communicate in relation to their own bodies and the body of the interviewer: sensing the floor or chair supporting them, the space, and the interviewer's attention—all in order to communicate, demonstrate, and persuasively perform their life stories.⁶⁵ Developing this more precisely, in this section I describe the different registers and scales of embodied storytelling, clarifying how they offer insight into logics of sensation and aesthetic practice.

My attunement to and study of these interrelated and synergistic registers is summarized in Box 3. Beginning with vocal performance, I used the interview recordings to study how breath and bodily support of the voice were recruited for narration. I also noted paraverbal aspects of communication, listening carefully and repeatedly. During the interviews themselves, I examined micromovements of conversation that were visible to me but were not examples of consciously danced movements: in particular, postural recruitment/shifts and facial expression. I paid close attention to the speaker's hand gestures, which drew from their aesthetic practice and social conventions. Lastly, I looked in depth at the key moments in the interviews in which dancing or reenacting embodied knowledge took place. To study these interweaving levels, my analysis took one of two forms: firstly, looking cumulatively to articulate the speaker's general personal repertoire and communication style, and secondly, focusing on the instances in the narrative when important exceptions to this personal repertoire were made—performative moments of drama or meaningful rhetorical change within the storytelling. All of these I attend to in a multisensory way, not only through visual description. I expound further on the registers outlined in Box 3 to clarify these different modes

65 Ness, 131–37.

66 Ness, 137. (*italics in the original*)

67 Ness, 137.

68 See Pink, *Doing Sensory Ethnography*, 78.

and their sensual composition. Since vocal performance is transparently described in the introductions to each body-biography, I focus on the remaining three levels.

Box 3: Sensory Movement Registers in Body-Biography Interviews

- Vocal Performance
- Micromovements of Conversation
- Hand Gestures
- Episodes of Dance and Movement Practice

At the most granular level, micromovement analysis considers the subtle actions that accompany speech, reflecting the speaker's somatic awareness and ongoing sensory engagement. These gestures—such as when dancers casually play with their hands and hair, stretch, or lightly massage the body—function unconsciously as a tactile means of staying present and thinking through motion. I studied these movements live during the interview and again when reviewing my video documentation. Shifts in posture over time, including stretches or changing seating position, respond to physical asymmetries and stiffness, revealing individual body sensation and habitus—reflecting prior injuries and surgeries. While not always tied directly to narrative content, these postural changes express an ongoing negotiation between bodily comfort and interview participation. Likewise, facial expressions—smiles, ironic looks, or moments of visual withdrawal—can dramatize difficult content or mark shifts in emotional tone, while changes in gaze (e.g., looking away or directly to the interviewer) signal processes of memory, visualization, or internal focus. All of these, therefore, I highlighted in my introductions and within key compositional moments in our dialogues. They evoke for the reader the embodied registers of listening to these artists.

Gestural repertoires in life story interviews give insight into aesthetic practices and socio-cultural positions. Dancers bring with them skilled movement vocabularies shaped by dance, longstanding physical training, and their teaching practices—as well as the appropriate socio-cultural conversational patterns for people of their age, gender, and class. Schulkind, for example, drew upon very different shrugs and rhetorical hand gestures (such as pointing and counting) than Cartwright, who often recruited gestures from her Yoga Narada® to tell her story. These hand gestures may serve didactic or illustrative purposes—modeling anatomical concepts or internal sensations—or function mimetically to represent objects, actions, or spatial relationships. Gesture phrasing and effort qualities may shift in relation to narrative tone: from soft, internal, and cyclical modes to direct, impacting, or emphatic actions. The floor can become an interactive surface—touched, pressed, or traced—as a way of grounding or emphasizing

speech. Descriptions of key gestures in our dialogues illustrated how embodied memories aim to bring the listener empathetically into the story and serve rhetorical purposes creating life story coherence.

Beyond describing these gestures for my readers, I was particularly interested in highlighting significant moments when dance practices or sensory engagement explicitly appeared in the interviews: When we conscientiously began to demonstrate or use our bodies to explain sensations, or to remember. These significant episodes are primary evidence for scholars asking how dance is remembered, experienced, and passed along. For these sections, I wrote participatory movement analysis in the first person that described my participant observation of the protagonist, based on my experiences in the interviews and subsequent study of the recordings. My notes presented complex kinesthetic memories: in the present, between two persons, reflecting on the past. Though unable to record these ephemeral passages objectively and completely, especially with a dual regard for myself and my speaker, this writing ensured that our moving bodies left a vital trace. To emphasize the importance of these moments, they are italicized in the life story dialogues. In the following section, I clarify my approach to movement analysis more specifically.

Embodiment and Laban Movement Analysis

Embodiment has been a central concern within dance scholar Jeff Friedman's approach to oral history. Friedman has introduced new possibilities for studying dancers' oral histories through the lenses of cultural phenomenology and Laban Movement Analysis (LMA), demonstrating in his case studies "how individuals use embodied experiences to ground and articulate their consciousness of the world around them."⁶⁹ Advocating for an embodied turn to oral history, Friedman's existing research is foundationally important for my inquiry.

Friedman's study of embodied narration may be compared to what Penny Summerfield has called "composure." By this, Summerfield refers not only to the "psychic equilibrium" that an interviewee may experience when reflectively sharing oral history, but also to the compositional means by which their narratives are crafted, as I have highlighted in the previous section on "Narrative Analysis."⁷⁰ While Summerfield does not include the aesthetic qualities of dance and choreographic practices in her analytic framework as a historian, these are richly exhibited in life story interviews with dancers.⁷¹ Logically, dancers draw upon conventions of "dancer talk" and aesthetic notions of well-made compositions and performances

69 Friedman, "Spiraling Desire," 79. See also Friedman, "Oral History a Go-Go," 172–82.

70 Summerfield, "Oral History as an Autobiographical Practice," 9.

71 Supporting this claim, see also Wehren, "Écouter les mouvements de la mémoire de l'autre." Wulff, "Instances of Inspiration," 167.

from their backgrounds as artists during oral history and life story conversations. They enact the qualities of posture, attention, and social courtesy that are valued within their communities, performing these in a conscious way for the next generation to remember them by.

As I have explicated in the previous section, these contributing aspects of vocal performance, gestures, bodily recruitment, and movement are leveraged to create coherence and dramatic impact and to afford further insight into aesthetic practices. The researcher may even investigate these consciously by emplacing the interview in a dance context and co-moving or partnering within the interview, as I do here. Jeff Friedman also attuned to these aspects of embodied storytelling by dancing with his protagonists. In his scholarship and choreographic work, Friedman innovatively explored choreographic and compositional aspects of motion in his oral history interviews, focusing on key moments of rhetorical poetics as well as figural narrative motion—both of which I will give examples of below. Friedman's research has also highlighted the importance of triangulation: comparing aesthetics of movement within his narrators' dance practices with their actual gestures and figurative narrative motions in oral history interviews.

I offer one case study analysis to illustrate Friedman's manner of closely reading movement, performance, and embodiment as integral to dance oral history. In his interpretation of American dancer Terry Sendgraff's interview testimony, Friedman resisted his scholarly urge to chronologize; instead, he learned to decipher spiraling stories within her oral narration and understand them as echoes of the kinesthetic experience of three-dimensional space in her aerial dance technique, *Motivity*. He argued that the narrative erotics of queer autobiographical narratives, such as Sendgraff's, resist normative narrative chronologies and spiral in search of their own expression. He detected evidence for this in narrative fragmentation, as well as narratives coiling recursively in time, as Sendgraff creates "her own coherent connections among diverse temporal and locational differences."⁷² In this, Friedman makes apparent Sendgraff's resistance to normative dance training—showing her evolving experiences of movement aesthetics and refinement of her own practice.

To come to these conclusions, Friedman draws on his training in the comprehensive framework of Laban Movement Analysis. This framework gives insight into the dynamic world of movement interpretation: enabling perception of the speaker's movement effort (towards space, weight, time, and flow), phrasing, and body shape.⁷³ Using Laban Movement Analysis to study the nonverbal aspects of interview conversation, Friedman observed cognitive schemas and metaphors that corresponded with his interviewees' dance

72 See Friedman, "Spiraling Desire," 84.

73 See Maletic, *Dance Dynamics*.

practices.⁷⁴ He also asked his interviewees directly during their conversations to articulate their own understanding of their movement: wishing to bring this tacit knowledge explicitly into language, to the extent that this is possible. Friedman recognized that the narrator's movement description is likely to be different from the interviewer's, even when both are dancers. Using his ability to interpret choreography as a spatiotemporal field of rhythm, gesture, and communication, Friedman contemplated his narrator's speech and movement during the interview itself—enabling his readers to discover with him the multiple meanings of these kinesthetic registers and movement vocabularies.

Building on these precedents, my research also drew upon my background as a dancer and training in LMA.⁷⁵ Like Friedman, I looked comparatively at the movement aesthetics of the dancers' practices and interview performance—considering their movements during the interviews as well as the figural rhythm, speed, structure, and dramatic arc of their storytelling as a composition. I observed carefully the Laban motion factors of intentionality towards space, weight, time, and flow, and looked punctiliously at the dancers' phrasing—discerning general personal repertoires as well as important rhetorical changes in motion factors.⁷⁶ One challenge of using LMA, as Friedman himself has acknowledged, is that while it is a rigorous system for studying movement analytically, it does not reflect the learned and individual ways that bodily knowledge is developed through dancers' personal biographies. Therefore, dialogue between LMA approaches and individual articulations of meaning are necessary to learn how movement and bodily understanding are constituted through praxis. Citing how my teachers had instructed me to interpret and perform movement, I drew upon these personal memories, as well as my background in LMA, to enhance our dialogues with these multiple perspectives.

By conceiving body-biographies as performative life-writing rehearsed through research encounters between a dancer and a dance scholar, I aimed to bring interpretive attention to my narrators' gestures, bodies, and affects in my sensual writing, wishing to further expose the dimensions of embodiment that marked each narrator's stories. One challenge in the writing process is finding a form for this on paper. Embodied narration is rich with meaning, and interpretation risks overexplaining or diluting what is already concisely poetic in live storytelling—a gesture or facial expression is worth a thousand words. In my work, I developed three strategies: First, in the introductions to each body-biography, I highlighted the bodily qualities of the speaker's paraverbal communication, micromovements, and

74 See Friedman, "Oral History a Go Go," 179, and the discussion on 172–182. See also Friedman, "Spiraling Desire."

75 I was educated in this system during my Master's studies at The Ohio State University.

76 See Maletic, *Dance Dynamics*.

gestures that made their storytelling unique—giving readers a sensual picture of how they spoke and moved together with me during our interviews. Second, within the printed dialogues, I inserted descriptions of seminal examples of embodied narration and highlighted these for the reader in italics.⁷⁷ By adding a second space for my analysis, these texts break out of our conversations to offer readers more in-depth interpretation of what these significant moments tell us about embodied memory and dance practice. Third, for each narrator, I added a section to their body-biography that elaborates on their practice—through a more focused description of their teaching or movement research—based on my participant observation. In this way, themes from our life review conversations resonated through embodied registers, composing a written text with palpable embodied dimensions. The texts also resist the chronological narration format and individualism that are dominant conventions of life stories and autobiography, describing rather two persons in the present, reflecting on embodied history together.

Closing Remarks on Theoretical Interpretation

This section on the theoretical interpretation of body-biographies has integrated perspectives from narrative analysis, movement analysis, and body-reflexivity. I have underscored that the interpretive work of analyzing body-biographies does not occur through the researcher applying theoretical questions to their life story interview transcripts; nor does it involve ghostwriting or uncritically reflecting on life story production. By contrast, knowledge in this domain is created through the researcher reflexively participating in life story interviews, performing participant observation of dancing, as well as engaging in cooperative life-writing. The outlines offered here (Boxes 1–3) underscore key principles of analytic focus that may sharpen the researcher's inquiry: shaping emergent life story dialogues for research purposes and enabling inscription of participant observation of movement, both within and outside of interviews.

I have highlighted throughout this chapter that this methodology involves the researcher's corporeal participation, attending sensually and responsively to how dancers narrate, gesture, and perform their life stories. The cultivation of sensuality and sensitivity within life story interviews is not simply an ethical stance but an epistemological method: It opens a space where bodily experience and verbal testimony inform one another. The body-biography interview is understood as a relational framework for mutual learning, in which bodies, movement, memory, and narration are co-constituted through dialogic performance. In basic terms, cooperative life-writing does more than document the gestures performed by the

77 One exception to this is the body-biography of Marcus Schulkind, where, for continuity, these passages were placed in the footnotes.

protagonist during an interview. By reflecting on corporeality both in life review and in the research methodology, the approach contributes body-reflexive writing that aids the reconstruction of embodied history. I acknowledge the partiality of this account, and the way my analysis doubles as review of my own body and movement perception while interacting with my interview partners—as readers will discover. Further remarks synthesizing this methodology are presented in the final, concluding section of this chapter.

Summary

This chapter has laid the groundwork for understanding body-biography as a participatory and embodied methodology for research of dance. Contributing to the growing field of dancer interviews, I have contextualized a methodology of body-biography that resists positivistic categories of “data,” “source,” or “transcript.” The “results” of this methodology are neither polished oral history interview transcripts nor raw or momentary reflections of lived experience. Rather the life-writing presented in Part II should be understood as written performances of life review that have been developed collaboratively with their protagonists. These carefully composed narratives emerge through relational storytelling and longstanding reflexive engagement between dancer and interviewer.

By detailing the multilayered process that underpins these texts—interviewing, participant observation, movement analysis, transcription, and life-writing—I have illuminated how such narratives are not only gathered but actively composed. The ethical, affective, and methodological dimensions of this construction, particularly the post-interview collaboration in refining and revising life stories, form a key contribution of this chapter. In this way, body-biography foregrounds the presence and agency of both interlocutors, offering a methodology that honors dancers’ lived knowledge while inviting critical reflection on the role of the researcher.

Although grounded in a small-scale study of four elder teachers with whom I share longstanding relationships, the methodological principles outlined in this chapter are adaptable. They can serve researchers with different backgrounds—inside or outside of dance—so long as the embodied, dialogic, and cooperative nature of the research is respected. Body-biographies, as I propose them, are not only valuable for scholars to produce dance historiography and archiving. I imagine that they might also be simplified for guiding student assignments in higher education: cultivating self-reflexivity, historical consciousness, and dialogue between teachers and students.

For the field of dance studies and artistic research, where interviews are increasingly common but often under-theorized, this chapter offers a framework for thinking with and through the body in the production of knowledge. It invites

readers to approach interviews not as neutral instruments, but as generative encounters shaped by movement, memory, and mutual curiosity. As such, body-biographies contribute to a growing body of methodological work in dance studies that seeks not only to document lives, but to understand how knowledge moves—between bodies, across time, and through the medium of language itself.