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L.I.F.E.: ARTICULATING AN EMBEDDED CHOREOGRAPHIC PROCESS

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This paper explores the evolving landscape of choreographic research in South Africa, focusing on the interdisciplinary nature of contemporary choreography and its reliance on embodied knowledge. The paper examines the theory of tacit knowledge proposed by Michael Polanyi and its intersections with embodiment theories. It further investigates the four interpretations of tacit knowledge presented by Harald Grimen. The study documents the intuitive and implicit choreographic processes behind the creation of "L.I.F.E.: A History of Distance," a dance-based physical theatre performance. The presentation highlights the importance of understanding choreography as an embodied arts practice and emphasizes the interplay between explicit and tacit knowledge in the choreographer's creative process.

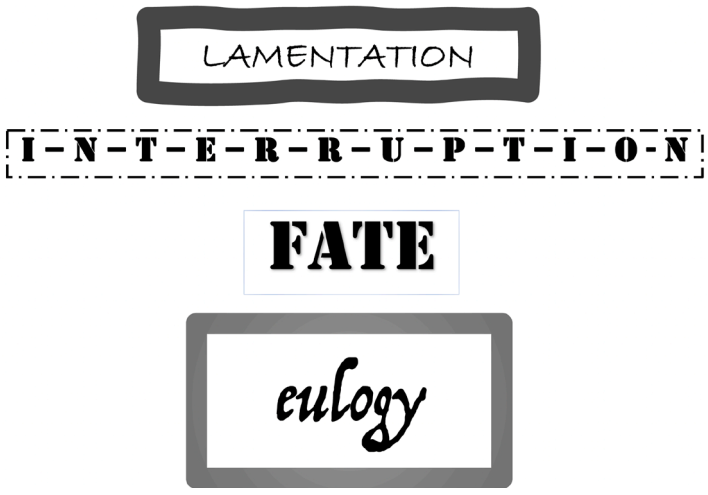
Prologue

> [The choreographer] stepped forward to explain to the audience what they had just witnessed, and the more she talked [...] the less you understood what she was saying. It wasn't because she was using technical terms that were unfamiliar to you, it was the more fundamental fact that her words were utterly useless, inadequate to the task of describing the wordless performance you had just seen, for no words could convey the fullness and brute physicality of what the dancer had done. (Auster 2013, 202)

Choreographic research in South Africa has evolved and grown significantly over the past few decades. Contemporary choreographers are constantly tasked with imagining new interpretations and approaches to their choreographic craft. Doing research into the processes embedded in choreographic practice becomes vital as it forges new conversations about and interrogations of *the art of choreography*.[1] Practitioner-researchers and artist-scholars are at the forefront of this research.

Friedman (2012, 7) suggests that 'dance makers [in South Africa] have been increasingly challenged to re-appraise how dance has been traditionally composed' and that both content and context should be considered when one approaches the choreographic process. This is the context in which this paper is situated. It can be argued that there are as many processes for making choreographies as there are choreographers and as many ways of creating embodied choreographies as there are interpretations of embodiment theories and approaches. This variability makes for a constantly evolving art form characterised by dynamic diversities and iterations, with contemporary choreographers drawing on many different evolving choreographic sources and methods.

This paper becomes exigent because *the art of choreography*, according to Green (2010, 4), is 'far more complex and defies boundaries,' whereas *to choreograph* is simply '[to arrange] movements to express an idea or concept.' My position is that, because of its 'complexity,' the art of choreography requires constant reconnaissance. It is an intuitive, embodied process that continually shapes and reveals unique approaches determined by the choreographer's interpretations of material from a myriad sources. The embodiedness of the process is at the centre of this paper. I endeavour to articulate the seemingly inarticulable nature of tacit knowledge, using the four interpretations of tacit knowledge proposed by Grimen (1991). The aim is to add to the growing field of artist-scholar choreographic research by documenting the intuitive, embedded or implicit choreographic processes that went into the making of *L.I.F.E.: A History of Distance* (Snyman 2017), the creative component of my PhD. *L.I.F.E.* is an acronym, with each letter representing a section of the choreographic work.



L.I.F.E. was constructed in four parts, each 20 minutes long. The four sections were woven together into a whole that was presented as a full-length dance-based physical theatre performance. This paper is structured according to the sections of the choreography. *Lamentation* reflects on the theoretical background of the research and offers a brief overview of Polanyi's (1958) theory of 'tacit knowledge.' *Interruption* introduces and interprets Polanyi's theory and its intersections with contemporary embodiment theories, while *Fate* discusses Harald Grimen's (1991) interpretations of Polanyi's theory and imagines each as a potential choreographic strategy in the making of *L.I.F.E.* Finally, *Eulogy* reflects on my embedded-implicit creative process and what it shares with the theory.

This paper considers choreography as an embodied arts practice that relies on 'inner sensing, imaginative response, and aesthetic shaping of the inner experience' (Blom and Chaplin 1982, xi). In my case, the practice includes interpretative choreographic strategies that emerge from my reading of Grimen.

Lamentation

There is a dearth of literature on choreographers' practice because choreography is widely seen as a 'form of inscription' or 'writing on the body' (Bannerman 2010, 474; Smith-Autard, 2010, 123). While there is a substantial literature on the importance of embodiment and the body as a fundamental source of inquiry in the humanities and social sciences (Featherstone and Turner 1995, 2), few scholars address the question of embodiment in the processes of creating choreographies.

When I was working with First Physical Theatre Company (FPTC) in 2006, I was part of Professor Juanita Finestone-Praeg's production of *16 Kinds of Emptiness* (*16*) for the National Arts Festival in Makhanda (then Grahamstown), South Africa. *16* was a Practice as Research (PaR) project, part of a series set up by university drama departments in consultation with the National Research Foundation. There was a call for case studies that presented an opportunity for South African practitioners to engage actively in 'shifting the status and perception of research in the performing arts within the academy and the profession' (Finestone-Praeg 2007, 203). In 2007 Finestone-Praeg published 'Reflective (A)Musings on 16 Kinds of Emptiness: Re-Framing Research for Practice.' The article is a personal reflection on her involvement as a practitioner within this research initiative.

The PaR project was one of the first of its kind in South Africa, marking a time when a more formalised approach to the making of South African physical theatre and dance was emerging. Gary Gordon (2010, 38), for instance, called for movement research as a way of bridging the 'gap between thought, passion and personal embodiment.'

In his magnum opus *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (1958), Michael Polanyi introduced the term 'Tacit Knowing' into philosophy. Central to Polanyi's thinking was the belief that creative acts (especially acts of discovery) are charged with strong personal feelings and commitments. Arguing against the then-dominant position that science was somehow value-free, Polanyi sought to bring into creative tension a concern with reasoned and critical interrogation with other, more implicit or 'tacit' forms of knowing.

Sheets-Johnstone (2018:13) argues that with the Industrial Revolution, human beings became more sedentary and in so doing lost a sense of kinaesthetic and intuitive movement. Movement is the first means of communication that we have, while language is 'post-kinetic' (Sheets-Johnstone 2018, 3). It is in this shift away from movement (kinetic) to language (linguistic) knowing that Polanyi's theory of tacit knowledge resides, reclaiming a space in which embodied ways of knowing can be acknowledged.

According to Frost (2010, n.p.), explicit and tacit knowledge are two distinct categories of knowledge. He describes them as follows: 'Tacit Knowledge is uncodified and frequently based on personal experience, whereas Explicit Knowledge refers to codified knowledge, such as that found in papers.' Davies (2001, n.p.), argues that explicit knowledge is knowledge that the knower is able to articulate verbally. Tacit knowledge, on the other hand, is characterised by Polanyi as the 'practice of a skill, the reading of a physiognomy, sensing and speculative skills […]. [I]n all our transactions with the world around us, we use our body as our instrument […]. It jointly interprets dozens of clues in our eyes, in our memories, in muscles of every kind and in the labyrinth inside our skull' (1967, 303).

If all knowledge is initially embodied, there must be a relationship of dynamic interdependence between explicit and tacit knowledge (Brohm 2005, 14). For Krieger (2005, 351), embodiment is by definition a 'multilevel phenomenon, as it necessarily entails the interplay between bodies, components of bodies, and the world(s) in which the bodies live.' In this regard, it is fundamental to understand that individuals simultaneously 'have a body, are a body, and become a body' (Haskins 2015, 21). It may then be argued that the choreographer's body has a knowledge of its own. In the practice of his or her art, the choreographer responds to and articulates the lived knowledge of tacit experience. That is, the choreographer's body of knowledge is intuitively transferred and interpreted in the choreographic process. The explicit articulation of the choreography comes *from*, resides in and is interpreted *through* the choreographer's body.

The idea of the interpreting body suggests that experiences, thoughts and feelings are located within the body and inscribed in creative choreographic processes. Damasio (2012, 20) claims that the body is the root of the conscious mind and suggests that we need our bodies in order to feel and think. The mysterious interplay suggested here is articulated by choreographer Anna Halprin (1969, 50) and Klein (2007), who defines choreography as a 'creative act of setting the conditions for things to happen, the choreographer as the navigator, negotiator, and architect of a fluid environment that he/she himself, herself is part of' (1082).

Michael Polanyi's *Personal Knowledge* (1958) is open to many permutations of interpretation. This paper focuses on four interpretations of Michael Polanyi's philosophy proposed by Harald Grimen (1991). The Grimen interpretations explore new potentialities for contemporary choreographic strategies through creating and crafting embodied, dance-based physical theatre work.

Interruption

In 1991 Harald Grimen[2] drafted a working paper titled *Taus Kunnskap og organisasjonsstudier* (1991) that is discussed in detail in Zhenhua's article *Tacit Knowledge/ Knowing and the Problem of Articulation* (2003). Zhenhua (2003,11) notes that much has been written about the concept of tacit knowledge by scholars from several philosophical traditions – phenomenological, hermeneutical, Wittgensteinian and Polanyian. Zhenhua's immediate concern, however, lies with the problematics of the articulation of tacit knowledge. Zhenhua refers to the Norwegian philosopher Kjell S. Johannessen (2003, 11), who argues that 'knowledge and language are woven together in an indissoluble bond […].[T]he requirement that knowledge should have a linguistic articulation becomes an unconditional demand.' This 'unconditional demand' was what Polanyi contested in highlighting the importance of pre-linguistic, implicit understanding or tacit knowledge. Zhenhua (2003, 12–13) then goes on to unpack Grimen's four interpretations of Polyani's concept of tacit knowledge.

The Thesis of Under-Articulation

According to Zhenhua (2003, 12) the first interpretation of tacit knowledge that Grimen articulates can be called the *thesis of conscious under-articulation*. In this view, tacit knowledge is something that we consciously attempt to conceal, to avoid articulating it or to under-articulate it. For instance, in marriage or political compromise, it is wise for the partners not to voice all they know about each other. This conscious under-articulation helps maintain a good relationship in marriage or politics, which might well collapse in the event of over-articulation. In this sense, the un-articulation or under-articulation of what one knows is tacit because nobody talks about it.

This interpretation of tacit knowledge, according to Zhenhua, is more of sociological than epistemological interest. Yet in my view, it remains relevant to aspects of choreographic strategy.

Key concepts:

- Conscious under-articulation/choices
- Concealment
- Mutual understandings

The Gestalt Thesis

The second interpretation of tacit knowledge put forward by Grimen is the *Gestalt thesis of tacit knowledge*. Zhenhua (2003, 12) suggests that when one is engaged in a certain activity, like playing the piano, riding a bicycle, swimming, etc., one has to rely unproblematically on a certain background without which the activity cannot be fluently carried on. If one focuses on the background and tries to describe it in words, the act of articulation will obstruct the performance of the activity. Zhenhua (2003, 12) argues that the knowledge that we have of this 'unproblematic background' is a kind of tacit knowledge. This does not mean that the knowledge cannot be verbalised, just that it cannot be while we are performing the activity. In Grimen's view, this interpretation of tacit knowledge is clearly influenced by Gestalt psychology, so he calls it the 'Gestalt thesis of tacit knowledge' (Zhenhua 2003, 12).

I also turned to Gestalt therapy because of its concern with embodiment. Sabar suggests that 'Gestalt Therapy has a strong focus on embodiment' and is about seeing 'where the resistances to free-flowing expression of movement and energy in the body lie' (2013, 6). The therapy is interested in how we create and hold the conflicts within our bodies. The strategy is to discover how the six principles of Gestalt psychology can expose the conflicts within the body to generate an embodied experience for the participants, in an overall perspective of flow and anti-flow. The six principles of Gestalt psychology are figure/ground, similarity, proximity, continuity, closure and symmetry or order. In conceptualising the choreographic strategy for this section of the work I imaginatively invoked these principles.

Key concepts:

- Problem solving
- Bodily sensations
- Lived experience
- Perception
- Reflection

The Thesis of Epistemic Regionalism

The third interpretation can be characterised as *the thesis of epistemic regionalism*. Zhenhua (2003, 12) suggests that 'all the knowledge that one has, constitutes a vast, loosely knit and non-perspicuous system.' We cannot reflect on or articulate the whole system all at once: what we do is focus on smaller parts and articulate those. In this sense, we are all regionalists.

Epistemic regionalism recognises that knowledge is not universal and objective but rather shaped by social, cultural and historical contexts. This means that the knowledge that is produced, applied, learnt or experienced in one context may not be directly applicable or transferable to another context. For Polanyi, according to Grimen (1991), this means that tacit knowledge is not necessarily transferable because the specific factors that shape the acquisition and application of tacit knowledge may differ from one context to another. Accordingly, while no specific elements of knowledge are in principle inarticulable, the knowledge that we can articulate at any given moment is limited: '[t]here is no unifying perspective from which we can verbally articulate at the same time all the knowledge that we possess' (Zhenhua 2003, 13).

Key concepts:

- Regions
- Non-perspicuous
- Limited articulation

The Strong Thesis of Tacit Knowledge

The fourth interpretation Grimen (1991) labels *the strong thesis of tacit knowledge*: '[f]rom this perspective, there are specific kinds of knowledge that are in principle verbally unarticulatable [sic], which means that there exists a logical gap between our capacity for cognition, experience and action, on the one hand, and our capacity for verbal articulation, on the other' (Zhenhua 2003, 13). The knowledge that is in principle inarticulable is tacit knowledge. Zhenhua (2003, 13) argues that for Grimen this interpretation of tacit knowledge is more profound than the Gestalt thesis of tacit knowledge and the thesis of epistemic regionalism because neither claims that there are specific kinds of knowledge that are in principle inarticulable. Grimen posits that tacit knowledge in this strong sense does indeed exist: the knowledge of sense qualities, the knowledge of the identity of a gestalt, and the knowledge of the choreography of an action are all extremely difficult to verbalise.

To talk about tacit knowledge in this context does not mean that language is unnecessary but rather that language is inadequate for the tasks of obtaining and transferring such knowledge. This perspective highlights the logical gap between knowledge and language and affirms the existence of certain kinds of knowledge that can rarely be suitably put into words.

Key concepts:

- Body Articulations
- Language beyond words
- Lived experience

Fate

The next phase of the project led me into the studio to commence the choreographic process. A workable choreographic strategy was devised for each of the key concepts that emerged from my intuitive interpretations of Grimen, as described in the previous section. These will all be discussed in due course.

According to Kraaijenbrink (2019, 28), actions do indeed speak louder than words. Theory has its place, but experience is indispensable. It is through strategy and execution together that one gains clarity, solidifies priorities, creates engagement, achieves quantifiable results, and moves one step closer to realising one's vision. Strategies are fluid and evolving and no one strategy defines the tacit nature of the practice. Kraaijenbrink (2019, 30) suggests that true strategy appears implicitly in what we do – our processes, actions and routines. The challenge lies in making the strategy explicit by 'moving from the strategy concept towards the strategy execution' (Kraaijenbrink 2019, 31).

The Thesis of Under-Articulation

In this view, tacit knowledge is something that we consciously attempt to conceal, to avoid articulating or to under-articulate it. As a strategy within a choreographic framework, this interpretation becomes an interesting route to discovery for the choreographer and the performers. There are at least two ways of achieving this thesis within the choreographic process.

First, the choreographer may interpret the thesis from the point of view of 'keeping the performers in the dark' about some, if not all, of the processes, themes or journeys in the choreography.

Secondly, under-articulation can be a device for uncovering the emerging narrative of the work as well as the process of generating an embodied choreography.

The strategy for this section was one of intentional concealment and limited transparency in the creative process. Withholding knowledge of the choreographic work and process from the participants was intended to preserve elements of surprise, spontaneity and mystery. Consciously concealing themes, structures and titles served to create a sense of opacity and open-endedness during the process, allowing for multiple interpretations and engaging the participants in a more authentic way.

Concealing specific information from the participants became a way to encourage them to focus on their own individual roles and responsibilities, without being distracted by what others were doing. The strategy resulted in unpredictability, as the participants did not know exactly what to expect from their fellow participants, which resulted in a heightening of intuitive response.

One participant wrote the following about the process:

> I don't even know what happened but it was amazing. Even though we had not said a word, it felt like we had this incredible sense of group coherence, as if it was all 'planned out'. Interactions felt and appeared so real – so honest, so vulnerable.

One of the tasks developed from this strategy was: *The Letter L as Inspiration*.

At the first rehearsal, I asked the participants to think about the letter L, and how it can be represented through movement. They were then asked to write a list of words that start with the letter L – as many words as they could think of in one minute. The time limit was introduced to prevent them from overthinking or trying to think of the most evocative or expressive words. This encouraged them not to focus on what they thought I might be looking for but rather to respond spontaneously.

These responses were journaled and used as a starting point to develop an L-shaped movement vocabulary. This intention was to allow the participants to settle into the process through the body as opposed to focusing immediately on the expression and performance of the movement. Below are two examples of what the participants wrote.

Participant 1 wrote:

LoveLive	
Learn	Lazy
Laugh	Light
Leave	Lame
Look	Linger
Listen	Lose

Participant 2 wrote:

Loss Lament	
Lost	Liquid
Lover	Live
Law	Love
Limp	Longing

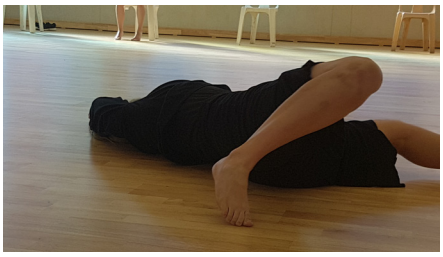


Figure 1: Participant exploring with the letter L on the floor.[3]



Figure 2: Two participants exploring the letter L together.

Next the participants were asked to experiment with different shapes and positions that resemble the letter L, such as a bent arm or leg, a diagonal line, or an L-shaped formation with the body.

Participants could choose to work alone or, if they gravitated towards another body, to explore with that body. This was all an attempt to provide shaping not only for the bodies in the work but also as possibilities for staging through floor patterns.

Although in the same space as each other, the participants were encouraged not to speak about what they were doing but rather to observe in silence how the other bodies were shaping, and explore how their shaping corresponded to, mirrored or contrasted with the others in the studio.

This initial task was purely focused on the shape of the letter in both upper and lower case. The concentration on shape, the body in space, was a point of departure to avoid delving too deeply or too quickly into emotional interpretation and making meaning.

I am a firm believer that meaning resides in the movements that we make and that we should not always approach movement from an emotional centre. The source material was thus deliberately withheld from the participants as per the choreographic strategy that emerged. This – the conscious under-articulation – made possible an entry point into the creative process that would not be enmeshed in emotional and interpretative over-analysis. I was hoping that the participants would respond intuitively, and I could gently immerse them in the process through body shaping.

The thesis of under-articulation became a choreographic strategy in the making of *L.I.F.E.: A History of Distance* (2017). It caused two things to happen in the studio. First, the performers became less self-conscious about meeting my brief for a specific section of the work, as they were encouraged to focus primarily on their own interpretations of the set task without being restricted by any notion of 'getting things right.' Secondly, it enabled an 'authenticity' of embodied experience to emerge from the performers creating movement. This in turn assisted me as a choreographer to unearth a variety of narratives and choreographic structures that may not have come to creative fruition if I had relied only on my own intuition.

Gestalt Thesis of Tacit Knowledge

Woodward (2013:283) argues that Gestalt psychologists emphasised the study of consciousness, like structuralist psychologists who used controlled introspection in sensory experiments. However, their insight was that both perceived forms (Gestalten) and the experienced world are already structured wholes.

Gestalt theorists followed the basic principle that 'the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.'[4] What this means is that the whole (a picture, a car, a moving image or series of images in a choreography) carries a different and altogether greater meaning than its components (paint, canvas, brush, movement, body shape, movement phrases). It is argued that a view of the whole enables cognitive understanding to take place. The human mind is conditioned to make meaning from images and thus reconfigures and reimagines the parts that are presented visually into an understanding of a whole. Visually and psychologically, we attempt to make order out of chaos, to create harmony or structure from seemingly disconnected bits of information.



Figure 3: Participants frozen waiting for their partners to unfreeze them



Figure 4: Partnering with a frozen body

As a choreographic strategy, this thesis can be construed in several ways: first, as choreographer, I am confronted with different bodies (parts) and am tasked with making sense of them together (whole); secondly, the structural parts of the choreographic work may be seen as parts that when viewed together become a functioning whole; and thirdly, within each part of the choreography, there are parts that form a whole section of choreography.

For the Gestalt thesis to become workable as a choreographic strategy, I turned to Gestalt Therapy. I focussed on working with the idea of conflict within the body and the group by removing the free flow of movement and the organic transferences of weight and transition within partnering work and patterns. The participants were tasked with creating a series of duets and trios, with the idea that one or more partners would remain 'frozen,' to unearth the possibilities of creating an embodied partnering moment through the seemingly dis-embodied task.

One of the tasks created for this section is called: *Freeze/Unfreeze*.

The primary focus of this task was the Gestalt principle of closure. In typical partnering encounters, participants would be encouraged to work carefully with flow and weight distribution. This task disrupts those principles. The participants were divided into pairs and labelled A and B. Partner A freezes in a position and Partner B attempts to move them. Partner A resists as much as possible. Once Partner B is able to move Partner A then Partner A moves to another point in the space and freezes again. The task was repeated until a series of freeze/unfreeze images had been generated.

In this first task, I was intrigued by what would happen if I removed the organic sense of flow and weight transference from a duet. Throughout my training and professional life the focus had always been on giving and receiving weight equally and on working carefully with a partner in order to find an organic sense of flow. What if I remove the flow? What if I remove the organic? How would this translate using Gestalt principles into a sense of closure, into a sense of similarity? Would I as the choreographer still discern a sense of organic partnership and relationship in the duet, or would I simply be observing the task?

The purpose of this task was to explore the concept of closure in partnering encounters, with participants engaging in a series of freeze/unfreeze images and creating frozen duets and trios. The task involved the partners entering a process of negotiation and establishing a working relationship, with a focus on the static body and the principle of figure/ground.

The participants were then asked to shift their focus to the person/people trying to unfreeze the frozen, creating a contrast between flow and anti-flow that was then used in the structuring of the section. The task provided a creative and engaging encounter for the participants as they explored the dynamics of partnering and the concept of closure through physical movement and negotiation. The use of freeze/unfreeze images and the focus on figure/ground principles created an unusual perspective on the duet. As I was watching the participants perform the task, I was willing them on internally, knowing what the struggle to move a body must feel like and in so doing, awareness of my own body became part of the encounter observed.

The Gestalt principles had moved beyond visual perception and become a bodily perception. This became what I can only refer to as external proprioception. Proprioception, according to Barlow (2018, 38), refers to one's awareness of one's body position and movement in space, one's ability to sense and understand the orientation, movement, and position of one's body parts without relying on visual or auditory feedback. Observing the frozen partnering, I could sense what should have been happening and intuitively access the conflict that the partner who was attempting to unfreeze was feeling. This accentuated the engagement of my mirror neurons, the neurons that play a crucial role in the understanding of others' actions, intentions, and emotions (Caramazza et al. 2014, 2–4). It is thought that mirror neurons are integral to the process of imitation and learning, as they allow individuals to replicate observed movements and behaviours.

It became clear that the task I had generated from the choreographic strategy had moved beyond the visual and became a bodily story for me as observer.

The Thesis of Epistemic Regionalism

The thesis of epistemic regionalism suggests that at any given moment, one can only reflect on small parts of one's knowledge system and verbalise them. In the present context, this means that the choreographer and the performers have to be engaged in continuous reflection on and articulation of ideas and processes. The choreographer has to understand that 'too much information' would be a source of overload that could result in the performers not being able to engage with specific tasks, ideas, narratives, etc. effectively. If we try to consider all that is happening all at once, we might muddle the connections between the myriad processes and embodied possibilities of the choreographic work.

It is thus vital for the choreographer to develop a series of regions to continue the creative process in the studio: to focus on these smaller regions in relation to each other and allow the interpretative ability of the performers to connect them together and articulate the connections. These regions comprise many elements of the choreography and the choreographic process: movement phrases, intent, narratives, themes and motifs.

The *thesis of epistemic regionalism* necessitates continuous reflection and articulation. There will always be more regions to uncover and consider in relation to each other depending on the perspective that the choreographer and performers bring to bear. While no specific elements of knowledge are in principle inarticulable, we simply cannot articulate at the same time all the knowledge that we possess.

In the first rehearsal for this section of the exploration, I devised and taught the participants a phrase of movement. This task was called *Fate*. The phrase was inspired by a passage I had written myself:

> Once there was a man who lived his life with an intense fear of death. He spent his days in a constant state of anxiety, always searching for ways to outrun the inevitable end that he knew was coming.

His body was tired.

In that moment, the man realised the futility of his quest. He saw that his fear of death had consumed his entire life, preventing him from truly living and experiencing the beauty and wonder of the world around him. And in his final moments, the man wept for all the years he had lost, and for all the beauty he had failed to see.

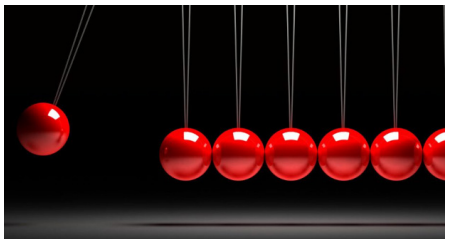


Figure 5: Newton's third law of motion.[5]

I generated a movement phrase from the above. The reason for teaching the participants a phrase of movement, instead of having them respond through movement, was to capture my subjective experience and sense of motion in their bodies. The purpose of their finding their 'stories' within my 'story' was to take some pressure off them and get them to focus on one idea from a kinetic point of view. What they would perform would then be predetermined, as though fate's hand were guiding them forward. I would have a heavy hand in the crafting of this moment.

Epistemic regionalism accentuates how knowledge is a collection of a series of events, traditions and ideas accumulated over time. Each event builds on the next: every action has a reaction, like the ripples of water when you drop a pebble into a pond. Working with this in mind I used 'accumulation' as a crafting device to build the beginning of the section. All the participants performed the same phrase, and because the focus was the accumulation and regionalism of the movement (the smaller parts of each moment within the phrase), they executed it as a group.

Next, I presented the participants with an image that depicts Newton's Third Law of Motion (Action/Reaction). Unusually, we discussed the image as a group so as to bring together various interpretations of the image and how it relates to the idea of fate. Even though we discussed the concept of fate, it was never made explicit that this is what the section was titled or how it related to the work as a whole.

The participants were tasked with finding their own link between the image and the experience of the accumulated phrase. Even though we react differently to situations, we are all part of a system where every action results in an equal, yet opposite, reaction. But because we are all part of the same system, we actually do have similar reactions and experiences. We cannot always articulate the similarity because our focus is limited by the vagueness of what binds us together. This task aimed to find common ground and connections between seemingly disparate or conflicting ideas, to synthesise them into a more cohesive understanding.

The emphasis in this task remained on the movement and execution of the movement as opposed to starting from a place of emotional or personal response. Accepting fatalism allows the bodies to execute the journey of the movement. From a conceptual standpoint, this also provides a clear contrast between the self's conflict and resistance to death and the hand of fate guiding the self towards an inevitable conclusion.

The Strong Thesis of Tacit Knowledge

In this perspective, there are indeed specific kinds of knowledge that are inarticulable, which means that there is a logical gap between our capacity for cognition, experience and action, on the one hand, and our capacity for verbalisation, on the other. Adopted as a strategy for choreography, it prompts the choreographer to approach the choreography through a series of tasks that elicit movement and dance responses that may not have been achieved if they had first been verbalised. Allowing the performers to respond from their lived experience and to articulate the seemingly inarticulable through the body results in an embodied response that is

individual and unique to each performer, yet still framed by the intent of the choreographer. The notion of tacit knowledge must be invoked because language is not sufficient for obtaining and transferring the kind of knowledge in question.

To generate a movement language and performance response for this section I decided to only include one task. The task is a collection of ideas and reminiscences, in a way like a eulogy. I only wanted one task so that I could give the participants highly specific guidance. The primary objective was to have each participant develop a gesture or movement that represented *a last breath*.



Figure 6: Participants exploring final breath gestures

I wanted to explore the concept of mortality and its impact on movement and emotion. Firstly, I had the participants stand in a circle. I asked the participants to close their eyes and imagine that they were facing their mortality (it could be represented as a figure, an abstract form, a shape, a colour, or a god). They were then asked to explore this visualisation through movement. This choreography task is meant to involve a personal exploration of their emotions and responses to the idea of their mortality, inviting them to be vulnerable and honest in their physical responses as no one else would know what they were feeling or expressing. The movement could be a subtle gesture or a larger movement depending on their expression and experience. I encouraged them to allow their body to express what they were feeling and to think about how they would respond to the news of their own death. Would you fight it, accept it, or try to change it?

I then asked them to consider how they would want to be remembered after they are gone. Would you want people to remember you as a fighter, someone who never gave up, or someone who accepted their fate with grace and dignity? Let your final movements reflect your desired legacy.

The first participant was instructed to go and select a point in the space that carried significance for her in relation to the journey that she had been on since the beginning of *Lamentation*. The other participants would approach where she was and would one by one pick up on her movement or gesture.

When they felt that they had made enough of a statement with the gesture they would break off and move to another point in the space – one at a time. The next participant would then respond with a movement of their own that built on the first movement, either by mirroring, contrasting, or elaborating on it. This call-and-response pattern continued until each participant had had a turn to initiate a movement and respond to a movement. The participants were encouraged to respond to each other's movements in real time, as it were, without anticipating or planning their responses.

This ritual of repetition focused on intuitive emotional responses. The idea was that with each iteration of the rehearsal process, and even in performance, the gestures would be entirely spontaneous. Each response was thus inarticulable, something that each participant did without knowing why they did it: something intangible and ephemeral.

According to Grimen's terminology, the concept of articulation covers more than just language. Besides verbal articulation, we have other modes of articulation, such as, for instance, action. In this choreographic strategy, the body and its movements become the language of the work, which requires the choreographer to embrace the articulation of the body as an expression inarticulable in words.

Eulogy

Grimen holds that action as a mode of articulation is as fundamental as language. Tacit knowledge that cannot be fully articulated in words can be articulated in ac-

tion. The theory of tacit knowledge thus enhances our sensitivity to non-verbal modes of articulation.

Using my practical experience in tandem with an academic study, this paper provides insights into my choreographic processes. One of the key features of practitioner knowledge is that it is often context specific. After 25 years of practice, I have developed certain skills and preferences in my creative work and the way in which I approach choreography.

This work and process is a culmination of my life as an academic, choreographer and performer. As a creative person, I have always trusted my gut and intuition in the making of work. Here, for the first time, I had actively to consider what I was doing in a theoretically meaningful way.

Epilogue

I approached this research to document and articulate my own attitudes and practice in respect of embodiment, to uncover my own embedded or implicit approach to choreography by engaging with some aspects of the philosophy of embodiment. Perhaps my inquiry stemmed from my own inability to always immerse myself completely in performance, while always expecting this from my participants.

As the process unfolded I reflected on how I would be able to get my participants to engage with existential concepts and the fact of their mortality through *L.I.F.E.* This involved contemplating my own biases and problematics to uncover something meaningful about my creative process. The journey of this theoretical and creative work helped to elucidate something that I thought I knew but did not know how I knew it, or even precisely what it was that I knew.

L.I.F.E. is a culmination of my experiences as a performer, researcher and human being, trying to decipher how my life's journey has affected me creatively, what it is that I have learnt along my journey and what it is that I 'do.' In 2017 I set out to make *L.I.F.E.* to reflect not only the theoretical framework I had devised but also the work that I had made in the past to try and understand myself and how my research and my talent might move my work in a new direction.

L.I.F.E. is in effect my own living eulogy, my reflection on my time spent with others and this research, the result of sustained introspection and re-evaluation of who I am, what I have accomplished and who and what I would regret 'missing' if I were to leave now. I return from that place of introspection and emerge as me. I am what I know and as a choreographing, sentient being, I can only return to myself, find my story in others and project this self to an audience through the kinaesthetic form of expression that is dance. I realise that I often doubt my ability and doubt the implicit, intuitive process at play. The 'reflective cycle' served to illuminate my intuitive responses and helped me to understand the underlying values and motivations that shape my choices.

In sum, the heart of this research was my choreographic intuition and seeking a means to articulate it. It was perhaps inevitable that I would focus on the journey of my life and my creative process. Sometimes I wondered whether the research would produce something fresh and exciting for me or whether I would fall into old patterns and habitual modes of doing and being. The story of my life in the past few years, up to this point in 2023, has vindicated the autoethnographic project of the research in respect of my approach toward embodiment in choreography. Perhaps I am a little closer to understanding what it means to choreograph a life.

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Notes

1 The phrase *the art of choreography* is attributed to Green (2010) and is used repeatedly in this paper.

2 Harald Grimen 'Taus Kunnskap og organisasjonsstudier' ('Tacit Knowledge and the Study of Organisation,') LOS-Center, working paper, Bergen, 1991. The original text is in Norwegian. The English translation was first prepared by Bjoern Wikner, then improved by Judith Lasen and finally approved by Harald Grimen. Unfortunately, Harald Grimen passed away in 2007 and according to his colleague Judith Lasen at Bergen University there is no longer a copy of the working paper available. This research paper therefore makes use of Yu Zhenhua's (2003) discussion of Grimen's working paper

3 All photographs by Westley Smith (2017).

4 http://facweb.cs.depaul.edu/sgrais/gestalt_principles.htm

5 https://www.lbbonline.com/news/newtons-third-law-of-advertising-for-every-action-a-creative-reaction