Chapter 5: A choreography of the in-between: Olga Mesa's *Solo a ciegas (con lágrimas azules)*[1]

As the spectators enter the performance space, a still, sole figure is standing on the foremost part of the stage, her eyes closed, seemingly concentrating and taking in the situation. Once the audience is seated, she opens her eyes and goes to the side of the stage – a stage practically bare, save for a light console, microphone, a few objects, a film projector without a screen, and a set of mirrors. 'Can I start?' she asks; an invisible man's voice replies 'Whenever you want'. She starts speaking into the microphone slowly, calmly.

> *[…] Y justo en ese momento comienzo mi práctica preferida no visible. Cierro los ojos, y me preparo a hacer el gran salto. Veo lo imposible, y esto me recuerda que la luz puede apagarse, de repente, como un blackout. Y respiro, y me tumbo en una esquina. Me imagino observando una guerra en miniatura. A menudo pienso en mi cuerpo atraido por los espacios que desaparecen; en mis gestos, aun no, constituidos; y en el sentimiento importante, que me gustaría traer a esta historia. Siento el deseo de escribir en la obscuridad* [At that very moment, I start my favourite practice of non-visibility. I close my eyes and prepare myself to take the great leap. I see the impossible, and this reminds me that the light can suddenly be turned off, like a blackout. And I breathe and lie in a corner. I imagine myself watching a miniature war. I often think of my body, attracted by spaces of disappearance; of gestures that are not yet constructed; of the important feeling that I would like to bring into this story. I feel the desire to write in obscurity.][2]

In the approximately one hour that follows, much of this will be translated onto the stage: the solo figure will play with the limits of visibility – at times

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1   Some first thoughts about this chapter were developed in: Leon, Anna: Now and Then. Contemporary and Historical Instances of Intermediality on the Choreographic Stage, in: Haitzinger, Nicole & Kollinger, Franziska (eds.): *Überschreitungen: Beiträge zur Theoretisierung von Inszenierungs- und Aufführungspraxis*, Munich: epodium 2016, pp. 14–21 (e-book).

2   Mesa, Olga : *Solo a ciegas (con lágrimas azules)* [DVD], Cie. Olga Mesa/Association Hors Champ – Fuera de Campo 2008, 41:19.

her actions will escape the audience's view; she will spend time in stillness, breathing, and explore gestures and movements. The lights will black out; sounds of war will be fleetingly heard. And, the figure will dance – some movements will be classifiable in a widely-construed "contemporary dance" vocabulary, others will stem from Argentinian tango. She will shout and resemble a fable creature – half woman-half animal, wearing a goat mask. Sounds will emerge from unknown sources, texts will be read, the light will change multiple times, film images will be shown.

The spectators will find themselves faced with what Olga Mesa – the lone figure on stage and choreographer of the piece – has described as an '*objet dramaturgique inattendu* [unexpected dramaturgical object]'.[3] *Solo a ciegas (con lágrimas azules)*, created in 2008, is unexpected, in a very literal sense. The spectator has little to help them navigate what is shown, and needs to connect sometimes-startlingly diverse elements in order to follow the piece. The work is dedicated to the choreographer's grandfather Antòn – "*El Argentino*" – but no clear biographical line is discernible; the artist seems to draw material from diverse sources and memories to construct its universe. The piece contains excerpts from Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Uccellacci e uccellini* (1966), the persistent humming of the *Coro a bocca chiusa* from Giacomo Puccini's 1904 opera *Madama Butterfly*, Robert Walser's 1901 rendition of *Snow White* read in voiceover by Sara Vaz, and tango songs such as Celedonio Esteban Flores' *La Comparsita* – all parts of a fleeting, kaleidoscopic whole.

Mesa is a figure that is dually inscribed in the continental European contemporary-dance scene at the turn of the 21st century. On the one hand, her work is relevant to choreographic approaches that were – not wholly aptly – termed "conceptual" dance: questioning the posited limits of dance; anchoring the work in both sensorial and theoretical understandings of the body; integrating text and immobility; and focussing on the relationality with, and acknowledged co-presence of, the audience. On the other hand, her approach exemplifies the integration of technology and multimedia dispositifs by implicating artistic methodologies and tools from other (here, cinematographic) artistic disciplines; through corresponding strategies of dephysicalisation of the body; and, in certain pieces, presenting installation works outside of the theatrical context. *Solo a ciegas* makes this dual inscription manifest; firstly, as a theatrical presentation of a layered and socio-politically-framed embodied subject engaging in more-than-kinetic ways with its audience, and secondly, as a multimedia endeavour, reframing a technologically-mediated bodily presence. Looking for the expanded

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3   Cie Olga Mesa – Association Hors Champ/Fuera de Campo: Publicity Material for *Solo a ciegas (con lágrimas azules)*, 2008, unpaginated.

choreographic aspects of this piece is a way of identifying expanded choreography's positionality within the turn-of-the-century dance landscape, situating it between a "conceptual" challenge to the limits of dance and the use of (new) technologies to reconsider choreography's relationship with corporeality, physicality, and presence.
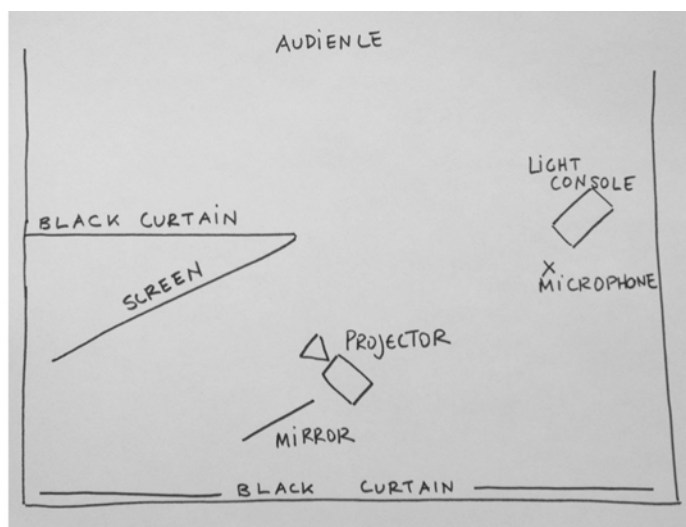
Solo a ciegas includes danced phrases, some of which challenge what dance could be; several sequences minimise movement or remove it altogether, and there is a great emphasis on media other than the human body. Watching the piece does involve watching the actions of a human body in movement, but cannot be reduced to that; in creating the piece, Mesa's choreographic activity cannot, similarly, be reduced to the arrangement of corporeal movements. In these ways, the *Solo* performs a decentralisation of dance in a composite performance framework that aligns with Saint-Hubert's multimedia ballet [Chapter 1], and undoes subsequent conflations of dance and choreography. Against this background, and in order to identify what "else" choreography may be in Mesa's work, this chapter draws from the performance itself (both as experienced in the theatre and in video recording), production and press material around the work, a series of discussions with the artist, and secondary sources about her. Reading *Solo a ciegas* as a relational arrangement of materials, actions, subjects, temporalities, and locations out of which a fragile universe is built, this chapter identifies an expanded choreography not characterised by the kinds of entities (human-corporeal or other) that it applies to, but by the act and process of assembling a multifaceted whole, made from heterogeneous relations between heterogeneous elements.

Body, text, sound, film, lights – in relation

Solo a ciegas has an unmistakably corporeal aspect. In Mesa's acts – breathing audibly; rolling, running, and kicking; placing herself in proximity to the spectators, physically acknowledging co-presence; using her voice to emit cries – the performer constantly reaffirms her bodily experience of the piece and the situation. Her corporeality is at the same time found – like dancing bodies in Saint-Hubert's ballets [Chapter 1] – in a framework composed by the presence and action of multiple media. There are moving images; a video-projector on stage transmits film material to a screen outside of the spectators' view, who have only indirect access to the – sometimes blurry, sometimes unidentifiable – images through an on-stage mirror [Figure 20]. There is text, spoken by the performer but also emitted through speakers that the audience cannot see. There are non-linguistic sounds: those produced by the performer's actions and emitted through her body, and those that come from invisible speakers (a light

tap of footsteps, music), blending with the sound of the film. There is light and subtly-changing colour, which extinguishes itself in blackouts. The light is active and present – white lights combine with projectors fitted with blue filters; some lights periodically dim.[4] There are objects that, once used, affirm their presence as indispensable parts of the work; and there are objects that are constantly active – for example, small mirrors placed on different parts of the stage, reflecting both aspects of the action and members of the audience.

Figure 20: The main elements of the on-stage scenographic-technical setup of Solo a cie-gas (con lágrimas azules). *By the author based on production notes. No re-use without permission.*

AUDIENCE

LIGHT CONSOLE

BLACK CURTAIN

SCREEN

X MICROPHONE

PROJECTOR

MIRROR

BLACK CURTAIN

The human body and other media are put into coexistence, interaction, and relation within the *Solo*. In this process, the body does not shadow other media, but, rather, brings attention to them as such. By passing in front of the projector and casting her shadow on the mirror image, manipulating the light console in real time on stage, and breathing into the microphone, Mesa's physicality becomes a reminder of the presence and mode of function of the diverse media on stage. Beyond accentuating the physicality of other media through the dancer's body, there are moments in *Solo a ciegas* when – despite its direct presence – certain body actions are partly mediated. After her prologue, the

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4   Mesa, Olga: Interview with the author (August 2017).

performer makes her first reference to war by alluding to Paul Verlaine's poem *Chanson d'automne* – which was used, after being slightly transformed, as a radio signal to the French resistance during the Allied landing in Normandy. Mesa announces 'I will tell you the words of the secret code' – but the altered code words are only secondarily spoken. They are firstly written in a notebook held so close to the microphone that the audience can hear the sound of tracing words on paper; this plays with their long-since-lifted secrecy, and provides a moment of intimacy that is only partly and indirectly accessed through the mediation of writing into the microphone. In other moments, Mesa's body's actions are taken up by non-human performers – the sound of her footsteps and words are, for instance, repeated by the speakers. The sound re-performs Mesa's actions, re-inserted at moments when she has moved on, dividing her presence into a visible body and an invisible sound source. (In each performance venue where *Solo a ciegas* is presented, the sound of Mesa's footsteps is recorded, to be added to the soundtrack and double her actual footsteps as a mediated shadow.[5]) The '*temps réel* [real time]' of the body's actions is blended with the '*temps différé* [delayed time]' of the recording,[6] blending present and past and inscribing the body's actions into the depth of memory. At other moments, the body is effaced by the media surrounding and mediating it. Mesa moves behind a black curtain which also hides the screen from view, and her actions become accessible only indirectly, on the opposite mirror, where the film is also projected; she is superposed and blends with the film, exiting the definite space of the stage and moving towards a space that is not entirely concrete. Or, she performs small, subtle movements while a weak spotlight provides mere glimpses of her. Through projection, light, and sound, her body oscillates between directly-present physicality and mediated reflection, echo, and trace. There are also points in the work where what the body does is completed by, and creates a complex whole with, what other media are doing. For example, at one point the performer is at the front of the stage, moving, at times emitting sounds and fragments of text, accompanied by sounds from *Uccellacci e uccellini*; establishing a connection with the film, she cries out one of the film's lines – '*Papà, corre!* [Dad, run!]'. She runs across the stage, and continues to move while the film image on the mirror alternates; a female voice, repeating parts of *Solo a ciegas*' prologue speech over the speakers, blends with the *Uccellacci e uccellini* dialogues – this time, with a poverty-stricken mother lying to her children that daylight has not come to avoid them getting up and asking for food she does not have. The body's twisting, running, and stilling is juxtaposed to, and imbued with the urgency of the young boy warning his father to run, the desperation of

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5   Mesa : Interview.
6   Ibid.

Pasolini's mother figure, the slightly-disturbing effect of unidentifiable footage, the solo performer's own questions, repeated by a possible spectre of her previous self through the speakers. Through interaction, mediation, concealment, juxtaposition, or association, Mesa's body constantly forms, dissolves, and reestablishes diverse relations with the surrounding media.

In such ways, *Solo a ciegas* does not simply combine the human body with other media functioning separately from the action, or illuminating it as secondary scenographic elements; it is "carried" by them as much as it is embodied by a performer it expands beyond. It forms a framework in which the human body is present, indispensable, but, on its own, insufficient. Indeed, while Mesa has written that she has '*toujours compris le corps comme la base, c'est-à-dire d'abord il y a le corps, ensuite le movement, la parole, le geste. Le corps est le point de depart* [always understood the body as the basis, that is, first there is the body, then movement, speech, gesture. The body is the starting point]',[7] she has also mentioned that she considers the film projector to be the "heart" of *Solo a ciegas* and noted that the body is not the work's protagonist.[8] The artist talks of her body as being extended through the technical *dispositif* surrounding it, connected with the other media on stage in feedback loops; and proposes terms such as '*mécanique de la sensation* [mechanics of sensation]'[9] which can be taken to describe this process of interaction between a sensing, active body and the technical – among other – elements with which it shares the stage. In other words, while the body, its physicality, and its sensations are necessary here, so is the presence of other media and, particularly, the cinematographic element. Rudi Laermans perfectly grasps this type of performance:

> Putting human and non-human capacities to move or to not-move on par implies that the second no longer serves the first [...] Sound waves or light rays no longer just emphasise bodily actions, adding or subtracting possible meanings, but interact with them as movements displaying their own characteristic physicality.[10]

But the piece is not limited to relations of the performer's body with different media; links are also established on stage that do not include the human

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7   Mesa, Olga & Sanchez, José A.: La Danse commence avec le regard, in: Ruiz de Infante, Francisco (ed.): *Olga Mesa et la double vision: Expérimentations chorégraphiques avec une caméra collée au corps*, Strasbourg: Les Editions des Actes Manqués 2016, p. 14.

8   Mesa: Interview.

9   Mesa: Interview. Mesa considers the camera – often used in real time in her performances – as a further extension of the body. Mesa, Olga: Esquisse de Vocabulaire à la frontière de la vision, in: Ruiz de Infante: *Olga Mesa et la double vision*, p. 27.

10   Laermans, Rudi: *Moving Together: Making and Theorizing Contemporary* Dance, Amsterdam: Valiz 2015, pp. 230–231.

being directly – a reminder that non-human agents and their links exist "in themselves" without necessary reference to "us" as a centralising factor. One of the choreographer's comments on the *Solo* was indeed that she had

> *construit un système émergent de codes secrets à travers une architecture de l'écoute, autonome de la vision et des déplacements et des décisions que mon corps réalise en temps réel* [constructed an emergent system of secret codes through an architecture of audition, autonomous from vision and from the movements and decisions that my body realises in real time].[11]

In the scene described above where the body's actions are part of a whole – in which lines from Pasolini's film blend with *Solo a ciegas'* recorded prologue – these sound elements enter into layered, overlapping dialogue. A recorded female voice poses the prologue's question – 'Can I begin?'; repeating the words from the opening, the performer responds 'Whenever you want', but she seems like an intruder in the dialogue, since the invisible person asking the question waits until a male voice from the speakers also acquiesces; this dialogue is overtaken by voices of children from *Uccellacci e uccellini* calling their mother; the dialogue switches and the female voice re-starts her prologue text; the mother from the film responds, the two interactions woven together. At another moment, Mesa's body is completely invisible behind the curtain, while the sound dialogues continue to perform. At times, the technical tasks of the different media relate to each other, too; for example, the film projector may function as such only indirectly – through the mirror – but also operates as an additional source of light, complementing the spotlights [Figure 20]. Different media support each other's actions. At one moment, the lights black out, allowing the film image to become more intense; although its images are not sharp, Pasolini's use of footage from the funeral of Italian communist leader Palmiro Togliatti is discernible (although not ascertainable); a male chorus hums a solemn tune while the performer's body is only present through its sounds and the fragmentary snapshots permitted by a slight reflection. Here, the relations between film images – Pasolini's use of newsreel footage in his film and Mesa's use of Pasolini's film projects the event twice-removed – are doubled by the relationship between the film, the gravity of the sound, and the starkness of the lights' absence. Furthermore, the stage setup that partially blocks spectators' visibility also allows a dialogue to be established between each medium's physicality/technical function and its perceived result. For instance, the film image the spectator sees reflected in the mirror refers to its source in the screen, itself referring to its source in the projector, which refers to the

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11 Cie Olga Mesa – Association Hors Champ/Fuera de Campo: Publicity Material, unpaginated, emphasis added.

original images that have been re-edited for the piece. The stage setup similarly refers to the film it contains; in *Uccellacci e uccellini*, the two protagonists hear a voice which initially comes from an invisible source – later discovered to be a speaking raven – just as invisible sounds emerge in *Solo a ciegas*. Finally, the intricately-constructed timeline of the *Solo* is marked by the film's editing; thus, media other than the body have the capacity to trigger events on stage.[12] The body therefore relates to different surrounding media but also exists in a multifaceted space created by them and *their* inter-relations.

This type of performance situation – composed of relations between a human body and other media, coupled by relations between these media themselves – corresponds to a shift in the reception attitude of the spectators, who must widen their kinaesthetic response to choreography towards the heterogeneous, multiple objects of relational choreography. Indeed *Solo a ciegas* demands – and generates – cross-modal perception, something underlined by the choreographer when she notes '*je propose des questions audiovisuelles au corps et des questions physiques à la caméra* [I propose audiovisual questions to the body and physical questions to the camera]'.[13] (Even in actions contained within the performer's body, this cross-modal relationality remains present; kicking her leg high, Mesa emits a shout, giving the action a kinetic, auditory, and visual element that emerges from the simultaneous, multiple uses of the body as medium.) Moreover, Mesa's piece introduces a double aspect in spectatorship, in which experiencing the cross-modal effects of on-stage actions or relations is continuously counterbalanced by trying to decipher how they come about. The film screen is invisible, but the presence of the projector on stage explains how a deviated, indirect image reaches the viewers; most speakers are out of sight but the presence of the microphone indicates a process of recording the performer's voice to be re-broadcast – parts of the dispositif are visible, thus indicating how invisibility is created. Beyond decoding how each element on stage functions, the audience is given clues to decipher how different elements are related. The performer controls the light console herself, in full view; a spoken action – 'blackout' – may announce and/or prefigure the dimming of the lights; the *horschamp* – a cinematographic concept referring to what lies outside the camera's scope – of the film prefigures an *hors-champ* of the moving body, which will also disappear from view; the lights interacting with the mirrors on stage both achieve and illustrate the process of creating limited visibility; the lights dim, to let the projector illuminate a part of the stage and thus draw attention to its function as a light-source that interacts with the spotlights. Other parts of the action are more difficult to decipher and the spectator is left with questions: do

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12   Mesa : Interview.

13   Mesa & Sanchez : La Danse commence avec le regard, p. 20.

they hear the soundtrack of the film or is sound coming from an independent source synchronised with the images? Is it the performer who just sighed, or did the sound come from the speakers? While there are no clues to help one find an answer, the very formulation of these questions incites the spectator to think of the piece in terms of intermedia relations.[14]

An equivalent claim of relationality within the work's reception can be made about its production. Indeed, Mesa's role as a choreographer was not limited to the creation of bodily (dance) actions delegating non-corporeal work, but expanded to this multiple constellation that includes the body. *Solo a ciegas* is a work in which interdisciplinary collaboration (including a film editor, sound technician, and collaborator in lighting design) was necessary; moreover, Mesa's authorship expanded to the co-conception and -creation of the lighting design, writing of text, and choosing of music and film.[15] The work's intermedia nature necessitates a type of choreographic authorship that is both collectively and individually interdisciplinary – not only in the types of skills and practices involved but also in the process of interweaving them, authoring what happens between them. Indeed, Mesa's process of work – as illustrated by the assignments given to her collaborators – reflects this; for example, *Solo a ciegas'* sound technician Jonathan Merlin was tasked not so much with composing the sound, but, rather, with the technical definition of when, and from where, sound emerged,[16] thus shifting his focus to the ways in which the sound relates to the rest of the stage action.

Mesa's choreography decentralises the human body as a dominant performer, and dance as a primary medium of expression, shifting the role of non-human media to active and meaning-carrying performers. Her relational treatment of diverse materials situates the choreographic not in a human-specific performance supported *by* non-human media, but in the arrangement of relations *between* both. This expands choreographic authorship to an interdisciplinary endeavour whose results are experienced cross-modally. By doing so, *Solo a ciegas* responds to a contemporary interest in non-human materialities and the forms of coexistence, interaction, and hybridisation between human subjects and non-human agents. At the same time, in these very ways it also mirrors Saint-Hubert's non-autonomous view of ballet as a composite spectacle, and the

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14   Rudi Laermans adds a highly interesting dimension to this kind of spectatorship; he considers that questions of dance criticism may not, in "expanded" cases, only focus on what a performance may mean (what he calls a 'hermeneutical or interpretative paradigm') but also on how it works. Laermans: *Moving Together*, p. 235.

15   For technical information and roles see Cie Olga Mesa – Association Hors Champ/Fuera de Campo: Publicity Material, unpaginated.

16   Mesa: Interview.

interdisciplinary role of his master of order. In return, this mirroring challenges the exclusions that result from a sole focus on dance as choreographic material in Saint-Hubert's ballet [Chapter 1].

Doing choreography

The construction of *Solo a ciegas* as a complex web of non-hierarchical relations between an (un)moving body, text, sound, film, objects, and light points to a choreography that orchestrates and brings together the actions of different media, including the body. In effect, the choreographer uses multiple terms – often borrowed from non-dance disciplines – which focus on the importance of putting together; for example, the cinematographic term of montage and the visual-arts-based notion of collage recur in her discourse.[17] By proposing a view of choreography as an art of forming relations between different elements, *Solo a ciegas* is associated with a wider discourse about, and conception of, choreography as a process and praxis of "putting in relation", developed in the decade following the piece's premiere. This was evident in artists' discourse – such as Michael Klien's proposal that 'choreography can assume the creative practice of setting […] relations, or set the conditions for […] relations, to emerge',[18] or Rasmus Ölme's idea that 'choreographic work re-articulates the relations between the items' of choreographic *dispositifs*[19] – and in theoretical approaches to choreography – as in Kirsten Maar's link between choreography and topology, 'which, being the theory of structures and relationships, describes relational spaces';[20] or Petra Sabisch' view of choreographic works as 'an assemblage of specific relations: relations to objects, to music, to bodies, relations between bodies, relations of visibility, relations between forces, relations of movement and rest, etc.'[21]

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17   Cf. Anonymous: Lexique incomplet, in: Ruiz de Infante: *Olga Mesa et la double vision*, p. 23.

18   Klien, Michael: *Choreography as an Aesthetics of Change*, PhD thesis, Edinburgh: Edinburgh College of Art 2008, unpaginated abstract.

19   Ölme, Rasmus: *From Model to Module: A Move towards Generative Choreography*, PhD thesis, Stockholm: DOCH University of Dance and Circus/Stockholm University of the Arts/KTH Royal Intstitute of Technology 2014, p. 29.

20   Maar, Kirsten: Uncanny Connections. William Forsythe's Choreographic Installations, in: Fischer-Lichte, Erika & Wihstutz, Benjamin (eds.): *Performance and the Politics of Space: Theatre and Topology*, New York: Routledge 2013 [trans. Michael Breolin & Saskya Iris Jain], pp. 253–254.

21   Sabisch, Petra: *Choreographing Relations: Practical Philosophy and Contemporary Choreography*, Munich: epodium 2011, p. 7.

Talking about her work on *Solo a ciegas*, Mesa has also described chore-ography as an art of *assembling*.[22] The notion of the assemblage also became prominent in the years surrounding the premiere of her work. While the term is not reducible to this reading, in contemporary choreographic theory it is primarily Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's vision of the assemblage that is encountered. Manuel DeLanda quotes Deleuze: 'What is an assemblage? It is a multiplicity which is made up of many heterogeneous terms and which estab-lishes liaisons, relations between them, across ages, sexes and reigns – different natures. Thus, the assemblage's only unity is that of a co-functioning: it is a symbiosis, a "sympathy"'; and comments: 'in this definition, two aspects of the concept are emphasised: that the parts that are fitted together are not uni-form either in nature or in origin, and that the assemblage actively links these parts together by establishing relations between them'.[23] This notion of assem-blage – a *relational entity* composed of *heterogeneous materials* – has theoretically grounded two points that are relevant here and are illustrated by the writings of Laermans. Laermans introduces the assemblage as part of his quest for a less anthropocentric, "post-humanist" choreography:

> the performative qualities of human as well as non-human actions [are treated] as being equal. Besides physical movements also lightning, sounds, props, text fragments or video images are all deliberately deployed as active agents, as components that do something and therefore co-define the overall performa-tivity of a dance piece.[24]

But crucially, this decentralisation of the human in choreography – through the notion of the assemblage – is presented as a way of conceptualising contem-porary choreographic work including heterogeneous media, *as opposed to* other multi- or intermedia approaches. Laermans and Carine Meulders write:

> [t]o a great extent, the contemporaneity of dance has to do with the making of new middle zones, of *heterogeneous assemblages* – of always particular couplings between for instance music, image and movement that produce completely different operative and perceptual frameworks than what we know from inter-disciplinary or multi medial work.[25]

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22   Mesa: Interview.

23   DeLanda, Manuel: *Assemblage Theory*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2016, p. 1f.

24   Laermans, Rudi: 'Dance in General' or Choreographing the Public, Making Assemblages, in: *Performance Research* 13/1 (2008), p. 11.

25   Laermans, Rudi & Meulders, Carine: The Body is the Re/De-Presentation: Or, What Makes Dance Contemporary?, in: Gareis, Sigrid & Kruschkova, Krassimira (eds.): *Ungerufen: Tanz*

This distinction between choreographic assemblages and other types of multi-media work can be paralleled by an important shift in the conception of choreography, from the ontological question of what choreography *is* – the material on which it operates, be it the body or multiple media – to the pragmatically-oriented question of what it *does* – here, putting heterogeneous elements into relation.[26] Indeed, possibly building on its lack of attachment to any one physical medium, (expanded) choreography is often seen as act rather than a material type of product; a multiplicity of verbs and action-words are utilised to describe choreography as primarily characterised by what it *does*. These terms include organising (Mårten Spångberg: 'I'm a choreographer that is occupied with organising [among other things] dances';[27] Jan Ritsema: 'Choreography is thinking about the *organisation* of objects and subjects in time and space on stage' [28]), arranging (Ölme: 'The first choreographic act is thus to choose which items to engage with. The second choreographic act is how to arrange them in relation to each other, forming a new assemblage than the one they were singled out from' [29]) and – echoing Saint-Hubert [Chapter 1] – ordering (Klien, Steve Valk, and Jeffrey Gormly: 'Choreography (n.): order observed […] a process that has an observable or observed embodied order. […] Choreography (v.): act of interfering with or negotiating such an order' [30]). This composition-related vocabulary brings attention to the *act* described, while the object this applies to can be left open; from the compositional process of ordering bodies in spatial, temporal, and dynamic configurations, choreography becomes characterised by arranging itself, beyond *what* is being arranged. In this sense, the hierarchy between the dancer's body and other media in *Solo a ciegas* may not be of primary importance; viewing choreography as an art of assembling or arranging suggests moving the focus away from the materials being arranged towards the act of arranging. The product not of a specific mediality (or multiple mediali-

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und Performance der Zukunft / Uncalled: Dance and Performance of the Future, Berlin: Theater der Zeit 2009, p. 285.

26   Cf. Sabisch: *Choreographing Relations*, p. 8.

27   Spångberg, Mårten: *Spangbergianism II* (first draft), Bologna: independent publication, 2013, unpaginated.

28   Quoted in CORPUS: Survey What does "choreography" mean today?, 2007, http://www.corpusweb.net/introduction-to-the-survey.html (Archive copy from October 2015). In the survey, Ritsema elaborates and questions this definition, for instance proposing choreography as 'thinking about the organisation of the *moving relations* between objects and subjects in time and space on stage'.

29   Ölme: *From Model to Module*, p. 30.

30   Klien, Michael, Valk, Steve & Gormly, Jeffrey: *Book of Recommendations: Choreography as an Aesthetics of Change*, Limerick: Daghdha Dance Company 2008, unpaginated.

ties), but of a specific praxis, Mesa's *Solo a ciegas* thus points to an expansion of choreography whose being may be its very doing.

Expanding choreography towards a praxis that applies to heterogeneous materials implicates reconsideration of choreographic authorship, including approximating choreographic making with other practices of *putting-together*. A focus on the art of arranging relations has indeed been underlined concerning dramaturgy, as proposed by Martina Ruhsam:

> Nowadays dramaturgy [...] doesn't necessarily refer to any dramatic text or action [...] The fact that contemporary performances are often hybrid forms of dance, performance, film, exhibition, lecture, media-art, and installation calls out for new strategies of staging and more importantly, for a new aesthetic of connection and relation – or, in other words, for new practices of connecting and relating.[31]

The same point can be made regarding curating, as noted by the editors of the relevantly-titled book *Assign & Arrange* when they speak of 'recent discourse in which choreographing and curating are increasingly being perceived and discussed as related practices of creating dynamic constellations, relations, collaborations and affective encounters'.[32] Establishing proximity between the choreographic, the dramaturgical, and the curatorial is related to the concurrent expansion that widens curating beyond the visual arts, and dramaturgy beyond its theatre background; their proximity with choreography marks dissolving discipline boundaries. In effect, what is at issue here is not just the comparability of different practices, but their qualitative transformation that converges towards relational praxis. Thus, at times the practice of choreography blends with that of dramaturgy, conceiving of choreography *as* dramaturgy; Gabriele Klein notes that '[c]horeography increasingly became a matter of dramaturgy; whereas the once close link between dance and choreography gradually loosened'.[33] Mesa's words on *Solo a ciegas* reflect this blend:

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31 Ruhsam, Martina: Dramaturgy of and as Collaboration, 2010, http://sarma.be/docs/2873 (August 2020). For an approximation between choreography and dramaturgy based on their relational approach, see also Cvejić, Bojana: Dramaturgy: A Friendship of Problems, in: *TkH (Journal for Performing Arts Theory)* 18 (2010), p. 50 and Laermans: *Moving Together*, p. 236.

32 Butte, Maren, Maar, Kirsten, McGovern, Fiona, Rafael, Marie-France & Schafaff, Jörn: Introduction, in: Butte, Maren, Maar, Kirsten, McGovern, Fiona, Rafael, Marie-France & Schafaff, Jörn (eds.): *Assign and Arrange: Methodologies of Presentation in Art and Dance*, Berlin: Sternberg Press 2014, p. 21.

33 Klein, Gabriele: Dancing Politics: Worldmaking in Dance and Choreography, in: Klein, Gabriele & Noeth, Sandra (eds.): *Emerging Bodies: The Performance of Worldmaking in Dance and Choreography*, Bielefeld: transcript 2011, p. 21.

> *Mon travail est très lié à la construction de la narration, à la question même de la dra-*
> *maturgie. Dans ce solo, il y a un texte fragmenté, il y a des éléments sonores extérieurs*
> *qui dialoguent avec ce que je dis moi-même et il y a du movement* [my work is very
> much linked to the construction of narrative, to the very question of dramaturgy.
> In this solo, there is a fragmented text, there are external audio elements in
> dialogue with what I say myself, and there is movement].[34]

Once again, the expansion of choreographic authorship aligns with shifts in
spectatorship. Beyond tracking and deciphering the relations that compose the
piece, the spectators of *Solo a ciegas* actively form them. While they are not
called upon to participate in the performance, they are an inescapable pole in
its construction; the performance is not just arranged in order to be presented *to*
them, but *through* their very presence and gaze. Disrupting the frontal, ideally-
complete viewpoint of the spectator, the black curtain hides the actual film
screen, and its reflection depends on each spectator's position [Figure 20];
mirrors placed on stage create reflections not visible to all spectators. Thus,
the piece's on-stage disposition and the performer's situation are construed in
relation to each other, *as well as* to individuated spectators that are positioned
at different angles with respect to the action. The choreographer notes:

> *Ce hors-champ me permet de questionner le cadre de la représentation dans une double*
> *configuration, du point de vue du spectateur et du point de vue inverse du plateau. Au-*
> *jourd'hui, je ne peux plus aborder la question du regard et de la perception uniquement*
> *de manière frontale. Il me faut déplacer, détourner les éléments de la scène comme si*
> *le regard était passé à travers un prisme afin de changer le rapport entre les choses et*
> *les individus* [This hors champ allows me to question the frame of the represen-
> tation in a double configuration, from the viewpoint of the spectator and from
> the inverse viewpoint of the stage. Today, I cannot approach the question of the
> gaze and of perception in a uniquely frontal manner anymore. I have to move,
> to divert the stage elements as if the gaze had passed through a prism, in order
> to change the relationship between things and people].[35]

Several theorists – including Laermans, Sabisch, and Bojana Cvejić[36] – have
indeed suggested that choreographic assemblages are not only made up of
"internal" relations, but also implicate relations with audience members; the
spectator is both external observer and active part of what they are watching.

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34   Mesa, Olga & Lavigne, Aude: Interview, 2011, http://mutualise.artishoc.com/bastille/medi
      a/5/dp_solo_a_ciegas.pdf (October 2018).
35   Mesa & Lavigne: Interview, p. 5, emphasis added.
36   Laermans: 'Dance in General', p. 13; Sabisch: *Choreographing Relations*, p. 7; Cvejić, Bojana:
      Choreographing Problems: Expressive Concepts in European Contemporary Dance and Performance,
      Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2015, p. 71.

If Mathilde Chénin's kinect videos allow a conceptualisation of a multiple choreographic ontology [Chapter 4], Mesa's *Solo a ciegas* and its choreographic assemblage of relations illustrates that the choreographic is identifiable, beyond ontological claims, in its praxis. This shift, amply reflected in the contemporary choreographic theory referred to above, has significant consequences both for choreographic authorship – approximable to other relational practices characterised by their type of *doing* – and spectatorship. This shift also has consequences for how choreographic history is conceived; a contemporary expansion of choreography to praxis reverses a long-standing attachment to (any, one, or many) materiality and reconsiders non-medium-specific practices of "putting-together" *as choreographic*. Saint-Hubert, a few centuries ago, argued for the importance of complementing an ontological understanding of ballet – what it is composed of – with the dramaturgical processes that arrange this composition – personified in the transmedially-relevant master of order [Chapter 1]. Contemporary choreographic expansions, like those discussed here, allow us to relocate choreography in Saint-Hubert's work beyond the materials that compose ballets to acts of ordering and the persons practicing them.

Of what is related

If, as Laermans' position suggests, the relational choreography of *Solo a ciegas* is more than a form of intermediality, it is necessary to consider what else this relationality applies to. If Mesa links a movement with a sound, an object with a light change, a film image with an action, she is not just creating material or technical associations – of substances and modes of communication – but is also, and primarily, forming associations that contribute to the work's purposefully-intimate and almost-confidential treatment of its polymorphous subject. In effect, *Solo a ciegas* is not – only – a piece about the way in which light relates to movement, the human body relates to film, or sound relates to image; it is a piece about memory and loss – and, particularly, the memory of war, childhood, and their intersections – treated through a choreography of relational arrangements.

The topics of war, loss, or memory are not clearly articulated in the work; they reveal themselves progressively through associations of bits of information, fleeting images, and sounds. Shots from Hiroshima after the nuclear explosion, bomber planes, and houses destroyed during the Spanish civil war are blended into the film reflected on the mirror;[37] the prologue mentions the word "war" without any further information; siren- and explosion-like sounds contribute to

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37   Mesa: Interview.

the soundtrack; Verlaine's poem, transformed into a WWII secret code, is woven into the textual and auditory fabric of the piece. None of these references, on their own, establish full focus on the topic of war – in some cases, taken individually, they are not even fully recognisable. But put together in a single universe – brought in relation through image, text, and sound – they lead the spectator to consider war. This consideration does not uniquely pertain to one – or any – of the particular war-related situations; it emerges between them as a non-specified war, onto which the spectator can project their own experiences and knowledge. Similarly, childhood is not directly referred to, but in the voices from *Uccellacci e uccellini* – of children and parents; in images from the choreographer's childhood (a cherry tree planted by her grandfather, edited to appear alongside a tree in Hiroshima);[38] in the reference to a "miniature" war in the prologue; and in the performer's rolling across the floor or abandoning herself as if to sleep – there is a hint towards childhood, which appears through the relations of these fragmentary elements without explicit articulation. The further relation between war and childhood – both ushering in the notion of loss – points to the work's focus on memory, on a rapport with what is not there. *Solo a ciegas* thus allows fragmentary information from disconnected sources to be put in relation and evoke the topics that influenced the piece. Mesa's choreography is a relational arrangement of heterogeneous media in addition to ideas, references, and information.

Solo a ciegas furthermore arranges relations between temporalities and spaces. The stage space is linked to the *hors-champ* of the screen, and to the mediated space of the projection on the mirror. But, at the same time, the piece circulates in geographical spaces beyond the theatre. Similarly, the real-time actions performed by the body on stage are linked to the off-time of pre-recorded material – in some cases repeating what is performed live, juxtaposing temporalities – and the rhythms of the film images; but, simultaneously, the piece navigates a wider chronological range. The *Solo*'s choreography arranges references to, and between, diverse locations and moments: 1940s France enters the stage through Verlaine's poem-turned-code; 1930s civil-war-ridden Spain and 1940s Hiroshima peek in through film images; 1960s Italy appears through Pasolini's film; early-20th-century South America emerges through excerpts of *La Comparsita* and tango steps (Argentina was already present through the reference/dedication of the piece to Mesa's grandfather, *El Argentino*); 1900s Japan, and 1900s European representations of it, are present through Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*. Mesa says that in *Solo a ciegas*, the performer's body must be present in the physical space shared with the audience, but the body also

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38   Ibid.

crosses different times and spaces[39] – theatrical, cinematographic, or sound spaces, in addition to times and spaces of memory. Like Pasolini's film that jumps between different time periods – in it, a present-day narrator recounts the story of two medieval Franciscan monks in a fantasy-ridden flashback – Mesa's piece navigates time and space, between specific locations and moments. Time-spaces multiply, fracturing each other's unity and continuity; but, rather than forming a new unity or continuity, they create a kaleidoscopic, multi-directional temporality and spatiality. The piece is neither set in, nor about, France in the 1940s or Spain in the 1930s; it is, rather, situated in the interval that relates the present with each and every referenced time-place, and in the interval that relates them to each other. It is, in Mesa's terms, in a *'temps suspendu* [suspended time]'.[40] Writing on the notion of the *hors-champ* – so crucial for the construction of the performance considered here – Deleuze has described a non-specificity of temporality and spatiality that also applies to *Solo a ciegas*:

> In one case, the out-of-field designates that which exists elsewhere, to one side or around; in the other case, the out-of-field testifies to a more disturbing presence, one which cannot even be said to exist, but rather to "insist" or "subsist", a more radical Elsewhere, outside homogeneous space and time.[41]

Similarly, while the *Solo* has a biographical basis, it does not simply link episodes, instances, and locations of a single person's life in a linear, coherent way. The work is not an autobiography of Mesa herself – even though elements from her childhood and family history are present – nor a biography of her grandfather – even though references to his life and context are also present. If a subject, a person, is portrayed here, it is a multiple and relational one. The sole figure on stage performs neither a single, unitary body nor a single, unitary subject: she becomes animal through squatted positions and a goat-mask, she becomes child by shouting or rolling across the floor, she proliferates by being reflected. This figure may be, at times, animal, child, adult woman – but she is neither animal *or* child *or* woman, nor animal *and* child *and* woman. She is an animal-child-woman emerging from the relations of all three. On the one hand, this multiplicity can be defined by the diverse experiences residing within this figure – even though they have not directly been lived by her – and by the relations between them. Talking of the multiplication of the body in Mesa's work, Julie Perrin indicates that this is not done in order to *'s'imposer ou envahir le plateau,*

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39   Ibid.

40   Anonymous: Lexique Incomplet, p. 23.

41   Deleuze, Gilles: *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1986 [1983, trans.Hugh Tomlinson & Barbara Habberjam], p. 17.

mais plutôt de défaire l'unité du sujet pour en faire surgir davantage de subtilité, de strates [impose oneself or to invade the stage, but rather in order to undo the unity of the subject, so as to make more of its subtleties and its strata emerge]'.[42] On the other hand, the figure is multiple because the stage is populated by multiple beings, related to each other by the media construction of the piece. A child yelling '*Papa, corre!*', a woman reaching back to her childhood and her grandfather, a mother protecting her starving children, a Spanish citizen living in Argentina before the civil war,[43] a radio-operator during WWII, a young Japanese woman waiting for her husband all night while a melancholy tune invades the air – all are there, without fully being there. None of the characters are fully represented, even though they are fleetingly present in subtle ways. By associating the vestiges of absent presences, a multifaceted figure of loss, longing, nostalgia, and pain emerges. And the work, once again, is not constructed as a simple collection of these characters but builds its representation of a multiple subject through the relations between them. Mesa comments on the way in which her work brings disconnected subjects into relation:

> *Ici, le corps est hors du temps et hors de lui pour aller au contact d'une mémoire collec-*
> *tive, voire universelle. Il s'identifie à des histoires qu'il traverse mais appartenant aussi*
> *aux autres, à tous* [here, the body is out of time and out of itself, in order to
> come into contact with a collective, universal even, memory. It identifies with
> the (hi)stories it goes through but also belonging to others, to everyone].[44]

In its publicity material, the piece is described as an '[*i*]*nventaire des espaces et des mémoires qui pourraient appartenir à d'autres corps: corps abandonnés, exilés, violés, disparus, imaginés* [inventory of the spaces and memories that could belong to other bodies: abandoned, exiled, violated, disappeared, imagined bodies]'.[45] Doubled by mirrors and disconnected from its voice, the body is fragmented; layering itself with other images, it is invaded; hidden by partial lighting, it is evoked. Correspondingly, the performance's subject does not reside in the physical body but in the relations between the identities, persons, stories, and media that collectively form the piece.

Finally, if *Solo a ciegas* contains arrangements of relations between information, identities, subjects, times, and spaces, it also emerges through the

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42   Perrin, Julie : La Chorégraphe à la caméra, in : Ruiz de Infante: *Olga Mesa et la double vision*, p. 77.

43   Cf. Mesa & Lavigne : Interview.

44   Ibid.

45   Cie Olga Mesa – Association Hors Champ/Fuera de Campo: Publicity Material, unpaginated.

association of these elements with, and by, the audience. Just like the media arrangement of the work includes the spectator – their position in the theatre, their gaze and its direction – the arrangement of archives, memories, and traces of war and loss also include the onlooker. All materials in the *Solo* – the images of war or childhood, the goat-mask, or the colour blue (present in the performer's attire/wig and in the lights) – do not represent or strictly symbolise, but, rather, are simply present and evoke associations that may vary from one audience member to the next. Thus, the presence of war, childhood, or loss relies on the spectator, (un)consciously contributing to the relational whole proposed by the choreographer. For instance, according to Mesa, the goat-mask scene was '*une image qui s'est imposée comme une vision, alors que je pensais à ce qu'il reste après la destruction d'une ville ou d'un paysage* [an image that imposed itself as a vision, while I was thinking of what remains after the destruction of a city or of a landscape]'.[46] Once it has become part of the piece, however, this association recedes, replaced by the associations audience members form with the material or deduce from its relations with other parts. If the piece deals with memory, it is not only because it presents vestiges of a now-absent past; it is also because it implicates the memories of those watching. Mesa does not *represent* memory; she arranges relations and gaps in the material to which the spectator can contribute associations, shift arrangements, and *perform* the multiple work of memory.

With a reflection on war and childhood, and a voyage between territories, temporalities, and subjects, Mesa's piece can be inscribed within a framework of contemporary European choreographic work interested in multiple subjectivities and corporealities (Vera Mantero's 1996 goat-feet in *one mysterious Thing, said e.e. cummings** speaks to Mesa's goat-head 12 years later), (auto)biography (e.g. the series including *Véronique Doisneau* (2004), *Lutz Förster* (2009), and *Cédric Andrieux* (2009) by Jérôme Bel and the aforementioned dancers; Eszter Salamon's *And Then* (2007) and Michikazu Matsune's *For Now* (2017)), and documentary and historical reference (e.g. Olga de Soto's explorations around Kurt Jooss' *The Green Table* in *Une introduction* (2010) or Salamon's 2014 *Monument 0 – Haunted by Wars (1913-2013)*, both focussing on the war history that interests Mesa). Against this background, *Solo a ciegas* performs a particular kind of body-subject, a particular kind of (auto)biography, a particular kind of documentary; like Salamon's *And Then* – in which multiple life stories are woven into an unstable narrative – it performs a life, story, and subject that are formed out of a web of sometimes-disparate relations. It is through this instability – in these network-like connections, in this multiplicity and dispersal of the subject – that the piece develops a choreographic politics of memory. This is a memory spilling out of a singular

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46   Mesa & Lavigne : Interview.

body, breaking the linearity of a causal narrative, in favour of a mesh of non-centralised links – putting the seemingly unconnected into relation.

In addition to its media assemblage, *Solo a ciegas* also assembles relations between themes, subjects, times, and places. As prefigured by Laermans, this doubling posits a relational praxis of choreography as more than a subtype of intermedia (choreographic) practice. This forms the basis for Mesa's work's politics of memory and for expanded choreography's capacity to articulate the complexity of – identitary, emotional, political, cultural – contemporary realities. At the same time, such a doubling is historiographically important, since it implies that the choreographic can be found – beyond practices encompassing multiple media – in the arrangement of elements such as themes, concepts, characters, or references. Returning to Saint-Hubert, his text considered compositions of motions, costumes, actions, and equipment as much as arrangements of *entrées* and themes around the notion of the subject [Chapter 1]. From the perspective developed here, these latter arrangements are not just frameworks in which the choreographic work of dance-making enters, but are choreographically relevant in themselves.

In the between-ness

Recounting a period of Mesa's career when she worked with collage, her regular collaborator Francisco Ruiz de Infante notes that she collected the elements to be used in the collage but did not glue them into any fixed position.[47] *Solo a ciegas* is similarly fleeting – a fragile construction, that defies the expectation of dissolution by remaining present, not falling apart. The physicality of the body – its rawness – combined with other media, is made evident; at the same time, by emerging through the immaterial, and shifting relations between these elements, *Solo a ciegas* has a strikingly non-solid, evanescent quality. The arrangement of the work's relations – beyond an assemblage of physical elements, their effects, and the information they transmit – generates an ambience-like quality, an environment, a *milieu* in which they coevolve. In a comparable way, Laermans refers to the 'total performativity' of assemblage-based, multimedia choreographies as something 'that the spectator usually experiences and speaks of in atmospheric terms';[48] Jenn Joy similarly refers to 'the choreographic as *an atmospherics* of encounter'[49] – choreography as *ambience*.

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47   Ruiz de Infante, Francisco : Ces collages pas collés… (première tentative), in : Ruiz de Infante: *Olga Mesa et la double vision*, p. 125.

48   Laermans: *Moving together*, p. 233.

49   Joy, Jenn: *The Choreographic*, Cambridge/London: MIT Press 2014, p. 7, emphasis added.

The ingredients from which the fragile but persistent atmosphere develops are on stage from the beginning of the *Solo*: the performer is there while the audience enters, as well as the technical equipment – light console, projector – and other objects the performer will (not) use; the prologue text prefigures many of the topics touched upon throughout the performance. No connection exists between them; only progressively will an ambience be created between seemingly-disparate elements. This piece both gives rise to this universe and exists through its emergence. Irène Filiberti perfectly grasps this passage from disparate presences to a combined, ambience-like entity in Mesa's work:
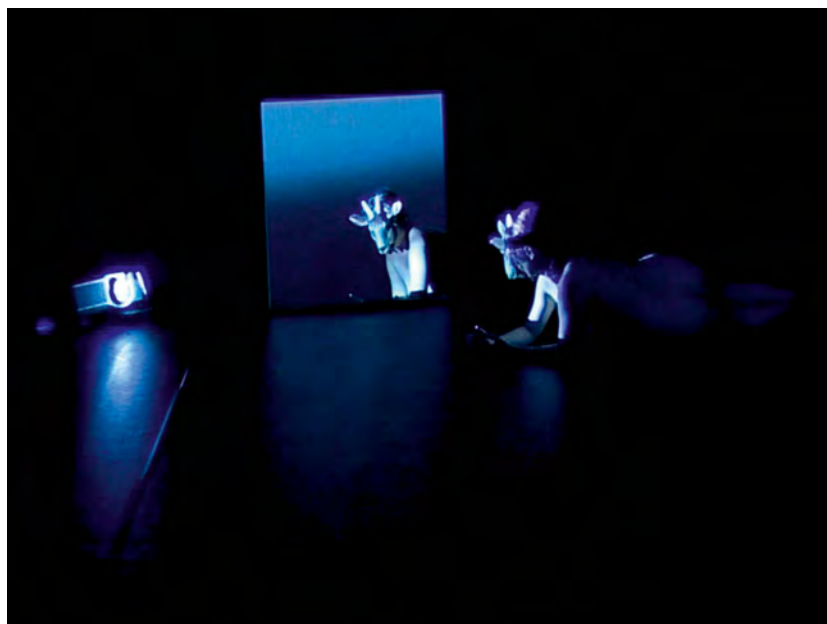
> [D]ans cet espace ouvert, infiniment, les choses, les mots, les corps, le mouvement ne peuvent apparaître qu'à partir de leur état premier : une page blanche, un espace vide. Ici, même le sol est un gisement de possibilités, de virtualités. Et puis, sans qu'on y prenne garde, avec le temps, cela prend forme, momentanément. Un frémissement, une hésitation, une émergence, une matière, une image, une phrase. Soudain on est devant la chose. Là, précisément où elle advient, où elle est juste en train de se faire [in this infinitely open space, things, words, bodies, movement, can only appear from their primary state: a blank page, an empty space. Here, even the floor is a deposit of possibilities, of virtualities. And then, without us noticing, through time, this takes form, momentarily. A simmer, a hesitation, an emergence, a matter, an image, a phrase. Suddenly, we are in front of the thing. There, exactly where it comes about, where it is just in the making].[50]

The piece is progressively developed out of fragmentary entities, that do not fully blend into each other; even when the different elements seem to entwine into a whole – accentuating each other's effects – the poles of their relations remain visible, thus barring the formation of a "total" combination. To take an example from what Mesa considers to be the climax of the work,[51] she is naked, wearing a goat-mask and high heels [Figure 21]. In front of the film projection mirror, both her physical body and its reflection are visible. Unclear sounds form a soft background. The film image, superposed on her body's reflection, changes from a blue, abstract, still image to figurative-but-unidentifiable shots. The woman-goat figure moves slightly, unhurriedly, and the humming chorus from *Madama Butterfly* begins.

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50   Filiberti, Irène: Le processus est poésie, in: Ruiz de Infante: *Olga Mesa et la double vision*, p. 11.
51   Mesa: Interview.

Figure 21: Film still from the video recording of Solo a ciegas (con lágrimas azules). *Source: Mesa, Olga:* Solo a ciegas (con lágrimas azules) *[DVD], Cie. Olga Mesa / Association Hors Champ – Fuera de Campo 2008, 41:19. No re-use without permission.*

The scene does not erase the distinct elements of which it is composed; body, movements, mask, sounds, film images, light, mirror, humming and blueness, goat-ness and human-ness, nakedness and heel-extensions, the theatrical present and 1904 Japan, the theatrical space and the film space – the spectator is aware of each and every one of them. At the same time, they are related, the perception of one associated with the perception of another; the nostalgic calmness and melancholy of the humming responds to the body's slight movements, the almost-abstract film images make space for the goat-head, the low background sounds underlie the scene's overall fragility.

Rather than attending to individual elements *or* the whole they compose, the spectator can focus on the interval of the relation, the space between different elements, a space which belongs to each and to all. In her text 'The Choreography of Singularity and Difference' – to which the present analysis is greatly indebted – on Salamon's *And Then*, Ana Vujanović similarly sees the work as consisting of human/dance actions and multiple media (including film), as well as existing *between them*. In a passage that could apply to the choreographed between-ness of *Solo a ciegas*, she writes that Salamon's choreography

is also the speech as a soundtrack, the filmed interviews, the camera angles and movements, the lighting on stage, the *dispositif* of the screen-stage, the performing modes. However, choreography here relates to, but at the same time cannot be reduced to, the inscription of these various elements themselves. The choreography here is the inscription of differences, shifts, and the *movements* between them.[52]

Recounting evolutions in Mesa's choreographic career, Jaime Conde Salazar similarly notes that

> *l'écran avait commencé à reprendre du terrain à la scène de telle manière que celle-ci finit par devenir un espace étrange entre différents médias ; une sorte de seuil où l'action vivante n'était complète qu'en relation avec l'image projetée* [the screen had started to take over with respect to the stage in such a way that the stage ended up becoming a strange space between different media; a sort of limit where the live action was only complete in relation with the projected image].[53]

Solo a ciegas, like Salamon's *And Then*, does not only exist in the space between its media, but also in the suspended time between its temporalities, the immaterial space between its spatialities, the relations between the subjects it brings onto the stage. The *Solo* almost floats among the elements out of which it is constructed, instead of remaining solely attached to their individual being and presence – and instead of creating a concrete, new, accumulated unit.

Arguably, this between-ness is the source of the piece's atmospheric quality and its very basic ingredient. 'Relations are themselves experienced' writes Brian Massumi,[54] referring to William James' idea, illustrated by Chénin's videos [Chapter 4]; a relation is not a mere projected association between distinct elements, but it is, itself, existing and perceptible. Comparably, the in-between intervals that form *Solo a ciegas* can be perceived as such; the work's very being is found in the composing elements *and* the interstitial space between them. This relational space also has qualities including, but not limited to, those determined by the participating media. In the goat-mask scene, when Mesa positions herself in front of the projection mirror [Figure 21] and moves, the interval between her body and the mirror can be understood as a relation in space, of images, of (bodily, bodily-mediated, and filmed) actions, and is perceived in a correspondingly cross-modal way. Relations are sensed in a field

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52 Vujanović, Ana: The Choreography of Singularity and Difference. *And Then* by Eszter Salamon, in: *Performance Research* 13/1 (2008), p. 129.

53 Salazar, Jaime Conde: Hors Champs, in: Ruiz de Infante: *Olga Mesa et la double vision*, p. 35, emphasis added.

54 Massumi, Brian: *Semblance and Event. Activist Philosophy and the Occurrent Arts*, Cambridge/ London: MIT Press 2011, p. 34.

between vision, audition, and kinaesthesia for the moving image. These relations have a texture, influenced by the sleekness of the mirror images, the roughness of its content, the rawness of the performer's skin; they have an intensity, modulated by the luminosity of the film and lights, the volume of the sound, the speed of the body; they have a sharpness, modified by contrasts in the film, the hesitations of the performer, the distinctness of the sounds. Most of these qualities emerge from media participating in the relations – the brightness of the film, the volume of the sound – but several also depend on their content and information. In the scene considered here, the humming chorus, nakedness and exposure of the body, goat-face, and film shots give the intervening space a nostalgic, melancholic, solitary, loss-ridden, strange, and strangely-familiar dimension. This texture, intensity, sharpness, nostalgia, solitariness, and strange familiarity are only partial attributes of the scene's individual elements; more so, they characterise the interstitial spaces – the relation – between them. In other words, the relations composing the piece are not abstract patterns but concrete, specific, qualitatively-describable entities. Mesa's art making is, thus, a process of arranging relations between heterogeneous elements, as well as an act of arranging heterogeneous relations.

The idea that the piece exists in both the compositional elements and in the immaterial territory circulating between them can be connected to the notion of assemblage, already employed to describe Mesa's work. In Jane Bennett's words,
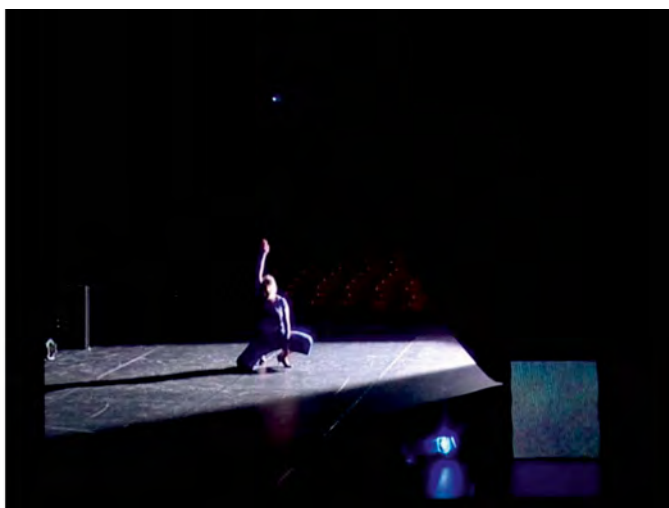
> no one materiality or type of material has sufficient competence to determine consistently the trajectory or impact of the group. The effects generated by an assemblage are, rather, *emergent properties*, emergent in that their ability to make something happen […] is distinct from the sum of the vital force of each materiality considered alone. Each member and proto-member of the assemblage has a certain vital force, but there is also an effectivity proper to the grouping as such: an agency of the assemblage.[55]

Mesa's work can also be seen as the emergent effect of its material performers' actions and relations. Towards the end of the piece, the performer goes to

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55   Bennett, Jane: *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, Durham: Duke University Press 2010, p. 24, emphasis added. Manuel DeLanda links emergence with the assemblage's characteristic of retaining the singularity of its members, an idea also discernible in Mesa's work: '[u]nlike wholes in which "being part of this whole" is a defining characteristic of the parts, that is, wholes in which the parts cannot subsist independently of the relations they have with each other (relations of interiority), we need to conceive of emergent wholes in which the parts retain their autonomy, so that they can be detached from one whole and plugged into another one, entering into new inter-actions.' DeLanda: *Assemblage Theory*, p. 10

the back of the stage and opens the black backdrop curtains to reveal the backstage area, where she performs a series of movements, including tango-based steps [Figure 22]. The physical space suddenly becomes bigger; an increase in the sound volume – tango music – contributes to this sense of opening, of escaping; some of the invisible equipment appears. For a moment, the universe on stage oscillates between evaporating – collapsing through the dissolution of its spatial boundaries – and expanding – to include the newly-visible elements. In this ambivalence, it becomes possible to realise that the piece has created a universe – an ambience-like existence – out of minimally-few disparate objects, words, actions, and images; by opening up to the "beyond" of the stage, and increasing the fragility of the relational arrangement that it has formed, the emergent relational entity is made manifest.

Figure 22: Film still from the video recording of Solo a ciegas (con lágrimas azules).[56]
Source: Mesa, Olga: Solo a ciegas (con lágrimas azules) *[DVD], Cie. Olga Mesa / Association Hors Champ – Fuera de Campo 2008, 41:19. No re-use without permission.*

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56   The piece was conceived as having the spectators on the stage. In this way, when the curtain opened, it would reveal an *hors-champ* constituted by the empty auditorium. This was, however, realised very few times due to technical difficulties. Mesa   : Interview.

As an immaterial emergence, the work *is* not but rather *happens*;[57] it comes about through the conjunctive actions of the assemblage's members. Indeed, even if the piece is mostly set and does not contain real-time improvisation, the constraints of the choreography are – in the expression of Mesa herself – 'alive'.[58] The relations between her body and other media are not just mechanically *performed* but *lived* in specific moments; for example, the sound technician can react to the performance by making sound respond to it.[59] A choreography of *doing* concerns what the choreographer does, as well as choreography itself as happening.

Thus the question of choreographic ontology is not simply replaced by a focus on relational praxis, but also by a focus on the results of this praxis in their emerging. Mesa's work therefore allows choreography's being and its characteristics to be envisaged without solely referring to physically-present entities and performed actions, but also to their relationality as happening. Once again, this relocation of choreographic ontology has historiographic importance; it seeks the choreographic beyond physical presences and practices, in the very unfolding of (com)position. In 1641, Saint-Hubert's list of necessary elements in a court ballet contained physically-present acts (dance, music) and material entities (costumes, machines), as well as dramaturgical aspects (subject, order) [Chapter 1].[60] These are *ingredients* of ballets, illustrating that in Saint-Hubert's context, ballet consisted of physically-instantiated acts and presences as much as the order of their composition; and that, as different as Saint-Hubert's focus on order may be from Mesa's evanescent emergence, they are both modes of unfolding relational choreography.

Conclusion

A word spoken, a fleeting image, a leg flying upward, a bright light turning blue, an object touched, a phrase written; Olga Mesa's *Solo a ciegas* allows a consideration of choreography that expands beyond the dancing/moving human body by re-aligning it with other media in a non-hierarchical relationship. Beyond a choreographic concern for the actions of the moving/dancing body and other media, however, the current analysis of Mesa's work identifies choreography as

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57   On the active, dynamic nature of assemblages see DeLanda : *Assemblage Theory*, as well as Laermans, who identifies a 'here-and-now or event-quality' in them: Laermans: *Moving Together*, p. 12.

58   Mesa: Interview.

59   Ibid.

60   Saint-Hubert: *La Manière de composer et faire réussir les ballets*, Genève: Minkoff 1993 [1641], p. 6.

a process of arranging relations between them. In this construal, choreography is characterised more by the act it operates – arranging, organising, ordering, relating – than by the types of objects – (non)corporeal, (non)physical, (non)kinetic – it applies to. Choreographic authorship is correspondingly modified and likened to other relational practices, placing it in an interdisciplinary position defined by common ways of *doing*.

A hungry kid, a woman-animal, a tango, a night of longing, a mission of resistance. In *Solo a ciegas*, the sounds, texts, film images, movements, and lights that are put in relation are intertwined with an arrangement of ideas, subjects, references, times, and places to form a portrait of war and childhood, loss and memory. The shift of choreography from material ontology to praxis of relational arrangement detaches it from a particular view of choreographic intermediality, and envisages it as a process of assembling narratives, subjects, and fleeting universes. As such, Mesa's choreography weaves a choreographic politics of memory, disruptive in its non-linearity, hybridised in its multiplicity, and critical in its open-endedness.

Intensity, texture, sharpness. Shifting choreographic attention to the creation of relations as potential objects of choreography, it is also possible to focus on how relations themselves are constituted beyond their poles as distinct entities or their additive effect. In this perspective, qualities that are attributes of the relations between the piece's materials are identifiable, beyond the qualities of those materials themselves. *Solo a ciegas* is composed of a body and sounds, of objects and texts, of film images and lights; it unfolds through an acting body, erupting sounds, changing lights, and moving images. But what it *is* can also be found in the interstitial, relational space, in the ambience-like, seemingly-fleeting-yet-persistent universe that develops in their between-ness. This development is an emergence, an event contingent upon the choreographic assemblage's distributed actions; it is an illustration of choreography's being beyond the materiality of its physically-present ingredients.

As a multimedia construction in which dance and the moving human body assume a non-hierarchical position – in horizontal coexistence with other media – Mesa's *Solo* reflects Saint-Hubert's non-solely-dance-centred vision of ballet [Chapter 1]. As a non-medium-specific assemblage resulting from a non-medium-specific relational praxis, the piece reflects *La Manière de composer*'s composite ballet spectacle and the interdisciplinary role of some of its practitioners. As a choreographic act of arrangement reaching beyond intermediality, Mesa's work reflects Saint-Hubert's ballet's dramaturgical links between non-linearly-related parts. As an event emerging from heterogeneous relations, *Solo a ciegas* reflects Saint-Hubert's focus on order and the subject as non-physical constituents of the ballet. Identifying these reflections may seem preposterous; viewing 17th-century ordered assemblages through a contemporary, Deleuzeian/

Guattarian choreographic-assemblages lens *is* preposterous. But, it is preposterous in Mieke Bal's sense of the term; [61] it is a historiographic act of purposefully putting "before" what came "after" to consider the relevance each may hold for the other. This relevance is the marker of common issues despite differential responses, thus pointing to the need for a macro-history of choreography that includes pre-modernist composite spectacle along with contemporary work that counters modernist influences. Contemporary Deleuzeian-Guattarian assemblages and 17th-century ordered assemblages are radically dissimilar – from Mesa's dispersed dramaturgy to Saint-Hubert's centralising subject; from Mesa's compositional open-ness to Saint-Hubert's compositional rules – but they are dissimilar *as choreographic assemblages*. It is in this framework – of a parallel choreographic history – that a comparison between them needs to be pursued.

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61   Bal, Mieke: *Quoting Caravaggio: Contemporary Art, Preposterous History*, Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press 1999.