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PATHWAYS TOWARDS EMBODIED TECHNIQUE: DISRUPTING REPRESENTATIONALISM IN SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEMPORARY DANCE PRAXIS

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Thesis and creative work submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Wits School of Arts

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Supervised by Prof Fred Hagemann, Prof David Andrew and Dr Alan Parker

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PLAGIARISM DECLARATION

I declare that this submission is my own work unless specifically stated otherwise in the text. It is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the PhD in the Faculty of Humanities, Wits School of Arts, University of the Witwatersrand and has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university in South Africa or abroad.



Kristina Johnstone

ABSTRACT

This thesis and cartography form part of an artistic research project that seeks to disrupt representationalism in South African contemporary dance praxis. The study argues that discursive methodologies risk recrafting colonial scripts and tether contemporary dance practices within a framework that perceives such practices as responses to the aesthetics and practices of Western theatre dance. To open up the possibility for an alternative logic, the study proposes a shift from representation and spectatorial methodologies to the embodied practices that circulate across the bodies of practitioners (Spatz, 2020:98-99) in experimentation, performances and workshops. By tracing the pathways toward embodied technique in my own artistic work, which includes a series of contemporary dance works and performance projects created in 2017 and 2018, the study positions contemporary dance practices as epistemic. The writing and assemblages of research documents that form the thesis and the cartography search for ways in which the dances propose repeatable and transmissible instances of embodied technique that contribute towards decolonising notions of embodiment, dance technique, choreography and training. The study troubles representationalism as a framework that upholds hegemonic structures of knowledge and offers the notion that when contemporary dance practice is conceptualised as embodied research, it may become part of a decolonial praxis. By turning towards practices as knowledge-generating and ways of knowing, the study proposes that a decolonial choreographic praxis is structured by technique that is aesthetic and ethico-political, traces and questions orientations towards whiteness, humanism and universalism, and offers a logic outside of representation. Chapters One and Two contextualise the main research questions and the theoretical framework of the study. Chapters Three and Four re-visit and re-iterate the creation of three dance works: *Monsters and Fossils* (2017), *Extreme Subjectivities* (2018) and *Before Naming* (2018). Chapter Five concludes the study.

The cartography (*See Appendix for access details*) is an integral component of the study that draws attention to its non-linearity and exposes the deep structure of embodied research. The

cartography and thesis are intended to be read through one another. Hyperlinks are provided throughout the thesis, and the full thesis can be accessed through the cartography[1].

[1] The boundaries between the thesis and cartography are porous. This means that some of the writing is shared across these two research documents. I also draw from my own previously published articles and conference papers that form part of this research process. All such sources have been acknowledged.

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CHAPTER ONE: MAP

Context

This study is an artistic research project that traces the pathways of embodied practice in the making and performance of a series of dance works and projects: *Assembly* (2017), *New Dance Lab* (2017), *Monsters and Fossils* (2017), *Any Body Dance Lab* (2018), *Extreme Subjectivities* (2018), *Before Naming* (2018-2019) and *All At Once (2018)*. As an embodied researcher in the field of dance and choreography, I set out to make this series of works with the aim of interrogating my own practice which is in search of decolonial approaches to dance-making and teaching. While the questions that I ask are the result of having worked in contemporary dance communities as a researcher, choreographer, performer and teacher in both South Africa and Uganda, I locate this study in the field of South African dance studies, and as such, my aim is to speak back to this field and contribute to ways of writing and talking about dance that disrupt hegemonic and colonial knowledge structures. I focus specifically on representation and representationalism as frameworks that uphold and perpetuate hegemonic structures of knowledge and propose that when choreography is conceptualised as embodied research, it may become part of a decolonial praxis.

Decoloniality, explains Sabelo J Ndlovu-Gatsheni, "is not a singular theoretical school of thought, but a family of diverse positions that share a view of coloniality as the fundamental problem in the modern age" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013:15). As I explore more deeply in Chapter Two, decoloniality is not synonymous with decolonisation, which refers to political liberation. Rather, decoloniality signals a search for "epistemological alterity", as argued by Ramón Grosfoguel (2011:n.p.), and the undoing of coloniality's hegemonic discourses that question "the humanity of all those who do not belong to the locus of enunciation (and the geo-politics of knowledge) of those who assign the standard of classification and assign to themselves the right to classify" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013:13). My own questioning of such discourses is influenced by my positionality as a child of a white mother and coloured father[2], and having

[2] These race categories refer to inherited Apartheid terms that continue to form part of South African discourses of identity. Although approaches vary, these terms are uncapitalised in this writing unless used otherwise in the text of another author. Moreover, it needs to be acknowledged that the term 'coloured' and the notion of 'coloured identities' are complex and contested as seen in, for example, the work of Erasmus (2001;2017) and Adhikari (2009).

been classified as coloured through the patriarchal emphasis that characterised Apartheid classification practices (Reddy, 2001:75). Thiven Reddy writes that "contradictorily, the very notion of 'impure', 'mixed', 'the borderline', 'the unclassifiable', 'the doubtful' people/category, represented by 'Coloured', functions as both the extreme Other of dominant racial discourse in South Africa, and also as its very ambivalent core" (Reddy, 2001:68). This ambivalence is a place from which to trouble conceptual frameworks that rely on fixed identity categories, including essentialised notions of race, that have been and continue to be used in both dominant and resisting discourses (Reddy, 2001:67). For me as an artist-researcher, disrupting representation and representationalism is a way to challenge fixed identity categories, and in the words of Zimitri Erasmus, "call for a new politics premised not on 'who we are' but on 'what we do' with 'who we are'" (Erasmus, 2001:25).

For this study, representation refers to the notion that language, or in this case dance, makes use of a system of signs that represent or stand in for things or ideas. According to Karen Barad, representationalism then, is "the belief in the ontological distinction between representations and that which they purport to represent … that is, there are assumed to be two distinct and independent kinds of entities – representations and entities to be represented" (Barad, 2003:804). Observing that representationalism has received significant challenges from feminists, poststructuralists, postcolonial critics, and queer theorists, Barad problematises representation as an over-reliance on language and other forms of cultural representation as an accurate mirror of what is being represented (Barad, 2003:804). The starting point for this study then, is the suggestion that representation and representationalism maintain a significant hold on the discourse of contemporary dance and choreography in South Africa, and that the dominant mode of analysing dance relies on dance viewed as text and the dancing body as discursive. I critique this representationalist framework to open up an alternative logic for choreography as practice and as embodied research. Drawing from Ben Spatz (2015; 2020), I propose that a focus on choreography as embodied practice and research draws attention to how this practice is "structured as much by knowledge as by habit" (Spatz, 2020:250). This offers an opportunity to disrupt colonial knowledge hierarchies and serve decolonial approaches in dance.

Problematising dance as text and body as discourse: representation and representationalism

As mentioned above, the starting point for my inquiry is to take up Barad's suggestion that representationalism should be problematised as an "over-reliance" on language (Barad, 2003:804). My suggestion is that in the discourse of contemporary dance and choreography in South Africa, the dominant mode of analysis relies on poststructuralist approaches that view dance as text and the dancing body as discursive. Dance Studies as an academic field, not only in South Africa, has relied heavily on Foucauldian theories of the body and subjectivity in developing discourses on power, gender and sexuality for choreographic analysis (Ness, 2011:19). Discussing cultural division in the context of South African dance, Clare Craighead, for example, writes: "the body is discourse" (Craighead, 2006:28). Lliane Loots similarly explores "the dancing body as discourse and therefore a site of power struggle for meaning in South African contemporary dance theatre" (Loots, 2012:54). Loots further argues for "the notion that the body, especially in dance, is a form of language in that it inscribes power and transmits implicit value systems and modes of behaviour and that these bodily discourses usually carry both gender and race constructions" (Loots, 2018:99). The politics of the body play a central role in the making and performing of, and writing about contemporary dance in South Africa. Gerard Samuel states that "it could be argued that in no other colonised country were dancing bodies more destructively subjected to disempowerment and disembodied than in Apartheid South Africa" (Samuel, 2011:41). Loots, who draws from the poststructuralist theories of Michel Foucault and Judith Butler, uses the phrase "voicing the unspoken" to describe some of the key concerns of contemporary theatre dance in South Africa (Loots, 2012:51). "Voicing the unspoken,"[3] writes Loots, "implies a host of issues relating to power and how we have constructed our (dancing) histories to either support or subvert historical power operations in our South African society, past and present" (Loots, 2012:54). Loots questions romanticised notions of interculturalism in South African dance and emphasises the importance of challenging contemporary dance training and creation methods as well as which bodies are made visible in dance. Her writing resonates with some of Peggy Phelan's

[3] Voicing the unspoken resonates with Boaventura de Sousa Santos' (2017) understanding of a "sociology of absences" in the context of epistemologies of the South. Santos explains that a sociology of absences engages the retrieval of "suppressed, silenced, and marginalised knowledges" (Santos, 2017:166).

(1993) arguments around the problematics of representation. In her seminal work, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (1993), Phelan "examines the implicit assumptions about the connections between representational visibility and political power which have been a dominant force in cultural theory" (Phelan, 1993:1). Phelan writes that "in framing more and more images of the hitherto underrepresented other, contemporary culture finds a way to name, and thus to arrest and fix, the image of that other" (Phelan, 1993:2). She further explains that since it "always conveys more than it intends" and "is never totalising," representation creates "an excess" or "a supplement that makes multiple resistant readings possible" (Phelan, 1993:2). As a result, "close readings of representation can produce psychic resistance, and possibly, political change" (Phelan, 1993:2). Loots' reading of the dancing body in South African contemporary dance as a site of power struggle echoes this argument. However, I suggest that remaining in a discursive domain, in other words, figuring the body as discourse and dance as text, limits the extent to which hegemonic knowledge structures may be troubled. Writing from a Social Studies perspective, Torkild Thanem and David Knights argue that while discourse analysis is a valuable tool to examine "how the body is constructed, subjectified and ordered through linguistic utterances and institutional practices," there is nonetheless much at stake in relying on only discursive and constructionist approaches (Thanem & Knights, 2019b:12). With reference to Dance Studies, Ness argues that "The replacement of a phenomenological with a thoroughly historicised subjectivity forecloses inquiry into the more radically, creative, emergent (and even liberatory and agentive) forms of danced experience and intelligence" (Ness, 2011:23).

Barad proposes "performative alternatives to representationalism" to shift "the focus from questions of correspondence between descriptions and reality (e.g., do they mirror nature or culture?) to matters of practices/doings/actions" (Barad, 2003:802). They further argue that these approaches (practices/doings/actions):

> bring to the forefront important questions of ontology, materiality, and agency, while social constructivist approaches get caught up in the geometrical optics of reflection where, much like in the infinite play of images between two facing mirrors, the epistemological gets bounced back and forth, but nothing more is seen (Barad, 2003:802-803).

Borrowing Barad's image of two facing mirrors, a logocentric or discourse-centred framework can be understood as a framework that bounces images and signs back and forth, but which

does not allow these images to escape. I suggest that this problem resonates with the particular challenges of contemporary dance-making and dance scholarship in postcolonial contexts, where the politics of representation occupies a critical place. Drawing from decolonial thinking (in this field I draw mainly from work by Walter Mignolo (2018), Rolando Vázquez (2006; 2009; 2019), Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2014; 2017) and Sabelo J Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015)), it also becomes clear that representationalism upholds Western, colonial hierarchies of knowledge Linda M Alcoff writes that Mignolo begins from the basic problem "that the systems of knowing and representing that developed in European modernity were constituted by and within the coloniality of power" (Alcoff, 2007:92). Problematising representation and representationalism from a decolonial perspective, Mignolo explains that representation "presupposes that there is a world out there that someone is representing" as being "a basic assumption of modern epistemology" (in Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2014:198). According to Barad, representationalism is "so deeply entrenched within Western culture that it takes on a commonsense appeal" (Barad, 2003:806). This study is predicated on the understanding that colonialism was not only a system of rule but also a system of knowledge and representation that imposed a "colonial script" on dancing bodies, narratives and choreographies (Lewis, 2011:201).

The politics of representation is a key concern for African dance scholars and practitioners considering that certain dancing bodies and cultural expressions have been excluded from theatre dance through the various value systems, and the systems of oppression that were imposed by colonialism, and in South Africa, by the violent system of apartheid. A critical issue in dislodging and creating counter-narratives to dominant scripts of dance, however, is not only understanding that contemporary dance in African spaces has been shaped by a history of colonialism and apartheid in the case of South Africa, but also acknowledging that it continues to be shaped by these histories. Colonial (and apartheid) constructs operating in dance, continue to occupy, as Mbembe (2017) points out, aesthetic, somatic, affective and imaginary spaces. Recalling Phelan's earlier-mentioned argument that representation tends to "arrest and fix the image of that other" (Phelan, 1993:2), the power of representation and colonial systems of knowledge have a significant impact on how stereotypes of the black body, for example, continue to be nurtured. Achille Mbembe explains that race became a primal form of representation that anchored its power by operating as an all-consuming form,

becoming "image, form, surface, figure, and – especially – a structure of the imagination" (Mbembe, 2017:32). Mbembe writes that while "race does not exist as a physical, anthropological or genetic fact," it is not just "a phantasmagoric construction, or an ideological projection whose function is to draw attention away from conflicts to be judged to be more real – the struggle between classes or genders, for example" (Mbembe, 2017:11). In addition, he argues that while the founding narrative of blackness[4], which was articulated by the West, had as its function to "codify the conditions for the appearance and the manifestation of the racial subject that would be called the Black Man," the second narrative of blackness, articulated by Africans and black peoples in the African diaspora, attempted to restore the self, to return the "Black Man" to humanity, but did this without being able to discard the construct of race itself (Mbembe, 2017:28). The economy of racial representation thus permeates both the founding narrative of blackness as well as its counter-narratives.

Drawing from Barad's image of two facing mirrors that bounce the epistemological back and forth, one could argue that the idea of blackness and what constitutes 'African' exists in the space between the mirrors, between a sign and a countersign, where images are bounced back and forth but nothing more is seen. These images are powerful. They presuppose and affirm a racialised world and, following Barad's argument, the texts created by these signs pose as reliable and accurate representations of the world. Mbembe notes that representationalism is particularly problematic in the case of Africa and African subject matter, where signs have long been divorced from reality. He writes that:

> […] still today, as soon as the subject of Blacks and African is raised, words do not necessarily represent things; the true and the false become inextricable. The signification of the sign is not always adequate to what is being signified. It is not only that the sign is substituted for the thing. Word and image often have little to say about the objective world. The world of words and signs has become autonomous to such a degree that it exists not only as a screen, possessed by its subject, its life, and the conditions of its production but as a force of its own, capable of emancipating itself from all anchoring in reality (Mbembe, 2017:13).

[4] The terms 'blackness' and 'whiteness' refer to the racialised constructs of black and white and are uncapitalised in this writing, unless used otherwise by another author. I am aware that practices with regard to the use of capitals and race terms vary. Erasmus (2017), for example, uses the uncapitalised terms to refer to racialised constructs, but capitalises these terms when referring to Apartheid categories of race (Erasmus, 2017:147).

Drawing from Mbembe's insight, I suggest that the implication of this power is that artists may both consciously and unconsciously participate in perpetuating these constructs. Desiree Lewis (2011), for example, who writes in the context of the representation of African sexualities in art, notes that colonial scripts and their stereotypes of African bodies are more insidious than we realise. She suggests that:

> […] contemporary forms of othering are not always explicitly and recognisably racist. In fact, they might often be presented as positive and ennobling celebrations of the black body. … [Colonial discourses] are entrenched as normal, neutral or natural in the images and symbols on which societies draw to make sense of their worlds. Moreover, colonial-inspired scripts have been recrafted by Africans ostensibly concerned with independent self-definition or ennobling views of Africa (Lewis, 2011:201).

Lewis draws attention to the power of colonial constructs and the representations that flow out of these constructs, to the point that they may be unknowingly or unquestioningly perpetuated. I explore this idea further in Chapter Three, where I refer to Ayo A Coly's (2019) elaboration of postcolonial haunting. Mbembe (2006) makes a similar argument and draws from Ato Quayson (2001) to point to the problematic nature of the Afro-centric impulse, which according to Quayson, "tries to excavate the glory of things past as a means of rectifying the sorry contemporary picture of Africa and to provide models of African achievement for the future" (Quayson, 2001:164). The problem of the Afro-centric impulse is that it is often co-opted into recrafting or recreating colonial scripts. As will be further discussed below through, for example, Jay Pather's (2006) suggestion of a "response aesthetic," contemporary dance in South Africa seems to be locked in a paradigm where artistic enquiries respond to colonial scripts and constructs and dominant Western aesthetic criteria by creating counter-narratives, which often involve replicating the very same scripts and constructs. Quayson accurately problematises this dilemma when he states that the issue with African scholarship, "is not just saying something new about Africa, but saying it under the full burden of a Western discourse that situates one's own attempt in relation to it and repeatedly establishes the new statement as an attempt to eradicate, validate, or ignore it" (Quayson, 2001:153).

Loots has written extensively on the notion of colonised bodies, and how dance in South Africa and dancing bodies, with particular reference to gender, have been, and often continue to be articulated within western patriarchal paradigms (Loots, 1995:53). She further argues that the body is not a "neutral site onto which dance can be placed through training and choreography"

(Loots, 2012:56). Rather, the body "comes to dance already inscribed by discourses and ideology whether these be gendered, racial or cultural" (Loots, 2012:56). The body cannot help but represent. Still, the aim of this section has been to argue that representationalism as an "over-reliance on language" (Barad, 2003: 804), which figures the dancing body as discourse and dance as textual, keeps dance and dancing bodies locked between two facing mirrors. Moreover, I suggest that this framework upholds hegemonic knowledge structures. The notion of thinking beyond representation, however, is not particular to the context of South African dance studies. Current discussions in contemporary dance and theatre in Europe and America are similarly engaging these concerns (Cvejić, 2015; Lehmann, 2006). Bojana Cvejić, for example, focuses a study on choreographies that "critically address the prevailing regime of representation in [European] theatre dance" (Cvejić, 2015:2). The aim of this study, however, is not to simply 'update' approaches and dance theory for a South African context. In this, I am mindful of Santos' warning that "in contrasting epistemologies of the South and the epistemologies of the North, we may easily fall into image mirroring, a temptation much akin to the dualistic, binary structure of the Western imagination" (Santos, 2017:158). Rather, I aim to claim a conceptual space for contemporary dance in South Africa beyond formulating responses to colonial scripts in line with a decolonial praxis, contributing to earlier work in the South African context by, for example, Samantha Prigge-Pienaar (2011) and Juanita Finestone-Praeg (2015), who advocate for improvisation and physical theatre respectively as radical and political teaching and performance methodologies.

In the next section, I critically engage with the terms 'contemporary dance' and 'choreography' to clarify my own understanding of these terms in the context of, and as a foundation for this study.

The terms 'contemporary dance' and 'choreography'

The term 'contemporary dance' gives rise to a particular problem when thinking through dance in postcolonial African contexts. Part of the dilemma for those working with contemporary dance in Africa is the continual need to renegotiate the dominance and influence of the Euro-American roots of contemporary dance while responding to a postcolonial cultural project. Even in a western dance context, Cvejić notes that the term

contemporary dance "entails a vague and undetermined concept" (Cvejić, 2015:5). Contemporary dance, she writes:

> Serves merely to distinguish the present-day production of dance from the coexisting historical or canonical styles of – originally West-European – theatre dance (ballet, "classical dance", also referred to as "academic dance"), or from other non-Western dance traditions as well as dance forms geared to non-art purposes (social, therapeutic, entertainment, etc.) (Cvejić, 2015:5).

This description is helpful in placing the term 'contemporary dance' in the sphere of theatre dance, but it also complicates the understanding of this term in the context of artistic practice in Africa by distinguishing contemporary dance production from non-Western dance traditions, affirming a discourse in which contemporary dance can only be conceptualised in close relation to a canon of western theatre dance and which historicises 'the other' through the temporal displacement that characterises modernity/coloniality (Alcoff, 2007:85). The question of what might constitute an aesthetic of South African or African contemporary dance has been the subject of some debate among practitioners and scholars in dance (Friedman, 2012a; Samuel, 2011; Douglas et al, 2006; Pather, 2006; Proceedings of Confluences 8, 2015). For example, in the context of South African dance, Friedman writes that "from the late 1990s, discussion in the South African dance community intensified around issues of identity and heralded work in which identity was the main focus. What is African, what is a South African, what should South African dance look like?" (Friedman, 2012b:89). Questioning the premise of a (South) African contemporary dance aesthetic, Pather argues instead that contemporary dance in South Africa can be understood as a "response aesthetic" (Pather, 2006:9), affirming the idea that contemporary dance in South Africa must be thought in relation to a western canon. Writing that the fates of Africa and the West are "inextricably linked" through the legacies of colonialism, Pather argues that "our contemporary dances then, whether they are post-modern, reconstructed, deconstructed, Afro-fused or Marxist feminist, will be responses to, rather than anything fundamentally of themselves" (Pather, 2006:11). Pather adds that "perhaps in time the shift towards this completely independent set of aesthetics will come and with it some kind of purity"[5] (Pather, 2006:12). While Pather argues against the essentialisation of contemporary dance in Africa, the image of a response

[5] It should be noted that elsewhere in the article, Pather does problematise notions of purity and authenticity in relation to contemporary dance in Africa (Pather, 2006:13). Here, I understand Pather's use of "purity" simply in relation to the idea of a "response aesthetic".

aesthetic, however, is still reductive, as it figures the choreographic practices of contemporary dancers as 'other' and keeps them locked in a conversation with a Western canon of artwork. Pather also problematises the colonialist framing of dance as something to be "watched," rather than something that one "does," writing that "in Africa, the moving, rhythmic body is still most common as a means to an end, prevalent more in ritual than in performance" (Pather, 2006:11). I return to this point later through Spatz (2015; 2020), who argues that spectatorial methodologies (which frame dance as something to be read and interpreted) need to problematised to grapple fully with the politics of practice. This also aligns with their suggestion that opening up the category of performance to a broader understanding of embodied arts decolonises colonial understandings of performance (Spatz, 2020:247–249).

Cvejić troubles the label contemporary dance calling it a "less specific denomination than 'choreography' and 'performance'" (Cvejić, 2015:5). She notes the "mistrust and hesitation" associated with the label, writing that "critics have pointed out that the name 'contemporary dance' promotes defiance of historicity through an obsession with contemporaneity, or 'presentism' and novelty under the capitalist logic of exhaustion and renewal" (Cvejić, 2015:5). From a decolonial perspective, Vázquez also problematises the idea of the 'contemporary'. He writes that "decoloniality calls for the end of the contemporary as a way of undoing the colonial difference. It challenges the dominance of abstraction in western aesthetics and its temporal regime," which makes all "others" seem behind in time (Vázquez, 2019:22). Secondly, Cvejić argues that the term is "more evaluative than classificatory," and used in "masterly judgements of 'contemporary' vs old-fashioned, outdated, passé, déjà vu" (Cvejić, 2015:5). Thirdly, Cvejić notes that contemporary dance retraces controversies and debates surrounding other related terms such as 'conceptual dance', 'non-dance' and 'anti-dance', a point I return to in Chapter Two (Cvejić, 2015:5–6).

Cvejić argues that 'choreography' is a shifting and indeterminate term (Cvejić, 2015:7-8). She observes that the question of "ontological status – 'is this dance' [is] still too often at issue" (Cvejić, 2015:9) and that the move to (re)define choreography is an attempt to include the "pluralist performance practices of choreographers and dancers" who work under this term (Cvejić, 2015:8). She notes that some choreographers avoid the term 'dance' altogether,[6]

[6] Cvejić argues that as a broader term "performance" sidesteps the question "is it dance" (Cvejić, 2015:11-12). Perhaps this is a way to account for the blurring of genre boundaries between different performing arts. I use

referring to their work as choreography, performance or choreographic performance. Furthermore, she refers to Phelan's impactful thesis of the ontological claim of performance as disappearance, to point out that this produces a binary between dance and choreography, or performance and choreography. She argues that "the account of movement's ephemeral nature consolidates the notion of choreography as the writing that follows and documents the vanishing trace of dancing, even if the writing, as poststructuralism established, always already precedes it" (Cvejić, 2015:13). André Lepecki refers to "the (almost spontaneous) parallels habit and language have forged between dance and writing (as explicitly manifested in 'choreo/graphing')" (Lepecki, 2004b:124). This relationship between writing and choreography will be explored further as this chapter and the thesis unfolds, particularly in relation to the concept of artistic research and the question of representation and representationalism in contemporary dance.

As will be further unpacked in both this chapter and the next one, I draw from Spatz (2015; 2020) to position choreography as practice and as embodied research. I use the term 'choreographic practice' to draw attention to the matters of "practices/doings/actions" (Barad, 2003:802), which in my view challenges the hold of the textual and the discursive on contemporary dance and draws attention to Spatz's argument that embodied practice is "structured as much by knowledge as by habit" (Spatz, 2020:250).

The term contemporary dance as referred to in this study, is less about identifying a particular category within the performing arts and more about acknowledging both the lineage of my training as an embodied performance practitioner in contemporary dance and the discourses that I am speaking to within the South African dance studies field. Spatz states that "it is increasingly common to declare a breakdown of boundaries between the previously established genres of performance and performing arts. Theatre, dance, and music are no longer separate forms but more like lineages or genealogies" (Spatz, 2020:243). Spatz suggests recontextualising dance, choreography and performance as part of a larger umbrella of embodied arts as a way to unmake colonially informed categories of the arts and to be able

dance because of the lineage of my own training. This point is picked up again later in this Chapter and Chapter Two through Spatz who argues for a broader category of embodied arts.

to more clearly see connections in practices elsewhere in the world (Spatz, 2020:247). They argue that a larger umbrella of embodied arts allows us to go:

> beyond the dissolution of disciplinary divisions that structure Western performing arts and recognise the blending and overlapping of performing arts with martial arts, healing arts, ritual arts, and sexual arts, etc. – all the fields of artistry and knowledge in which the affordances of embodiment itself are foregrounded (Spatz, 2020:249).

I propose that this recontextualisation of contemporary dance as an embodied practice among other embodied arts, is a productive way of undoing the binary between contemporary dance and 'other' contemporary dance when this dance is conceptualised in relation to a western canon. The conceptualisation of contemporary dance in relation to a canon of western theatre dance, exemplified in Pather's suggestion of a "response aesthetic" also recalls what Spatz refers to as a "threshold ontology."[7] While threshold marks the crossing of boundary and possible transformation (Spatz, 2020:6), Spatz draws attention to the risk of threshold ontologies: "radically un-distanced, a threshold experience puts one inside the moment of transition, from which point little else is visible. The risk is that the crossing itself becomes primary, rather than the place to which one arrives" (Spatz, 2020:21). The threshold point they describe as a trope of excess that is celebrated for its announcement of "something more" but that, if one gets stuck here, can begin to "resist the development of new techniques, new principles, new fields" (Spatz, 2020:21). Spatz argues that:

> We see this fairly often in contemporary humanities writing, whenever excess, ephemerality, transgression, queerness, or related terms are celebrated as fundamentally "more-than", as if they were inherently opposed to institutionality and disciplinarity, rather than being potential foundations for alternative institutions and disciplines (Spatz, 2020:21).

The notion of excess and threshold ontology is relevant in the South African context of contemporary dance, where excess as a philosophical concept has gained particular meaning both in relation to "political action and theatrical innovation" (Msimanga, 2019:108). While threshold is essential in breaking through towards possible new fields, Spatz, however, emphasises that the threshold must be made repeatable.[8] "Without this step," writes Spatz,

[7] Spatz describes "threshold" as a phase in their "toolkit" for embodied research. They describe the toolkit as a trajectory from field to object, threshold, technique, principle and back to field (Spatz, 2020:6). This research trajectory will be further elaborated at a later point in this chapter.

[8] Repeatability is a key characteristic of what Spatz (2015;2020) names technique. I return to this later in this chapter and in Chapter Two.

"the threshold remains eternally liminal" (Spatz, 2020:24). This study questions how choreographic practice might move beyond liminality. I suggest that a choreographic practice that engages with concerns of decoloniality has the potential to disrupt hegemonic knowledge structures and imagine an alternative "ecology of knowledges"[9] (Santos, 2014:188). I intend to argue this by drawing from Spatz (2015; 2020) to suggest that choreography as embodied research can challenge representationalism and move beyond threshold to open up new pathways towards embodied technique, and ultimately new principles and fields.

Investigative questions

The starting point for this study is the suggestion that the dominant mode of analysis in the discourse of contemporary dance and choreography in South Africa relies on dance viewed as text and the dancing body as discursive, and that this reliance on representationalism upholds hegemonic knowledge structures. This leads me to ask the following investigative question:

How can I, as an embodied researcher, explore pathways in choreographic practice to disrupt text-based representationalism in South African dance studies?

Other related questions include:

- How can contemporary dance in Africa be thought of outside the canon of Western theatre dance?
- How can the questions 'what is South African?', 'what is African?' and 'what is contemporary dance in South Africa?' be asked outside the politics of representation and the frameworks created by colonial narratives?
- What might it mean to develop choreography as a decolonial praxis?

Finding a logic in a meandering artistic research process/articulating a method after the facts

This study takes the form of an artistic research project. Following Manning (2016), artistic research (a term I will expand in the next section), or what Manning herself calls "research-creation", can be seen as going "against method" (Manning, 2016:26). Yet, I also offer that

[9] This further explored in Chapter Two.

artistic research is radically *for* methodology by opening up and challenging normative qualitative research approaches. While I do not include a separate chapter on methodology, the methodology and methodological shifts I suggest in this research project are implicit and can be traced in each chapter as well as the cartography that is part of this work. Particularly in Chapters Three and Four and the cartography, the intra-action[10] between varying modes of writing and other research documents begin to propose, in Manning's words, "concrete assemblages for rethinking the very question of what is at stake in pedagogy, in practice, and in collective experimentation" (Manning, 2016:27). Further, she adds that this "creates an opening for what Moten and Harney conceptualise as the undercommons: it creates the conditions for new ways of encountering study – forms and forces of intellectuality that cut across normative accounts of what it means to know" (Manning, 2016:27). Methodological shifts thus offer political interventions/disruptions within normative academic and praxis paradigms.

In many ways this thesis is an attempt to think through and provide an overarching logic for the sprawling nature of my research process, which groups together seven projects that took place between 2017 and 2019: *Assembly* (2017), *New Dance Lab* (2017), *Monsters and Fossils* (2017), *Any Body Dance Lab* (2018), *Extreme Subjectivities* (2018), *Before Naming* (2018-2019) and *All At Once* (2018). This list does not include the many other research moments that took place in my teaching practice, in classes taught by others, in the writing of short essays and papers during this time, or the projects which took place before 2017 and of which this research process is an inevitable continuation. Although these projects are distinct and quite different from each other to the extent that the connections at times stopped being immediately apparent to me, the intuitive sense that they all sit within the same body of work allows me to look for a shared logic retrospectively.

Chus Martinez's (2012) use of the "maybe" provides a way to understand this manner of research. Martinez writes that "the maybe is a non-concept; it is a modifier. It denotes the attempt to introduce difference into relations that define knowledge, the limits of language and the event of thinking in art" (Martinez, 2012:46). She adds that:

[10] Intra-action is conceptualised by Barad (2003) as a counterpoint to "interaction". This concept will be elaborated below.

> The “maybe” also implies that method is not at work or, better said, that the method is not a method yet but can become one. Imagine a movement, a force, traversing the whole project, its materials. It is probable that only at the end will you see some sort of method at work, something that only a posteriori one could call a method. The principles at work emerge through diverse logics, the materials, artistic or discursive, the languages. This is completely different from a tactic (Martinez, 2012:49).

Martinez describes method as emerging from the practices that are part of the work, rather than being that which determines the course ahead. Following this idea of the “maybe” I suggest that the sprawling collection of choreographic projects that are part of this research, and that are held together by “slender threads” (Mbembe, 2017:148), nonetheless create room for a research method to surface. Seemingly in contradiction with this, however, Martinez also notes that, specifically with reference to the reception of art works by viewers, “theory cannot assume the role of external mediator between the work and the viewer; it cannot limit itself to speaking after the fact” (Martinez, 2012:57). Thus, in attempting to articulate a method after the facts, I am also conscious of the fraught relationship, not only between theory and practice, but particularly between language and artistic and embodied practice. This difficulty is ‘felt’ in the process. Working with my closest collaborator, I notice that the conversations are most energetic when we are working, when we are figuring out what the performance needs, how it works. Making work includes physical practice and endless conversations in the studio, in each other’s homes, in the car, in text messages, emails and over the phone. The practice feels dense. Clear in the moment of doing, but dense and difficult to capture in writing. The difficulty is also felt in the act of capturing itself which begins to feel like a colonising move on a process that seems best characterised as meandering, sprawling and slippery. In evoking the “maybe,” Martinez, as mentioned above, points to the limits of language and conventional research methodologies (Martinez, 2012:46). The tension between language and artistic work can be understood as the inadequacy of language, specifically when it is used as a representational tool to capture artistic work. As mentioned earlier, I draw from Barad’s suggestion that “language has been granted too much power” (Barad, 2003:801) and that “representationalism should be problematised as an over-reliance on language as an accurate mirror of what is being represented” (Barad, 2003:804). This also recalls Mbembe’s earlier-mentioned argument that especially in the context of Africa, the relationship between words and things is treacherous. Representationalism and consequently language, have received significant challenge from “feminists, poststructuralists, postcolonial

critics, and queer theorists" (Barad, 2003:804). Similar challenges can be found in artistic or embodied research. Spatz notes that "one of the key moves in embodied research/practice research/artistic research is to announce the insufficiency of language to capture embodiment and practice" (Spatz, 2020:35). Spatz further argues that more is needed than thinking of the nonverbal or nonlinguistic as a "threshold over which we might cross, for then we are still situated with the field of language" (Spatz, 2020:35). It is instead more pertinent and "effective" to start by recognising "specific principles, such as *logocentrism*, that structure the fields in which we live" (Spatz, 2020:35). In other words, by bringing the structure of logocentrism into focus, it becomes possible to see how embodiment and practice can be figured as lacking, short of words, as something to overcome, solve or complete. Spatz places logocentrism alongside universalism and identifies these principles as "part of the historical project of whiteness and European colonialism" (Spatz, 2020:35). Although Spatz notes that logocentrism and universalism also have applications outside whiteness (2020:35), I propose that in the context of this study it is necessary to problematise logocentrism as a principle of whiteness and Western epistemology, which create a particular "orientation" in the world (Ahmed in Spatz, 2020:35). Structures like logocentrism, universalism and whiteness can be made visible by foregrounding Sara Ahmed's notion of "orientation" as a phenomenological question. Ahmed argues that "what is 'present' or near us is not casual: we do not acquire our orientations just because we find things here or there. Certain objects are available to us because of lines we have already taken" (Ahmed, 2006:21). A queer phenomenology then, which Ahmed is in search of, involves disorientation,[11] "turning the tables on phenomenology by turning towards other kinds of tables" (Ahmed, 2006:63). By questioning certain structures – the structure of representationalism in this case – and seeing these as orientations, it becomes possible to trace alternative trajectories. In this way, I hope a productive link can be made between research method as emergent in the work of artistic and embodied research and the project of decoloniality, in support of Spatz's suggestion that:

> Embodied research has always been a decolonial project, but often without knowing it. It takes as its starting point embodiment, which is always the abjected and vulnerable "other" of coloniality, patriarchy, racism, ableism and misogyny (Spatz, 2020:xvi).

[11] I return to the notion of disorientation in Chapter Three, where disorientation becomes part of a search for embodied technique.

In the next sections I will expand the ideas introduced above, beginning with a discussion of artistic and embodied[12] research (which will be further expanded in Chapter Two), in order to propose a container, both a methodology and a conceptual framework, for the artistic projects that are part of this study.

Artistic research

Lise Hovik describes artistic research as "research that is carried out within and through an artistic process in which the artist researcher does not only have the work of art as a goal but also documentation and analyses of action-based experience, in order to reach recognitions and knowledge" (Hovik, 2019:671). Leora Farber notes that discourse on artistic practice as research in South Africa is still under-developed (Farber, 2010:8). The term 'artistic research' is sometimes used interchangeably with related, yet slightly differentiated practices like practice as research, practice-based research, practice-led research and performance as research (PaR), all sharing the notion that creative practice can reveal particular kinds of knowledge and understandings that may not become apparent through other research methods (Barret and Bolt, 2007:1; Farber, 2010:9). Quoting Baz Kershaw, Mark Fleishman writes that as a research methodology, performance as research has become a "well-established approach using creative performance as a method of inquiry in universities in the UK, Australia, Canada, Scandinavia, South Africa and elsewhere" (Kershaw in Fleishman, 2012:28). Despite this, the related term 'artistic research' is not uncontested. Particularly the association of 'research', a term closely related to academia, with artistic practice is seen by some as confusing and contradictory. "Artistic research is an awful term," writes Martinez (2012:46). She continues:

> More than anything [the term artistic research] 'entertains' a paradox: the possibility of a non-deliberate system or discipline at the core of the deliberate ones. 'Research' here does not name the embodiment of any particular form of academic training, but the gesture of placing the 'maybe' at the core of the real. And this causes something very simple to occur: knowledge vacillates (Martinez, 2012:46).

[12] I am aware of the problematics of terms like 'embodiment' and 'embodied', which Maxine Sheets-Johnstone (2010; 2015) argues are frequently used as "lexical band-aids." While I still use these terms somewhat loosely in this chapter, Chapter Two offers a more critical engagement with the impact of these terms.

Martinez gestures towards two points that I will explore further. The first can be related to the way in which artistic research meets or confronts a set of deliberate disciplines and systems that make up an institution like a university. The second point begins to transform the understanding of knowledge as it relates to research and which I will investigate further alongside notions of embodiment and the suggestion that choreographic practice may be understood to be epistemic and conceptualised as embodied research. The framework for this is offered in Chapter Two.

The question of the institutional legitimacy of artistic research seems to centre on the relationship between theory, which is most often associated with written text or discourse, and practice, which involves the artwork and its creation. Many of the presentations and discussions at the Artistic Research Africa conference[13] in January 2020 seemed to characterise the relationship between theory and practice, when it comes to approaching artistic research in an institutional context, as tension. This tension is created by certain ontological and epistemological problems, which Fleishman describes as "issues of knowledge types, aesthetic values, contextual responsiveness, practice/theory problematics, questions of how best to present PaR in conference contexts, debates about different types of reflexivity appropriate to PaR, and so on" (Fleishman, 2012:29). Writing in the context of choreography as research, Sonja Smit notes that to acknowledge performance itself as a form of knowledge means to "recognise its impact before its dissemination through analysis" (Smit, 2015:221). Fleishman, drawing from Colin Painter, also states that performance is "both a form of research and a legitimate way of making the findings of such research publicly available. Hence, there is no necessary connection assumed between the apparatus of research and the written word" (Fleishman, 2012:28). Yet, more often than not, creating artistic work or performance in an institutional context, specifically a university, requires that the artwork is accompanied by a textual analysis. Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt (2007) propose that the relationship between the artistic work and the written analysis is dialogic. They refer to artistic research as "materialising practices," which imply "an ongoing performative engagement and

[13] The conference formed part of the Arts Research Africa project, which is an Andrew W. Mellon funded project in the Wits School of the Arts that engages questions of artistic research in Africa (https://www.wits.ac.za/ara-conference/about-ara/).

productivity both at the moments of production and consumption" (Barrett & Bolt, 2007:5). They further note that

> A dialogic relationship between studio practice and the artist's own critical commentary in the writing of the creative arts exegesis is crucial to articulating and harnessing outcomes of these materialising practices for further application (Barrett & Bolt, 2007:5).

While framing the practice/theory interaction as dialogue seems to work conceptually, further reading and my experience of engagement within an artistic research process indicate that the idea of 'dialogue' insufficiently captures the difference in the way in which artistic research comes to knowing. The idea of dialogue evokes relatively stable exchanges that are temporally and spatially distinct, whereas the artistic research process itself suggests a much more entangled existence of practice and theory that appear instead as smashed together processes talking at the same time and from the same body. This notion of a practice/theory entanglement 'talking at the same time and from the same body' resonates with certain practice theory approaches, as described by Spatz (2015; 2020) and Theodore R Schatzki, Karin Knorr-Cetina and Elke von Savigny (2001), which "displace the mind as the central phenomenon in human life" (Schatzki, 2001:20). Schatzki defines practices as "organised nexuses of activity" (Schatzki, 2001:56) and argues that many approaches within practice theory attempt to move beyond "problematic dualisms and ways of thinking"[14] (Schatzki, 2001:10). Practice theory makes room for embodiment as an important aspect of knowledge formation. Schatzki explains that many practice theorists "highlight embodied capacities such as know-how, skills, tacit understanding and dispositions" (Schatzki, 2001:16). In addition, social theorists of science, including Knorr-Cetina and Andrew Pickering, from whose work Spatz draws to develop an understanding of embodied research, have shown "how practices are in fact central to scientific knowledge formation" (Schatzki, 2001:16).[15] This supports the argument that all practices are in a sense embodied, whether located in science or embodied arts, such as dance. Although, as Spatz notes, "realist thinkers have emphasised practices in

[14] Schatzki explains that practice theorists work against numerous paths of thinking including "intellectualism, representationalism, individualisms (e.g., rational choice theory, methodological individualism, network analysis), structuralism, structure-functionalism, systems theory, semiotics, and many strains of humanism and poststructuralism" (Schatzki, 2001:10-11).

[15] It could be added that a focus on practice could form part of what Santos (2017) calls a "sociology of emergences," which is a key concept of the epistemologies of the South (Santos, 2017:171). Santos explains that a sociology of emergences responds to the problem that "the disciplines and the analytical categories developed by modern sciences and humanities prevent us from detecting and valorizing the artisanship of practices of resistance" (Santos, 2017:171).

which materials outside the body are central over those in which embodiment itself is the primary medium of practice," this study turns to dance and embodiment itself. In addition, my description of artistic and embodied research as a "smashed together process" speaks to the undoing of a practice/theory dichotomy in the way in which certain practice theory approaches re-centre knowledge formation within an interconnected nexus of activities (Schatzki, 2001:56).

Spatz also delves into the relationship between theory and practice in university settings and places this discussion specifically in the context of a crisis in academia.[16] Ronald Barnett, also cited by Spatz, states that "globally, the university is being incorporated into knowledge capitalism … that its dominant activities – teaching, research and public engagement – are being steered in that direction" (Barnett, 2012:202). Barnett, however, also notes that "there remain spaces for more emancipatory and publicly-oriented stances on the part of the university" (Barnett, 2012:202). Drawing from Barnett (2012), Spatz argues that this transformation leaves room for new conceptualisations of knowledge. If, writes Spatz, "knowledge is not to be reduced to information, education to vocational training, and research to product development, then new epistemological groundwork must be laid" (Spatz, 2015:218–219). New epistemological groundwork is also a necessity for a decolonised university (Mbembe, 2015; Santos, 2017). Mbembe (2015) argues that:

> in order to set our institutions firmly on the path of future knowledges, we need to reinvent a classroom without walls in which we are all co-learners; a university that is capable of convening various publics in new forms of assemblies that become points of convergence of and platforms for the redistribution of different kinds of knowledges (Mbembe, 2015:np).

Bringing into focus other ways of knowing can be a way of rethinking the division between theory and practice as well as the "epistemic distance that separates scholar from subject" (Spatz, 2015:221). This epistemic distance has historically been associated with notions of objectivity and academic rigour (Spatz, 2015:221). The idea of "talking from the same body at the same time" plays with this epistemic distance and speaks to the way in which embodiment

[16] It should be added that Santos (2017) in the context of decolonising the university argues that "the university is being confronted with paradigmatic questions for which it has so far only provided sub-paradigmatic answers" (Santos, 2017:xiii-xiv). According to Santos, "paradigmatic questions are those questions which go to the roots of the historical identity and vocation of the university, in order to question not so much the details of the future of the university, but rather whether the university, as we know it, indeed has a future at all" (Santos, 2017:xiv).

comes into focus as a central space for knowledge formation. This thought will unfold in Chapter Two through the writings of Spatz (2015;2020), Thomas J Csordas (1990), Carrie Noland (2009), Sheets-Johnstone (2010; 2015) and a consideration of the impact of the field of somatics in my own movement and choreographic practice. 'Talking from the same body at the same time' also resonates for me with new materialist approaches, for example the writing of Barad (2003; 2011; 2012) whose notions of "intra-action" and the "agential cut" radically refigure performativity and agency (Tikka, 2018:n.p). Intra-action (as opposed to interaction) sees entities not as ontologically separate and distinct, but rather takes into consideration that the ontological status of entities depends on their relation (Barad, 2003; Tikka, 2018). Intra-actions are thus "performative and emergent events" (Tikka, 2018). Instances of embodied, artistic practice go hand in hand with an emergent research method and can thus be characterised as performative, emergent events, or intra-actions. This also lays the groundwork for arguing, as I will return to later, that questions of epistemology are not separate from questions of ontology (Barad, 2012). In other words, "measuring" as proposed by Barad, or other methodological procedures, are not separate from the body of research itself. In addition, bringing into focus alternative ways of knowing is a way of undoing entrenched knowledge hierarchies and is thus central to the project of decoloniality. Writing from a sociological perspective, Santos argues that "there is no global social justice without global cognitive justice … In order to capture the immense variety of critical discourses and practices and to valorise and maximise their transformative potential, an epistemological reconstruction is needed" (Santos, 2014:42). Santos further explains that:

> The very action of knowing, as pragmatist philosophers have repeatedly reminded us, is an intervention in the world, which places us within it as active contributors to its making. Different modes of knowing, being irremediably partial and situated, will have different consequences and effects on the world (Santos, 2014:196).

In this section, I have suggested that rethinking the theory/practice relationship relates to the rethinking of academic scholarship and concerns of decoloniality, which will be further discussed in Chapter Two. In the next section, I consider the relationship between artistic work and writing, and how this study approaches the dissemination of its research 'findings'.

The relationship to language and writing: dissemination of knowledge

The theory/practice dichotomy that characterises the institutional context of artistic research, not only appears in the post-event of having to produce a dissertation but is present throughout the research process. This is evidenced by the many institutional hurdles that present themselves along the way in the form of research proposals, progress reports and ethical clearance procedures. The language of these institutional obstacles is peppered with terms like 'hypothesis', 'data collection' and 'findings'. Evan Webber critiques this institutional approach in relation to artistic research. He notes that this institutional approach has often depended on art-makers yielding to the suggestion that "process was the means by which knowledge was created" and if they undertook that process methodically enough this might "stabilise their discoveries in language" (Webber, 2017:34). Webber further explains that if discoveries are to be stabilised it implies that artistic research must engage with "the standards or at least the assumptions of science, assuming the risks and responsibilities of opinion and entangling oneself in the stratifications of power. To be in language. But also to be in bureaucracy" (Webber, 2017:34). Webber points to the notion that artistic research gains (academic) value when it makes use of the methods and functions under the assumed reliability of science. Spatz (2020) similarly writes that:

> Many of today's major debates around truth and knowledge hinge on the question of reliability and in particular on the status of the sciences in comparison with other ways of knowing. While it is clear that science affords a special and very powerful type of access to reality, putting embodiment first requires us to avoid the trap of scientism,[17] the according of absolute priority to science (Spatz, 2020:9).

It should be noted, however, that science need not necessarily be seen in opposition to other fields of knowledge. Spatz, for example, leans heavily on concepts drawn from social epistemology, sociology and philosophies of science through the works of Knorr-Cetina, Pickering, Rheinberger and others. As mentioned earlier in relation to practice theory, Spatz writes that 'one of the successes of [sociology of scientific knowledge] has been to show how science is similar to other practices, rather than being a distinct category of thought with a unique type of access to truth' (Spatz, 2015:25). If the work of science can be conceptualised as embodied practice, as Spatz suggests, at issue is perhaps not the doingness of science, but

[17] I return to this point in Chapter Two.

as Webber (2017) mentions, 'the language of science' and the relative stability and reliability of its discoveries poured into the language of science and articulated primarily through writing.

Webber (2017), Martinez (2012) and Spatz (2015; 2020) all draw attention to the earlier mentioned problem of relying on language as a stabilising means and thus the primary mode of dissemination of the research. I suggest that the representational relationship between sign and thing, which forms part of the problem statement of this study, is mirrored in the representational relationship between the writing/documentation of the research and the artistic or embodied practice. Martinez suggests that artistic research "calls for a radical reconsideration of the role of language" (Martinez, 2012:46). Spatz argues that part of the process of challenging the dominance of Western epistemology, the enclosed orientation of whiteness, and the accompanying bifurcated dualism of mind and body, is the "dismantling of logocentrism, a project that makes every book outdated before it is written" (Spatz, 2020:xvii). Embodied knowledge, argues Spatz, is transmitted *before* the intervention of language. The practical transmission of embodied knowledge takes place in pedagogical practice, in performance and other art forms (Spatz, 2020:24). Drawing from Paul Preciado, Spatz notes how practical workshops permeated by a micropolitics[18] serve to "create and distribute knowledge" (Preciado in Spatz, 2020:24). Two of the projects that are part of this research process, *New Dance Lab* *(NDL*) and *Any Body Dance Lab* *(ABDL)*, can be discussed in this context. Both projects centred on the question of how to create space for dance to happen and be presented and aimed to form networks of practitioners. As such, these projects expose some of the practices that circulate around and through my own movement and choreographic practice that is the basis for this study. For *NDL*, practitioners were invited to present 5 minutes of their most recent movement research. The project included public performance, but also sharing and feedback moments among the group of artists. *ABDL* consisted of six weekends of workshops followed by public performances of works created during the workshops. Both projects involved many instances of embodied knowledge being

18 Philosophers including Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari have articulated regimes of power in terms of a macro- and a micropolitics. In A Thousand Plateaus, Deleuze and Guattari explain that every politics is defined by a macropolitics and a micropolitics simultaneously (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004:213). They further note that a micropolitics includes "perception, affection, conversation and so forth" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004:13).

shared and transmitted. In this sense, this thesis is an attempt to reiterate knowledge that has, in part, already taken flight and caused the research project to transform.

It is noteworthy that for both *NDL* and *ABDL*, we gravitated towards the word 'laboratory'. This was partly because of an intuitive response to historic projects in the genealogy of Western theatre dance such as the Judson postmodern dance movement of the 1960s.[19] On a theoretical level, laboratory has also been conceptualised, for example through the work of sociologists Knorr-Cetina and Bruno Latour, as a space that links science to other embodied practices (Spatz, 2015:163). Writing in the context of acting as embodied technique, Spatz notes that "laboratory" appears as a "valued third term alongside 'theatre' and 'school'" (Spatz, 2015:164). "This trio of spaces," writes Spatz, "reflects the epistemic structure of 'acting' as a field of knowledge," where "theatre" provides the dissemination of knowledge to the general public, "school" offers training, and "laboratory" is a space for research' (Spatz, 2015:164). Spatz notes how these three descriptors also align with "the basic functions of a university: teaching, research and public engagement" (Spatz, 2015:164). Borrowing from Latour's writing, laboratories can be defined as "places where the researcher actively modifies society by directly and literally altering the landscape of possibilities for action" (Latour, 1983 in Spatz, 2015:164). This imbues the concept of laboratory with political possibility.[20] Our call for *NDL* in April 2017 read:

> The platform seeks to attract progressive and experimental new dance works and invites choreographers and artists working with dance to propose short new dance works that engage with risk, immediacy, experimentation and new research (*NDL*, Call for Proposals).

The choice of this framing indicates a desire to demarcate an epistemological project and an epistemic space. This idea aligns with Spatz's concept of experimentation not as "a matter of aesthetics but of epistemology" (Spatz, 2015:163). The notion of immediacy here relates to

[19] The American postmodern dance movement of the 1960s is often traced to the experimentation of a group of choreographers including Yvonne Rainer, Trisha Brown, Steve Paxton and others at the Judson Dance Theatre in New York (Cvejić, 2015:9). It should be noted, however, that the simplicity of this origin story is problematised by, for example, Goldman (2010) and Lepecki (2006).

[20] I align my understanding of 'political possibility' here with Manning's (2016) understanding of 'choreographing the political'. Manning describes 'choreographing the political' as 'devising techniques, in the moving, for an activist philosophy that is ecological and neurodiverse at its very core' (Manning, 2016:129-130). Furthermore, 'choreographing the political' is 'allied to the kind of study that happens in the undercommons…[it] is a call not only for the collective crafting of minor gestures, but for the attunement, in perception, to how minor gestures do their work' (Manning, 2016:130). I understand minor gestures here as part of the earlier-mentioned micropolitics. These ideas will be expanded as the thesis unfolds.

the earlier mentioned idea that embodied knowledge is transmitted before the intervention of language (Spatz, 2020:xvii). In addition, Spatz argues that embodied practices contain an "epistemic impulse," which suggests that even when these practices take place outside academic spaces and without academic support, the research "is already in circulation among artists and practitioners outside academia" (Spatz, 2015:224). With reference to Spatz's abovementioned note on the inevitable outdatedness of post-event writing and, as the further discussion will show, this project is not about undoing writing as a way of capturing research outcomes. Rather, it is about recognising that there are multiple fields in which the knowledge associated with these outcomes circulates, such as pedagogical practice, choreography and performance. The next section offers a critical reflection on the unfolding/emergent nature of an artistic research problem.

Working without knowing what you're working on

Webber proposes that artistic research means "I can work without knowing exactly what problem I am working on" (Webber, 2017:36). This recalls Martinez's (2012) earlier mentioned description of method not as a predetermined plan or tactic, but as emerging through the process of doing or working. Martinez replaces "hypothesis" with "intuition" and proposes the idea of a "no-concept concept." She explains that:

> An intuition is not an epidermic feeling; it has history, it appears when certain conditions, the reception of certain artworks, readings, ideas, views, etc. have already occupied our minds. However, a hypothesis and an intuition are two very different things. A hypothesis requires evidence and must state what constitutes that evidence … An intuition – let's say artistic research, that is, the way artistic research created a space inside art for thinking, for philosophy to live longer – does not require – one could even say, does not tolerate – evidence, but rather an understanding (Martinez, 2012:50).

Intuition in this research project has felt like unpicking a thread and following where it leads next. She writes that "an intuition is nothing but partial and therefore has no claims to universality or neutrality; in other words, it is the opposite of a principle, a norm, a rule, a premise" (Martinez, 2012:50). Yet, Martinez elaborates that an intuition "does not belong to the realm of the merely subjective" (Martinez, 2012:50). The inadequacy of hypothesis as a driver of artistic or embodied research is similarly noted by Spatz. Spatz draws from Cetina's notion of a scientific laboratory (mentioned earlier) to explain that "the mechanisms ruling the progress of research are more adequately described as successful 'tinkering' rather than

as hypothesis testing or cumulative verification" (Spatz, 2020:76). Alongside Cetina's 'tinkering', Spatz considers Pickering's notion of 'tuning' and Manuel De Landa's 'tracking' as related yet subtly differentiated ways of capturing the quality of the practitioner's engagement with material reality (Spatz, 2020:76). Tinkering, tuning and tracking pay attention to the "sensitive relationship between practitioner and material" (Spatz, 2020:76). Spatz applies these qualities of engagement to "Practices that are specifically *embodied* … rather than technological; that is, situations in which tinkering, tuning, and tracking take place not between a human agent and a material substrate but within human embodiment itself"[21] (Spatz, 2020:77). Read through the lens of tinkering, tuning and tracking, Martinez's intuition takes on an embodied technical quality (that can be filled out visually, aurally or kinaesthetically).

Spatz explains that tinkering can "continue indefinitely"[22] as outcomes are "rarely measurable in quantitative terms"[23] (Spatz, 2020:7). Drawing from this understanding of tinkering, tuning and tracking and Martinez's understanding of intuition, the structure of practice can be conceived of as "articulated and enacted" (Spatz, 2020:77). Martinez further advances the suggestion of a "no-concept concept" as a way to question the relationship between practice and words/writing, and the presumed stability of this relationship. She notes that:

> With increasing velocity in the age of technology, knowledge is conceived under the aegis of dominion. Concepts have become a material, and the concern regarding 'having a concept' to work from has too often turned into a question of possessing a thing (Martinez, 2012:51).

The directionality of concept to body or body to concept has been a recurring theme in this study and it surfaced particularly during *ABDL* (2018). Reflecting on that project in 2018, I wrote: "The flow of artistic research seemed to progress from conceptual work to practice, creating an apparent binary between thinking and doing: thinking as separate from doing, and in this case, thinking before doing" (*Any Body Dance Lab*, 2018:n.p). This recalls the earlier-mentioned tension between theory and practice and the suggestion that practice or 'doing' is

[21] Embodiment, and the inseparability of agent and substrate in embodied technique will be further explored in Chapter Two.
[22] In this sense, the 'cut' delineating which works to include in the cartography is somewhat arbitrary and artificial. The research questions I pose in this study are present in works before 2017 and after 2018.
[23] Spatz explains that "it is often not clear when tinkering whether the situation is getting better or worse. And even when there is improvement, one may wonder if the situation could be made better still" (Spatz, 2020:7).

not epistemic in nature; the idea that knowing is a matter of thinking rather than doing, and by extension that concept is associated with thinking (theory) rather than doing (practice). Martinez's no-concept concept questions the "limit of the logic of equivalence between experience and Logos, the 'conservative' relation between practice and discourse, that assumes stability among the terms" (Martinez, 2012:55). She further explains that working from a no-concept concept does not mean the same as "letting works speak for themselves" or does not indicate "a lack of notions or ideas" (Martinez, 2012:55). In the context of an art exhibition, which I substitute with performance, Martinez writes that working from a non-concept:

> Is more of an event, an occasion to reformulate the sense of continuity between experience and language, to question the necessity of constructing a theory, an ideal discipline, that the works will then implement, or to see them as a cause that forces us to produce an equivalent language, able to describe what seems to be happening in the situation […] (Martinez, 2012:55).

In advocating for a no-concept concept, Martinez makes connections between concept, logos, discourse, and writing. Writing in the context of artistic research cannot be separated from considerations of *how* this writing takes place, which is a question that, it could be argued, must be asked over and over again with each artistic project tinkering, tuning or tracking its relationship to discourse and writing. Martinez writes: "If we do want to remain silent or to appear as if we want to avoid rigor, this means we need to reinvent the whole task of language in relation to objects and images" (Martinez, 2012:54). This, however, also makes room to consider other kinds of documents, in addition to writing, that structure artistic and embodied practice into research fields (Spatz, 2015:241–242). Noting that theorists and practitioners are "guilty of using the word research as a catch-all term" (Spatz, 2015:232), Spatz argues that not all practice is necessarily research, and that there are a number of criteria that need to be fulfilled to identify practice as 'research'. Spatz explains that practice as 'research' depends on the production of relatively reliable, stable and transmissible "documents of technique"[24] (Spatz, 2015:234). Rather than requiring academia to accommodate "those aspects of practice that are ephemeral, evanescent, undocumentable, and unknowable" (Spatz, 2015:234), which some accounts of artistic research focus on, Spatz proposes that by paying attention to

[24] Spatz uses the term 'technique' to describe a unit of practice, as that which structures a particular embodied practice and allows it to become repeatable and transmissible (Spatz, 2015; 2020). This concept of 'technique' will be further explored in Chapter Two.

relatively stable and transmissible documents of technique, the door is opened "to a radical transformation of academia, not through the dismantling of its standards but through an extension of the logic of scholarly epistemology itself" (Spatz, 2015:235). In other words, Spatz proposes a shift from the artwork, or even the practice itself, to that which structures the practice: 'technique' (Spatz, 2015). According to Spatz, claiming a space for artistic and embodied practice as a research field in academia requires an "examination of the epistemological relationship between scholarship and the archive" (Spatz, 2015:235). Spatz argues against viewing a live event as a research outcome as it is "bounded in time and space" rather than repeatable and transmissible (Spatz, 2015:232). That is not to say that the live event/performance does not deal in knowledge, rather Spatz's argument is that documentation is what structures knowledge into scholarship (Spatz, 2015:241). This sounds contradictory to Martinez's no-concept concept and the privileging of intuition over hypothesis. On one hand, I am following Webber and Martinez to argue that artistic research as embodied practice is a way of working without knowing (or naming) the problem you are working on (Webber, 2017:36). This is an idea that resonates with Cvejić's understanding of the choreographic problem, which I explore further in Chapter Two.

On the other hand, by reading Spatz closely, I follow their thinking that there are ways of studying live performance practices that turn ephemeral events into durable epistemic locations through documents that are deposited into an archive (Spatz, 2020:9). The dual experience of performance event as disappearing and the attempt to grasp and account for some of the knowledge processes that structure the performance, is continually confronted in this study.[25]

Spatz resolves this by challenging the limitations of theorising the ontology of performance as disappearance, as ephemeral or fleeting, a notion which is evoked especially through Phelan's (1993) work. According to Phelan, performance "becomes itself through disappearance" (1993:146). She writes that "performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulations of representations of representations: once it does so it becomes something other than performance" (Phelan, 1993:146). According to Spatz, while "performance theory has for some time now tended to emphasise the uniqueness and

[25] The assembling of research documents in the cartography is an attempt to expose the non-linearity of these knowledge processes.

the unrepeatability of the live event" (Spatz, 2015:57), this is an example of the trope of excess that "romanticises and reifies the allegedly excessive qualities of embodied practice, ignoring the extent to which such practice is structured by repeatable technique" (Spatz, 2015:57). Spatz continues by stating that "performance in the sense evoked by Phelan – that of theatrical spectacle – is no more ephemeral than any other practice" (Spatz, 2015:58). Susan Melrose, Stefanie Sachsenmaier and Rosemary Butcher similarly observe that the notion of ephemerality.

> Of time and of time lost is actually proper to a temporally limited spectator engagement with performance, rather than to that of the different expert practitioners involved in performance-making, for whom 'the work' has never been ephemeral (Melrose, Sachsenmaier & Butcher, 2013:1).

They add that while the performance outcome seems "initially to end the enquiry," it will reveal "to the practitioner concerned a further set of questions, to be re-engaged, and to be worked through, once again, and differently" (Melrose, Sachsenmaier & Butcher, 2013:5). The problem, or limitation, according to Melrose, Sachsenmaier and Butcher, in privileging a spectatorial perspective is that "the complex ongoing and internally differentiated *processes* of performance-making crucially remain invisible and unknowable" (Melrose, Sachsenmaier & Butcher, 2013:4). They further note that this has implications for performance researchers. They write that this means that:

> As performance researchers concerned with attempting to grasp and to account for at least some of the 'knowledge processes' (or epistemic processes) that are specific to creative decision-making in performance, we need to be present and engaged *before the event*, in the event, and after it (Melrose, Sachsenmaier & Butcher, 2013:4).

This suggestion of the need to be present before, in and after the event, resonates with Cvejić's (2015) conceptualisation of choreography as spanning making, performing and attending, and will be further explored in the next chapter. In order to trouble representationalism as a framework in the context of contemporary dance in South Africa, I propose a shift from the privileged spectatorial perspective to that of the embodied practitioner who searches for underlying knowledge, or 'embodied technique' that structures the work. This move meets Pather's earlier-mentioned argument that the idea that dance is something one watches rather than does, forms part of a colonialist paradigm of performance (Pather, 2006:11).

It should be noted, however, that Phelan does not oppose writing. She argues that "the challenge raised by the ontological claims of performance for writing is to re-mark again the performative possibilities of writing itself" (Phelan, 1993:148). She adds: "The act of writing towards disappearance, rather than the act of writing toward preservation, must remember that the after-effect of disappearance is the experience of subjectivity itself" (Phelan, 1993:148). In drawing attention to the performativity of writing, Phelan foregrounds writing as embodied practice, and as "intuitive" in Martinez's vocabulary. Writing as enacted "towards disappearance"' is also reminiscent of Spatz's characterisation of writing as unavoidably "outdated" as soon as it hits the page (Spatz, 2020:xvii). Considering the relationship between performance and archive, and performance as archive, Alan Parker (2020) offers an alternative view on this outdatedness. Proposing an alternative spatio-temporal ecology for the study of performance, Parker makes use of the concept of the anarchival to position performance and archive, not as "documentation of past activity" but rather as "a feed-forward mechanism for lines of creative process, under continuing variation" (Murphie, 2016:7). Drawing on this concept of anarchival, Parker argues that decoloniality and decolonising the archive are constant and ongoing processes of interruption (Parker, 2020:220).

The sections above have discussed artistic research as a framework for this study and have drawn attention to the tension between theory and practice that characterises artistic research specifically in an institutional context. The discussion keeps circling back to the problematics of language as a negotiator of the theory/practice relationship. At times, I have used the term 'embodied research'. The concepts of embodiment, embodied practice and embodied research, and their relation to choreographic practice will be unpacked further in Chapter Two. In the next section, I will offer an overview of the research phases and materials that constitute this study.

Research phases/materials: a cyclical and onto-epistemic trajectory/cartography

I have described this research process as sprawling, meandering and slippery. Between 2017 and 2019, I worked on five dance works (*Assembly* (2017), *Monsters and Fossils* (2017), *Extreme Subjectivities* (2018), *Before Naming* (2018-2019) and *All At Once* (2018), and two projects that engaged the idea of a community of practitioners creating and presenting works

on a shared platform (*New Dance Lab* (2017) and *Any Body Dance Lab* (2018)). These instances of creative/movement practice were interspersed with instances of writing. Documents of the artistic works, both audio-visual and written, have been gathered in an online cartography which traces the journey of the research project. Although the practice of 'cartography' is at times linked to the colonisation of space (Mignolo, 2018:362), I appropriate the term 'cartography' from Rosi Braidotti, who defines a cartography as "a theoretically-based and politically informed account of the present that aims at tracking the production of knowledge and subjectivity and to expose power both as entrapment (potestas) and as empowerment (potential)" (Braidotti, 2018:33). The notion of 'mapping' emerged as a metaphor to keep track of the research and to describe its methodology. Crucial to this study, however, is the idea that a cartography tracks knowledge and that this tracking of knowledge holds political possibility. Braidotti further explains that a cartography questions "what kind of knowing subjects we are in the process of becoming and what discourses underscore the process" (Braidotti, 2019:32). The research documents in the cartography as well as Chapters Three and Four include self-reflexive and autoethnographic acts of writing that trace my own journey as an artist-researcher in relation to the socio-historic and socio-political context of contemporary dance making in South Africa.

The assemblages of writing and research documents navigate through multiple unfolding methodologies, including archiving, memory, performance and cartography. As part of this research project, the cartography reveals links with practices that circulate in and through my own work and is not separate from this thesis. The two can be read through one another.[26] For the thesis, I have chosen to limit the discussion to three works: *Monsters and Fossils* (2017), *Extreme Subjectivities* (2018) and *Before Naming* (2018). The cartography includes all works. The cartography holds the creative component of this research project and traces the duration and the cyclical nature of this process. The documents gathered here, and in the cartography, often mark a gap between my own understanding and articulation of concepts as they appeared 'then' (in the past) and as they appear to me 'now' (in the present). This idea responds to Melrose, Sachsenmaier and Butcher's question: "How may the multi-modal expert-practitioner archive 'their work', and why would they want to?" (Melrose,

[26] Hyperlinks to the cartography are provided throughout the text, and the thesis can be accessed through the cartography.

Sachsenmaier & Butcher, 2015:89). Butcher answers this question by suggesting that archiving responds to the question: "What was I doing, then, and what am I doing, now?" (Melrose, Sachsenmaier & Butcher, 2015:89). Butcher's question indicates the idea that her knowledge is inscribed through the making of new work (Melrose, Sachsenmaier & Butcher, 2015:90). This resonates with Vázquez's description of the "movement of thinking" (Vázquez, 2006:44). Working through Hannah Arendt's work, Vázquez argues that "if thinking is to keep its movement, it ought to renounce the desire for results, the search for definite truths" (Vázquez, 2006:44). In addition, drawing from Jean-Francois Lyotard's account of remembering, Melrose, Sachsenmaier and Butcher argue that new work, or new writing, resonates for its maker(s) "something [un-]resolved in her own mind" (Lyotard, 1991:53 in Melrose, Sachsenmaier & Butcher, 2015:92). In this light, making new works feels akin to making the same work over and over again.

In order to trace the embodied pathways of choreographic practice in the works that are part of this study, I also draw on Spatz's conceptualisation of embodied research as a cyclical and reversible onto-epistemic trajectory (Spatz, 2020:1). Spatz argues that embodied research "can best be theorised not through phenomenology or cognitive studies but through social epistemology" (Spatz, 2020:xvii). Borrowing Cetina's concept of "epistemic objects as limitlessly unfolding" (Spatz, 2020:1), Spatz notes that too often "our theories of research focus narrowly on the border between known and unknown, without acknowledging how mobile this border is" (Spatz, 2020:2). Like Martinez's suggestion that knowledge vacillates, Spatz sees this border as "constantly shifting" and draws attention to the unstable "distinction between question and answer, method and topic, premise and inquiry, the visible and the invisible" (Spatz, 2020:2). This conceptualisation creates an ever-expanding field of research for the researcher as:

> Knowledge that recedes from awareness is "behind" us, while "in front" of us are new fields of knowing that only become possible because of what has been automatised. As we move forward into these new fields, they too gradually become sedimented and "deposit" into the known (Spatz, 2020:2-3).

Spatz's description challenges "binary models of the research edge as the place where the known meets the unknown. Such models are accurate to a degree, but they fail to account for the continual movement of the research edge" (Spatz, 2020:2). Before further exploring the

directional perspective on research offered by Spatz, it is worth unpacking the notion of this framework as an onto-epistemological project (already referred to earlier).

I draw primarily from Barad to explain that classical ontology is based on "a belief in a world populated by independently existing things with determinate boundaries and properties that move around in a container called 'space' in step with a linear sequence of moments called 'time'" (Barad, 2011:144). They add that these discrete entities "interact with one another in a locally determinate fashion, wherein change is the result of one event (the cause) causing another event (the effect)" (Barad, 2011:146). Rejecting classical ontology, Barad develops a theory of agential realism (this concept is further explored in Chapter Two). Drawing from Niels Bohr's philosophy of physics, Barad uses the example of a simple two-slit experiment to demonstrate that "the very nature of [an] entity – its ontology – changes (or rather becomes differently determinate) depending on the experimental apparatus used to determine its nature" (Barad, 2011:142).[27] Barad coins the term "intra-action," referred to earlier, to describe the mutual dependency of entity and apparatus (Barad, 2003:815). This leads Barad to posit that measurements, which are intra-actions, are "world-making: matter and meaning do not preexist, but rather are co-constituted via measurement intra-actions" (Barad, 2012:646). They add that "if measurements intra-action plays a constitutive role in what is measured, then it matters *how* something is explored" [emphasis my own] (Barad, 2012:646).

By viewing instances of embodied practice and research as intra-actions, or ontologically as a mutual dependent relation between entity and apparatus – whereby the researcher cannot be separated from that which is studied – epistemic distance is reconfigured. Understanding intra-actions as cutting together-apart in one movement (Barad, 2011:125), and which will be further elaborated below, suggests the changeability of this distance. Rethinking understandings of epistemic distance in research activities supports the decolonising of knowledge-making practices and enlivens Santos' insight that (in the global South), "our knowledge flies at low altitude because it is stuck to the body" (Santos, 2014:12).

Building on the notion of agential realism, which posits that theories of knowing and theories of being are entangled with one another, I return to Spatz's conceptualisation of research as

[27] The simple two-slit experiment Barad refers to, shows that particles behave like a wave when they pass through a two-slit apparatus without a which-slit detector, yet behave like particles when the apparatus includes a which-slit detector (Barad, 2011:142).

directional, as an onto-epistemological trajectory that is both cyclical and reversible. Spatz does not offer a "fixed ontology" as in a "coherent and analytically exhaustive set of types," but rather an "onto-epistemological toolkit" (Spatz, 2020:6). This concept of the directionality of research, alongside Barad's notion of intra-action and agential realism, provide a framework in which to consider the artistic projects that are part of this study, the way in which they repeat themselves and reenact similar ideas, and the way in which they interact with theory and practices at various points along the way. Spatz's onto-epistemological toolkit contains five items that are "already recognisable from contemporary thought" and which Spatz resituates "in a particular relation as points along a journey" (Spatz, 2020:6). The toolkit consists of a trajectory from *field* to *object*, *threshold*, *technique*, *principle* and back to *field*. The journey is both cyclical and reversible. Spatz describes the reversible nature of this journey as "opening" and "closure." "Opening" describes the direction of research and learning, a movement which is characterised by "entering, unfolding, delving into, uncovering, expanding, drawing near" (Spatz, 2020:7). However, Spatz explains that "we can also move in the opposite direction through a journey of closing, folding up, getting out of, gaining distance. This is the direction of *teaching*, *pedagogy*, and *mastery* – the direction of closure" (Spatz, 2020:7).

Moving through the boundary of known and unknown, which depending on the direction of movement can either be figured as "opening" or as "closure," is perceived by Spatz as an essential strategy for "getting at things in different ways," for arriving in new fields, and undoing entrenched epistemological hierarchies, which Spatz links to the project of decoloniality (Spatz, 2020:15). Drawing from Spatz's onto-epistemological toolkit, I pay particular attention to the point in the trajectory Spatz names "technique." Spatz explains that in the trajectory of research what first appears are "objects within fields" (Spatz, 2020:6). Then, "at a certain point,":

> An object becomes crossable, transforming into a threshold, border or boundary. Although one can now cross this boundary, the space on the other side remains unclear, fuzzy. It can only be defined by the threshold that gets you there (the limen, hence it is liminal) until another transformation takes place, at which point it becomes possible to specify in precise and technical terms just what happens "over there" (Spatz, 2020:6).

This new point in the trajectory Spatz calls *technique*. Technique can be "codified and formalised as exercises, definitions, or instructions" (Spatz, 2020:6). Spatz offers a metaphor

for the fleeting moment threshold becomes technique and describes this point as the "crest of the wave, the highpoint at which the 'thing' seems to crystallise and to be known for what it is, its grain and detail" (Spatz, 2020:6). Spatz emphasises the transition from threshold to technique, critiquing both object-oriented and threshold-oriented ontologies. They write that "while object-oriented ontologies can be radical in their capacity to deprive powerful fields of their assumed primacy' they may not 'accord greater epistemological power to and legitimacy to subjugated fields" (Spatz, 2020:17–18). Threshold ontologies, as argued earlier with reference to Pather's (2006) suggestion of South African contemporary dance as a response aesthetic, run the "risk that the crossing itself becomes primary, rather than the place to which one arrives" (Spatz, 2020:21). The moment threshold crosses over into explicit technique "may not last long" and:

> Soon through, repetition, the same technique that had been explicit discovery is trained and repeated until it becomes habitual, automatised, and sedimented: an implicit principle that underpins and affords what can only be recognised as a new field, different from the one in which we began (Spatz, 2020:6).

For Spatz, technique marks the moment knowledge becomes repeatable and transmissible.

Momentarily stabilisations

I suggest that by tracing pathways of practice in my choreographic practice as an embodied researcher, techniques may be exposed that structure this practice. To think through this practice, I draw from Barad's understanding of phenomena, as the smallest units of analysis, and intra-action, which as discussed above, explains how phenomena emerge from the mutual entanglement of object and measuring apparatus (Sauzet, 2015:39). Sofie Sauzet explains that "analysing phenomena, then, is a methodological practice of continuously questioning the (situated) effects that the way we research have on the knowledge we produce" (Sauzet, 2015:39–40). Considering that research objects are ontologically inseparable from research apparatuses, I refer to Barad's "agential cut" to describe "momentary stabilisations" in the research process (Sauzet, 2015:3). As referred to earlier, intra-action replaces the classical Cartesian cut – which separates and makes an inherent distinction between subject and object –with an *agential cut* (Barad, 2011:125). Rethinking classical models of causality, Barad suggests that the question of agency is linked to

ontological indeterminacy rather than epistemological uncertainty (Barad, 2011:134). They explain that:

> The agential cut enacts a "local" resolution within the phenomenon of the inherent ontological indeterminacy. Crucially then, intra-actions enact agential separability – the local condition of exteriority-within-phenomena. Thus, differentiating is not a relation of radical exteriority, but agential separability, of exteriority-within. Intra-actions cut things together-apart (in one movement) (Barad, 2011:125).

Agential cuts, Sauzet explains, are momentary stabilisations, which can be described as "doings, rather than beings" (Sauzet, 2020:3). I suggest that each instance of artistic creation, each reiteration of a dance work, each instance of writing, each recombination of documents that form part of the cartography, can be considered agential cuts, or momentary stabilisations that allow for the gathering of research materials and analysis. Each momentary stabilisation responds to a particular choreographic problem, as will be further explored in the next chapter, and produces shifts in knowledge.

Summation of the chapter

This chapter has discussed the starting point of my inquiry, which is the suggestion that the dominant mode of analysis of contemporary dance and choreography in South Africa relies on dance being viewed as text and the dancing body as discursive. I view this as a representationalist framework, which, following Barad, should be problematised as an over-reliance on language (Barad, 2003:804). To find ways to disrupt this representationalist framework, I propose adopting an artistic research methodology to trace the embodied pathways in my own choreographic practice. Drawing from practice theory, new materialism, performance theory and decoloniality, I have discussed artistic research as an onto-epistemic process, which simply described, means that the thing we research is "enacted in entanglement with 'the way" we research it" (Sauzet, 2015:39). Throughout this discussion, the relationship between theory and practice as well as the relationship between artistic practice and writing appear as sources of tension. This study groups together three research 'outcomes': the artistic projects that form part of the study, a cartography and this written thesis. Each recombination of research documents is viewed as an 'agential cut' or a momentary stabilisation that allows for a shift in knowledge.

The next chapter considers decoloniality in relation to artistic practice. The chapter will propose an understanding of choreography as epistemic, as embodied research and as a decolonial praxis that will form the basis for subsequent chapters and the cartography.

CHAPTER TWO: CHOREOGRAPHY AS EMBODIED RESEARCH AND DECOLONIAL PRAXIS

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I problematised modes of analysing contemporary dance and choreography that rely primarily on viewing dance as text and the dancing body as discursive. Drawing from Spatz, my suggestion is that the over-reliance on a representational framework may foreclose the excavation of other aspects of dance-making and performing within South African dance studies. In this chapter, I set out to clarify my understanding of choreography that also underpins the remainder of this study.

The overarching idea is that choreography is a practice that is epistemic in nature and that choreography can be conceptualised as embodied research. I argue that when choreography is conceptualised in this way, it has the potential to trouble representationalism and open up avenues towards a decolonial praxis. By focusing on choreography as an embodied practice and as embodied research, I take up Spatz's suggestion to shift from the politics of representation to the politics of practice (Spatz, 2015:7). According to Spatz, theatre and performance studies have often privileged "the phenomena of (public) spectatorship as a site of social intervention" (Spatz, 2015:7). By way of contrast, the intervention here consists of focusing on dance and performance-making as a site of practical experimentation, as embodied research from the perspective of the choreographer-performer who in this study, is the 'embodied researcher'. The aim is to destabilise a view of dance as a practice of inscription (writing on the body), which can, for example, be argued through the lens of Foucault and Butler.[28] Choreography is positioned here as a material-discursive and embodied practice, that offers alternative and expanded understandings of agency, which I unpack further through the works of Noland (2009), Spatz (2015; 2020), Barad (2003; 2011; 2012) and Erin Manning (2009a; 2009b; 2016). Recognising that choreography is epistemic, implies that choreography transcends the performance event, and recalls Melrose, Sachsenmaier and Butcher's earlier-mentioned suggestion (discussed in Chapter 1) that the embodied researcher is present before, in and after the event (Melrose, Sachsenmaier & Butcher,

[28] In this writing I have drawn from Foucault (1970; 2002) and Butler (1993). Other texts are included as secondary sources.

2013:4). It also aligns with Cvejić's concept of choreography as spanning the practices of making, performing and attending, to which I add sensing, moving, witnessing and teaching (Cvejić, 2015:38).

By underscoring the epistemic nature of choreography as embodied research, I suggest that choreography can align with the idea of a decolonial praxis. The project of decoloniality problematises representation as a dominant logic and positions epistemic justice as one of its central concerns (Santos, 2014). I refer to choreography as a "decolonial praxis" to align myself with Mignolo's decolonial vocabulary. Decoloniality involves a "praxis of living" which considers sensing as interwoven with knowing (Mignolo, 2018:362). This kind of praxis, according to Mignolo, recognises that "your sensing changes with your knowing; and your knowing reifies and modifies your sensing" (Mignolo, 2018:362). By arguing that choreographic practice is both knowledge-generating and a praxis, a "way of thinking, knowing, and doing," I bring the study in proximity to some of the concerns of postcolonial and decolonial thinkers (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015:485).

This chapter begins with a discussion of decoloniality and the notion of a decolonial praxis, before further unpacking the notion of choreography as epistemic and as embodied research. I also clarify my understanding of embodied technique, which is a central concept in Spatz's (2015; 2020) work, and the tracing of which forms the basis for subsequent chapters.

Decoloniality and choreography as a decolonial praxis

As mentioned above, the aim of this study is to trouble representationalism and to seek an understanding of choreography as epistemic, as embodied research, and as a decolonial praxis. The idea of a decolonial praxis is drawn from Mignolo who describes decoloniality as an "option," distinct from the civilising "mission" that characterised the cultural project of colonialism (in Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2014:197). Decoloniality, according to Ndlovu-Gatsheni, is an epistemological and political movement and as such "a necessary liberatory language of the future for Africa" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015:485). Ndlovu-Gatsheni further notes that, as mentioned in Chapter One, decoloniality includes diverse positions and "can be best understood as a pluriversal epistemology" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013:13). Following Aníbal

Quijano,[29] Mignolo explains that decoloniality emerges from the entanglement of modernity/coloniality (Mignolo, 2018:372). Different from colonialism, coloniality is understood to be complicit together with modernity (hence modernity/coloniality), in enforcing and embedding patterns of power within "culture, labour, intersubjectivity relations, and knowledge production" (Maldonado-Torres, 2007:243). Under the guise of modernisation and progress, coloniality operates as "an embedded logic that enforces control, domination, and exploitation" (Mignolo, 2005 cited in Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015:487). In addition to economic domination, coloniality also has psychological, epistemological, cultural and linguistic dimensions, as argued extensively by Ngugi (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015:487).

Just as 'coloniality' addresses a concept distinct from 'colonialism', the differences between decolonisation and decoloniality also need to be untangled (Spatz, 2020:252). Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang in particular, also referred to by Spatz (2020), draw attention to the danger of the "metaphorisation of decolonisation," for example when decolonisation becomes a metaphor for broader questions of social justice which "makes possible a set of evasions, or 'settler moves to innocence', that problematically attempt to reconcile settler guilt and complicity, and rescue settler futurity" (Tuck & Yang, 2012:1). Decolonisation, according to these authors "cannot be easily grafted onto pre-existing discourses/frameworks, even if they are critical, even if they are anti-racist, even if they are justice frameworks" (Tuck & Yang, 2012:3). Spatz explains that while decolonisation "refers to the transfer of political power" and "decolonisation movements aim to overturn a system of colonial rule; decoloniality, by contrast, is an ongoing praxis that unmakes and reinvents techniques, institutions, and logics" (Spatz, 2020:253). Decoloniality is thus concerned with knowledge and knowledge practices. In this sense, and without denying the importance of social justice projects, this study aligns choreography with an epistemic endeavour that seeks to grapple with the notion of alternative logics and techniques.

Central to this argument is the understanding that decoloniality involves a reconstructive epistemic project that begins "from a more expansive account of what knowledge might include" (Alcoff, 2007:95). This is a response to decoloniality's basic problem (as referred to in Chapter One) that "systems of knowing and representing that developed in European

[29] See for example, Quijano (2007).

modernity were constituted by and within the coloniality of power" (Alcoff, 2007:92). As Vázquez writes, these systems of knowing and representing deny the "plurality of other worlds"[30] (Vázquez, 2019:22). Mignolo argues that to understand the structural role knowledge plays in articulating colonial differences, it is necessary to come "to terms with the geopolitics of knowing, sensing, and believing" (Mignolo, 2018:371). Santos (2014) similarly emphasises the importance of epistemic justice by advocating for an "ecology of knowledges" (Santos, 2014:188-211). In Santos' ecology of knowledges, knowledge is not a representation of reality, but rather an intervention in reality (Santos, 2014:201). An important point I take on from Santos is that knowledge as an intervention in reality "always combines the cognitive with the ethical-political" (Santos, 2014:201). Choreography as a decolonial praxis foregrounds the epistemic nature of choreography and demands that aesthetic concerns are interlinked with the ethico-political. Drawing from Santos (2014) and Spatz (2020), I suggest that a decolonial praxis of choreography and therefore decolonial techniques of the body, address questions of knowing and doing as well as ways of being in the world. A decolonial praxis addresses epistemological and ontological questions. From a South African sociological perspective, Crain Soudien argues that the "central significance of South Africa is that it poses the question of *being*, of ontology, the capacity to feel, to know and to be aware of oneself, with an intensity not easily matched elsewhere in the world" (Soudien, 2012:2). In advocating for the necessity of unlearning the logic of race – a master signifier, according to Soudien – he shows how questions of knowing oneself are entangled with questions of well-being, of taking care of oneself and others (Soudien, 2012:2-3). Building on this, a decolonial praxis of choreography addresses the aesthetic, the ontology, and the ethos of making and moving. This meets Guattari's ([1989]2000) concept of an "ecosophy," which they define as a politics that is "both ethico-political and aesthetic" (in Manning, 2016:127-128), as well as Mignolo's concept of a decolonial aesthesis, which I explore further below.

Decolonial aesthesis and embodied arts

Seeking a decolonial praxis of artmaking entails troubling established conceptual frameworks. Mignolo suggests that a decolonial artist does not aim to 'succeed' in the art world, which

[30] This includes the temporalities of other worlds, as elaborated in Chapter Four through Vázquez (2006; 2009; 2019).

operates within particular constructs of 'the arts' that are often grounded in capitalist and neoliberal conceptions (in Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2014:205). According to Mignolo, the challenge of dislodging established conceptual frames, is closely connected to the fact that "the 'conversation' has been established within Western epistemology," which is constituted within the coloniality of power (in Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2014:203). Challenging this conversation then, involves 'delinking' from the legacy of modern aesthetics and conceptions of art formed in Greek and Roman philosophical thought (in Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2014:201). Mignolo coins the term "decolonial aesthesis" (distinct from 'aesthetics') to name any practice, thinking or doing, that dismantles the sensibility of the colonised subject in such a way that it might be reconstituted as an alternative sense understanding – a perceptual perspective unlike the ones that are known through the inheritance of colonial sensibilities. Mignolo's decolonial aesthesis challenges an entrenched colonial sensibility and requires a "critical intervention within the world of the contemporary arts" (Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2014:201–202).

Practitioners and scholars in the field of South African contemporary dance have emphasised the need to disrupt hegemonic constructs of dance and dancing bodies in order to grapple with the ongoing legacies of colonial and apartheid power structures (Loots, 1995; 1999; 2012; 2015; 2018, Friedman, 2012a; 2012b; Samuel, 2011; 2012). These disruptions, they have argued, need to take into account not only performance texts, but also ways of teaching and training, questions of whose bodies are made visible and processes of creation. This study chooses to explore how homing in on choreography as embodied research creates opportunities for disrupting established conceptual frames of contemporary dance and dance-making. This follows Spatz's proposition that "notions of embodiment and embodied arts offer something specific to decolonisation efforts, which cannot be subsumed under the concept of performance" (Spatz, 2020:246). As noted in Chapter One, Spatz advocates for the use of a broader umbrella of "embodied arts" as a way to unmake genre boundaries between theatre, dance and music, and to deploy an alternative framework for thinking around the body, performance and research (Spatz, 2020:247). Spatz explains that:

> If divisions between theatre, dance, and music have never made much sense outside the Eurocentric canon, one could hope that a political decentering or "provincialising of Europe in the world would include a radical reconfiguration of concepts like script,

> narrative, score, and work, which structure disciplinary divisions in performing arts (Spatz, 2020:246).

Spatz further notes that while the field of performance studies has attempted these interventions, the promise has remained "unfulfilled insofar as the broad spectrum of performance offers no corresponding field of practical experimentation" (Spatz, 2020:246). Spatz argues for the potential of embodied arts as a broader, disruptive category, not only because of the breakdown of genre boundaries, but also because of the possibility of "a more radical breakdown of the epistemological and ontological boundaries separating artists and audiences" (Spatz, 2020:246). Spatz's concept of "embodied arts" as an open field of practical experimentation offers possibilities for an alternative and 'delinked', in the sense of a decolonial aesthesic conceptualisation of choreography.

As noted earlier, this study follows Spatz's suggestion that the politics of representation are not the same as the politics of practice, and that "another language is needed" (Spatz, 2015:7). By thinking through the notion of a decolonial aesthesis and imagining choreography as part of a larger territory of embodied arts, it becomes possible to see how sensing, moving, making, teaching, performing/presenting, witnessing/attending, thinking, and writing about dance are not necessarily separate activities but interwoven strands within an embodied practice and research process. This reiterates Pather's argument, referred to in Chapter One, which suggests that the framing of dance as primarily something to be watched, is limiting in an African context (Pather, 2006:11). By positioning choreographic practice as embodied research (as conceptualised by Spatz), choreography can be aligned with a decolonial praxis that, as argued earlier, radically considers the aesthetic, the political and the ethical as co-constitutive aspects. According to Spatz, in this understanding of embodied arts:

> Spectatorial methodologies are displaced and – following arguments for situated embodiment in other fields – it is the artist or practitioner who is recognised as having contestable but undeniable privilege in relation to the meaning of events (Spatz, 2020:250).

This perspective of the embodied researcher guides the subsequent chapters and the cartography that forms part of this study. Spatz further clarifies their position by stating that embodiment or embodied arts are not pitted against performance (Spatz, 2020:250). Rather, Spatz draws attention to the limitations of performance as a concept "insofar as it posits a spectatorial position in relation to which the meaning of the event takes place – a position

which easily becomes synonymous with that of the theorist or critic" (Spatz, 2020:251). This aligns with my own position that a focus on dance as textual and the body as discursive (which relies on a representationalist framework) forecloses the excavation of other aspects of dance-making and performing. In response, the dance works that are part of this study aim to engage with a field of practical experimentation. In the next section, I provide a proposition for conceptualising choreography as epistemic, and as embodied research including a discussion of embodiment that frames the remainder of this study. This follows Spatz's suggestion that "embodiment has the potential to initiate or reinvent an ethics and politics in which life, survival, vulnerability, and ecology would be key terms" (Spatz, 2020:246). This also resonates with Manning's evocation of choreographing the political, which she describes as "devising techniques, in the moving, for an activist philosophy that is ecological and neurodiverse at its very core" (Manning, 2016:129). It is at this point that choreography may meet a decolonial praxis.

Thinking through choreography/troubling the logic of representation

The aim of this next section is first, to establish a framework for my understanding of choreography as epistemic, as an instance of thinking, with the understanding that questions of epistemology are at the heart of decolonial thinking. Secondly, I draw from Cvejić's understanding of choreographic problems and expressive concepts to suggest how such a framework troubles the logic of representation. Finally, I introduce Spatz's conceptualisation of technique to suggest how thinking through choreography may give rise to new techniques that can fuel a decolonial praxis of choreography.

Thinking through choreography

To foreground choreographic practice as epistemic, I use the idea of 'thinking through choreography', drawing primarily from Cvejić (2015), Lepecki (2006; 2015), Efrosini Protopapa (2016), and Spatz (2015; 2020). My intention in thinking through my own choreographic practice entails a shift from interpretation, which considers the 'aboutness' of the work, and which I refer to as "spectatorial methodologies" as critiqued by Spatz (2020:251), to a focus on the workings/doings of the dance, which underscores the onto-epistemological character of this project and, in Spatz's terms draws attention to the politics of practice (Spatz, 2015:7).

This also follows Cvejić' invitation to think about the *being (and doing)* of performances rather than the *about* of performances (Cvejić, 2015:15).

Cvejić begins by unpacking conceptual divisions between dance, performance, contemporary dance, conceptual dance or even non-dance or anti-dance (as referred to in Chapter One) and offers a proposal to rethink choreography as experimentation. Rejecting the notion that works subsumed under the debatable categories of conceptual dance, non-dance or anti-dance are somehow in opposition to contemporary dance, she employs a rigorous philosophical method to undo and rethink certain powerful assumptions of contemporary dance, including the bind between the body and movement, and the apparatus of theatrical representation that casts dance performance as a communication between performer and spectator (Cvejić, 2015:23).

Cvejić's argument partly builds on Lepecki's (2006) notion of exhaustion in contemporary dance and choreography, which is also taken up and expanded by Protopapa (2016) amongst others. In his seminal work, *Exhausting Dance*, Lepecki (2006) considers how contemporary choreography troubles the ontology of dance as kinetic flow, understood to be the bind between dance and movement (dance as movement) established by modernity. In dance as kinetic flow, Lepecki (2006) (read here through Protopapa) recognises modernity's ontology which "rests on the kinetic, an ongoing motility, a propensity to movement" (Protopapa, 2016:171). "Exhausting dance" then refers to the interruption of this ontology through "kinaesthetic stuttering," or even acts of stillness (Protopapa, 2016:171). Employing postcolonial and critical race theory alongside the exploration of contemporary choreographic practices, Lepecki suggests that these works are political in the ways in which they challenge "the kinetic spectacle of modernity," Lepecki argues that these choreographic practices may "challenge colonialism and its new guises" (Lepecki, 2006:14). Protopapa expands the notion of "exhausting" dance by offering an alternative concept of "possibilising," which she borrows from Deleuze.[31] Rather than marking the ends of dance, as the idea of 'exhausting' surfaces, Protopapa suggests that choreographic experimentation continually opens up to new possibilities (Protopapa, 2016:170). According to Protopapa, this idea of "possibilising," resists not only modernity's bind between dance and "a certain kind of movement (in the sense of 'flow', for example), but also potentially a whole discourse that is concerned with labelling

[31] Protopapa refers to Deleuze's text *The Exhausted* (1997).

dance according to its relationship to (dance) movement," through for example, shifting terms such as conceptual dance or non-dance (Protopapa, 2016:180). Protopapa and Cvejić read this interplay between the exhaustion of dance and the constant seeking of renewal as "an obsession with contemporaneity," which warrants critique (Protopapa, 2016:176). This perspective meets a point made by Vázquez, who argues that contemporaneity, which emphasises the present, marks "the temporal normativity of modernity" (Vázquez, 2019:28). Speaking to the idea of a decolonial dance practice, Vázquez calls for "the end of the contemporary as a way of undoing the colonial difference" (Vázquez, 2019:22). In framing choreographic practice as epistemic, as an instance of thinking, I note the significance of resisting modernity's privileging of the contemporary. As Lepecki, Cvejić and Protopapa argue, choreographic practice as epistemic is more than an approach that seeks renewal. This point will be elaborated later on in this chapter through the work of Spatz (2015; 2020).

Troubling the logic of representation

Lepecki's (2006) notion of "exhausting dance" and Protopapa's notion of "possibilising" propose "new analytical frameworks for contemporary choreographic work" (Protopapa, 2016:181), and as such underscore ways in which dance or choreographic practice functions as philosophical thinking or can be considered epistemic. Protopapa proposes that dance as philosophical thinking does not seek to analyse movement in terms of meanings or its about-ness, but rather "to identify the possibilities themselves opened out for dance through choreography" (Protopapa, 2016:181). Extrapolating from this, Cvejić, read here through Protopapa, explains that dance as philosophical thinking does not ask "what the object of the dance is, but what sort of concept it proposes" (Cvejić in Protopapa, 2016:175). In this section, I continue to draw from Cvejić's (2015) understanding of choreography as thinking and explore specifically her notion of choreographic problems and expressive concepts that provide a challenge to the logic of representation.

Cvejić's study considers a set of choreographic practices that "critically address the prevailing regime of representation in theatre dance" (Cvejić, 2015:2). Key to her argument is that in order to go beyond representation, performance studies must "radically examine its disciplinary objectives and techniques, such as interpretation by means of case studies, culturalist quests for identity, and representational thinking in general" (Cvejić, 2015:32). This

representational regime, writes Cvejić, is "characterised by an emphasis on bodily movement, identification of the human body and the theatre's act of communication determining the reception of the audience" (Cvejić, 2015:2). She focuses on seven examples of contemporary works of Western theatre dance to elaborate how choreography has "the capacity to engender thought" (as discussed in the previous section) and to demonstrate how these works rethink "the relationship between the body, movement, and time, and consequently give rise to distinctive concepts of their own" (Cvejić, 2015:2). She analyses choreographic works as a set of choreographic "problems" that require expressive concepts in response. She draws from Deleuzian and Spinozist philosophy and specifically Deleuze's ontology of difference, process and becoming to provide a theoretical basis for the critique of representationalism in choreographic practice. According to Cvejić, Deleuze's logic of expression can be succinctly explained "through a shift of the question posed to the work of art from interpretation ('what does it mean?') to experimentation ('how does it work?')" (Cvejić, 2015:30).

As discussed previously in relation to Barad's new materialism, the system or logic of representation, according to Deleuze, depends on "the model of recognition in Western philosophy" (Cvejić, 2015:33). Cvejić develops her argument through a close reading of Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition* (1994).[32] The model of recognition is described by Deleuze as having two sides that form the image of thought: "the subjective identity of the self and its faculties and the objective identity of the thing (and world) to which these faculties refer" (Deleuze, 1994:133 in Cvejić, 2015:34). The model of recognition, which has a hold in Western philosophy through the works of Plato, Descartes and Kant, leads to an understanding of representation, "where representation depends on the recognition of the form of the Same with regard to concepts" (Cvejić, 2015:36). Within this model, "difference," according to Deleuze, "becomes an object of representation always in relation to a conceived identity, a judged analogy, an imagined opposition or a perceived similitude" (Deleuze, 1994:138 in Cvejić, 2015:36). Cvejić follows Deleuze to argue that representation is "a reductive model of thinking" because:

> It subordinates difference to identity and thus never allows the thought to begin anew, to create anything but the recognisable and the recognised. In other words, that which isn't recognised and cannot be recognised is either dismissed by the representational image of

[32] I engage primarily with Cvejic's reading here because of her application of these concepts to choreographic thinking.

> thought, or […] forces thought to reinvent itself and affirm difference prior to identity (Cvejić, 2015:37).

The choreographies analysed by Cvejić apply a number of strategies to breakdown theatre dance's reigning representational regime. These dances either 'part with the recognition of the dancing body, or with reception as a unified judgement of cognitive faculties' (Cvejić, 2015:33). These works, then, cannot be made sense of by relying on a representational logic. Drawing from Deleuze's antirepresentational conception of thought, Cvejić proposes an alternative logic to make sense of these choreographies. She shows how these choreographic processes (which span making, performing, and attending) create instances of joint thinking and doing, leaning on Deleuze's alignment of thought with creation or the notion that thought brings "into being that which does not yet exist" (Cvejić, 2015:38). Cvejić demonstrates how these dances are held together by a set of questions or "problems," rather than referring to recognisable objects or images exterior to the dance. These problems are met with expressive concepts, as articulated by Deleuze through Spinoza, which replaces the logic of representation.

Expressive concepts, or "expression" is drawn from Spinoza's univocal ontology with its concepts of parallelism of thought and adequation, and moves away from Cartesian representation, offering an alternative correspondence between things and ideas (Cvejić, 2015:43). Briefly, Spinozist ontology rethinks causality and explains that "the mind perceives adequately when it sees a thing necessary from the same logic" (Cvejić, 2015: 43). This ontology thus posits that "ideas in the form of problems and compositions arise in parallel, non-causal correspondence," rather than through recognition which supports representation (Cvejić, 2015:45). An expressive concept creates a "relation between the concept, the problem and the performance composition" (Cvejić, 2015:55). However, it does not "directly correspond to (in the sense of interpreting) the entire work: it expresses it from the viewpoint of the problem" (Cvejić, 2015:55). Cvejić summarises this philosophical operation as follows:

> First, the problem and the performance composition arise in a parallel process of thinking and doing at the same time. Second, the concept explores the logic in the path of thinking and experiment under the aegis of the problem. Third, the relation between the concept and the performance composition is mediated by the problem, and thus involves an agreement between something included in the performance … and the problem as its object (Cvejić, 2015:55).

Cvejić's application of choreographic problems and expressive concepts is compelling because they account for experimentation or "the probing of a path" within choreographic practice (Cvejić, 2015:49), what Lepecki refers to as "exhausting," Protopapa renames as "possibilising" and Spatz (2020:132) calls "research", which I will explore further in subsequent sections. As a foundation for this study, these probing, re-searching, experimental approaches to choreography imply that each dance work demands the creation of new, specific beings/doings that correspond to the choreographic problem rather than drawing from existing language that is reconstituted according to the logic of representation and the model of recognition. Choreography as thinking, probing, re-searching opens up possibilities for what may be called "variations in performance" (Noland, 2009:3), or in a Foucauldian sense, "instances of resistance" (Noland, 2009:3), or in Deleuze's terms, a search for "the unpredictable and the new" (Noland, 2009:64–65).

As discussed in Chapter One, this understanding of choreography underscores ways in which dance works, or other instances of embodied practice, offer durable epistemic locations (Spatz, 2020:9). This contrasts with Phelan's (1993) thesis of the ontology of performance as disappearance. In this regard, Cvejić argues that:

> The differentiation between choreography in its making and choreography in its performance shouldn't ontologically favour performance as the "mode of being" of dance just because performance supposedly erases choreography in terms of excess/lack (Cvejić, 2015:13).

Cvejić makes use of choreographic problems and expressive concepts to account for the creation of new experiences beyond recognition, outside the logic of representation (Cvejić, 2015:37). While there are possible alliances between Deleuzian ontologies, decoloniality and feminism, for example (as indicated by Braidotti, 2019, and Braidotti & Regan, 2017), it should be noted that this critique emerges within western philosophy itself. It remains to be argued whether this conceptualisation of choreographic practice can work beyond a western narrative. Can expressive concepts take into consideration the racialisation of the dancing body, for example, and contribute towards decolonising embodiment? Although Cvejić limits her scope to European works, there are a number of instances in her analyses in which the white performing body assumes a suggested neutrality. In borrowing from Cvejić, I am mindful of the problematics of positioning any body as neutral but suggest that Cvejić's troubling of

representational logic may be extended to consider the decolonisation of the dancing body, and as Spatz advocates, the decolonisation of embodiment itself (Spatz, 2020:252).

In this section I have created a framework for my own understanding of choreographic practice as epistemic. From Cvejić I have borrowed the idea that dance works pose choreographic problems that give rise to the creation of expressive concepts. In the next section, I expand these ideas through the work of Spatz (2015; 2020) in particular. Specifically, I borrow Spatz's conceptualising of technique, or "embodied technique." While Cvejić focuses on choreographic problems and expressive concepts, Spatz draws attention to the "practice" of choreography (and the politics thereof). Spatz names technique as a unit of analysis and as that which structures embodied practice and allows for the sedimentation and transfer of knowledge. While expressive concept responds to a choreographic problem, technique begins to articulate something within the practice that is relatively reliable, repeatable, and transmissible, and thus proposes a compelling idea for imagining a decolonial choreographic praxis. Spatz draws from Marcel Mauss's (1950) techniques of the body to define technique along four characteristics:

> (1) Technique is knowledge; it is acquired and not easy to unlearn. (2) Technique is transmissible; it travels across time and space and is always hybrid and mixed. (3) Technique is a compromise between "nature" and "humanity." (4) Technique can be embodied in the sense that it may work with and through the materiality of bodies as distinct from technologies (Spatz, 2015:32–33).

Moving forward with the idea of "technique" also marks my deliberate reclaiming of this term. Spatz notes that "technique is often negatively associated with 'the mere mechanical' or 'procedural'" (Spatz, 2015:29). Through the trope of excess, as discussed Chapter One, technique is also seen as lacking, as in the idea that artistry requires technique to be accompanied by something more. In addition, in the context of South African dance, Sylvia Glasser has noted that technique is frequently associated with western dance forms that have historically been positioned as high art (Glasser, 1991:n.p), in other words, colonial techniques. This supports Spatz's point that "reductive idea[s] of technique implied by the trope of excess damages our ability to appreciate the diversity of embodied practices and the variety of technique that structures them" (Spatz, 2015:60). In tracing the pathways of my own choreographic practice in subsequent chapters and in the cartography of this study, I search for instances where movement experiments begin to articulate repeatable,

transmissible, and relatively reliable technique (Spatz, 2015:32–35), in an effort to imagine techniques for a decolonial choreographic praxis.

Choreography as embodied research and technique

In the previous section, I foregrounded choreography as epistemic using Protopapa and Cvejić's notions of dance as philosophical thinking and demonstrated how this troubles a representationalist model through Cvejić's application of the Deleuzian understanding of "problems" and "expressive concepts." In this section, I draw heavily from Spatz (2015; 2020) to develop this idea further and position choreography as embodied "research," which forms a foundation for the way in which I approach the dance works, the cartography and the writing that are part of this study. I have already been using much of Spatz's terminology, including "practice," "technique" (or "the technical") and "epistemic," without acknowledging the rigour with which Spatz approaches these terms. Spatz describes these three concepts as follows:

1. Practice, understood as situated moments lived and experienced.
2. Technique/the technical, knowledge that structures practice and which allows us to compare moments of practice across time and space.
3. The epistemic, that territory of the unknown which is closest to us, just on the edge of grasping, encountered but not yet known (Spatz, 2020:134).

These terms structure much of my approach going forward. This study critically approaches poststructuralist and postcolonial discursive readings of the dancing body and choreographic practices in order to draw attention to their limitations. Writing from a social sciences perspective, Thanem and Knights, for example, argue that while discourse analysis and constructionist studies can offer useful tools "for how the body is constructed, subjectified and ordered through linguistic utterances," these approaches tend towards disembodied ontologies, epistemologies and methodologies (Thanem & Knights, 2019b:12). These authors offer that disembodied research is limited by failing to account for embodied reflexivity, the understanding that "the body is a target of knowledge yet actively involved in its creation" (Thanem & Knights, 2019a:2). Applying this understanding to choreographic practice, I follow Spatz who argues:

> When we "read" embodied practice in terms of signification alone, we ignore much of its meaning, which is located not in the relationship between signs but in the quantity and quality of embodied effort that goes into the enactment of technique. Signification, in this sense, is a surface phenomenon. It is an important dimension of the meaning and effectiveness of embodied technique, but by no means the only one (Spatz, 2015:50).

The choreographic processes detailed in this study are research efforts, specifically embodied research and, in this case, movement research. This builds on the understanding that these processes are "neither planned, nor haphazard, but epistemic" (Spatz, 2020:146). For Spatz, choreography is "an ongoing negotiation with the materiality of embodiment," and choreography becomes research when "this negotiation is directed toward the discovery of new, previously unknown pathways in practice" (Spatz, 2020:146). This understanding of choreography as research overlaps with contemporary concepts of dramaturgy. Maaike Bleeker (2015), for instance, aligns dramaturgical practice with thinking, arguing that creations can be conceived "not in terms of what they represent but how they enact ideas formulated in performative practice" (Bleeker, 2015:69). Vida L Midgelow (whose work I return to in the next chapter) proposes a "reconfiguration of the dramaturgical and the improvisational, which allows us to understand them both as embodied practices that play with memory" (Midgelow, 2015:106). Lepecki conceptualises dance dramaturgy as an "anexact yet rigorous work of errancy" (Lepecki, 2015:62). He writes that "what fuels dramaturgy as a practice *for* dance and *in* dance is the tension established between multiple non-written, diffuse and errant processes of thought and multiple corporeal processes of actualising these thoughts" (Lepecki, 2015:51-52). Spatz takes up Lepecki's concept of an "anexact yet rigorous" method and suggests that this methodology "has another name – research – and that it both embraces and far exceeds the quantified research of technological science" (Spatz, 2020:146). By reclaiming the term "research" in combination with art, performance and embodiment, Spatz implies a difference between viewing and analysing artistic or embodied research as opposed to analysing and viewing the artwork or performance as object (Spatz, 2017). This reiterates the point that a shift can be made from the spectatorial perspective of the disappearing performance event to the enduring knowledge, or "technique," that structures the performance. Documents of technique then become the research outcomes of embodied research and that which is sedimented to form an archive that extends synchronically (in conversation with practice taking place contemporaneously) and diachronically (extending through time), and thus contributing to a scholarly archive (Spatz, 2015:237). I propose that the next chapters, which

look more closely at the dance works that are part of this study, and the cartography, which is constructed through the assemblage of performance materials, offer such documents of technique, and expose the networks of practice that intersect and run through my own.

Spatz's understanding of "technique," in part discussed above, is key to this argument. They describe technique as a unit of practice that structures embodied practice and research. Technique is relatively reliable and is that which allows knowledge to become repeatable and transmissible (Spatz, 2020:101). For Spatz, the technical and the epistemic are "two sides of the same coin," and research can then be characterised as a constant movement between the technical/epistemic boundary (Spatz, 2020:2). In Spatz's research lexicon, epistemic objects refer to new, explicit knowledge or new discoveries that arise out of practice. Once these new discoveries become implicit and automaticised, they become part of technique, which in turn may lead to new epistemic objects (Spatz, 2020:3). This leads Spatz to define technique as "a network of fractally branching pathways that vein the structure of practice," which therefore allows what lies ahead in the research process to be characterised as emergent and unfolding (Spatz, 2015:44). In the next chapters and the cartography, where I look more closely at choreographic practice, I take up Spatz's understanding of choreography as embodied research and their definition of technique, to imagine techniques that could emerge from, and in turn fuel a decolonial praxis of choreography. Drawing from Spatz, the movement of this technical/epistemic boundary is what allows new practices and pedagogies to unfold. Next, I will contextualise my use of the term 'embodiment' and my understanding of technique as 'embodied'.

Embodiment and embodied technique

Spatz argues that research in embodied technique takes places at "the primary site of living and being" (Spatz, 2020:70) and can thus occupy a valuable place in institutionalised research. This argument is based on Spatz's concept of "embodiment as first affordance" (Spatz, 2020:70). It should be noted that Sheets-Johnstone problematises the use of the term "embodiment" in current discourses stating that it is often used as "on the one-hand, a lexical band-aid that covers over a 250-year-old suppurating wound and, on the other hand, a linguistic implant that plumps up facets of humanness by giving them a body" (Sheets-Johnstone, 2010:122). She argues that "embodiment" and "embodied" are imprecise, that

they follow from certain misconceptions, and result in part from the difficulty of putting into language the dynamics of animate life (Sheets-Johnstone, 2010:121-122). “Embodiment” and the qualifier “embodied”, according to Sheets-Johnstone, gloss over the “fundamental fact of animation that integrally and explicitly informs the evolution of animate forms of life” (Sheets-Johnstone, 2010:118). She further argues that, like animation, particular properties of movement, including kinesthesia and proprioception, are passed over in the shorthand of “embodiment” and “embodied.” Embodiers, she writes, “need to wean themselves away from embodiment and sensory-*motor* talk and work towards languaging the realities of sensory-*kinetic/kinesthetic* experience” (Sheets-Johnstone, 2010:122). Paul Bowman has similarly problematised the use of the term embodiment as “very current” in academia (Bowman, 2019:75). Bowman cautions against an “evangelistic” use of embodiment as a way to counter logocentric and semiotic approaches, arguing that embodiment frequently defaults to “embodiment of,” which ends up resurrecting discursive tendencies in cultural and performance analysis (Bowman, 2019:89).

Bearing these limitations in mind, I take up Spatz’s use of embodiment as first affordance as an important way to extend practice theories and definitions of research that support decolonial understandings of alternative epistemologies. Spatz’s central argument is that the “affordance of embodiment is logically prior to that of any external physical environment” and “is the first site at which the dialogue between agency and materiality takes place” (Spatz, 2020:76). The notion of affordance is borrowed from James J Gibson (1979) who refers to affordance as the relationship between environment and animal. Gibson explains that “the affordances of the environment are what it offers the animal, what it provides or furnishes, either good or ill” (Gibson, 1979:119). He adds that “the possibilities of the environment and the way of life of the animal go together inseparably” (Gibson, 1979:135). Transposing this notion of environmental affordance, Spatz posits that, in the area of practice, embodiment is “the primary site of engagement” (Spatz, 2020:71). This expands understandings of embodiment in practice theory discourses, as explored in depth in Schatzki, Knorr-Cetina and Von Savigny (2001). In a seminal text arguing for embodiment as a paradigm for the study of culture and self (1990:5), Csordas points to the reflexivity that underpins embodied research methodologies (Thanem & Knights, 2019b:12). Csordas argues that the methodological

postulate for embodiment as a paradigm is that the body is not only object, but also the subject of culture, or "the existential ground of culture" (Csordas, 1990:5).

His argument builds on Mauss' (1950) conception of "techniques du corps," as a concept of embodied practice. Mauss' work, according to Csordas, and also explored extensively by Spatz (2015; 2020), anticipates the mediation of fundamental dualities (such as mind-body, sign-significance, existence-being) by noticing that the body is "at once an object of technique, a technical means, and the subjective origin of technique" (Csordas, 1990:11). However, rather than maintaining the subject-object duality still present in Mauss' work, Csordas aims to show that a paradigm of embodiment "has as principal characteristic the collapse of dualities between mind and body, subject and object" (Csordas, 1990:7).

To arrive at a paradigm of embodiment, Csordas reads two theories that deal with embodiment through one another: phenomenology and Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice (through the concept of habitus) (Csordas, 1990:7). In the western philosophical tradition, the branch of philosophy that deals foremost with embodiment is phenomenology, particularly through the work of Edmund H Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Jonathan O Clark explains the phenomenological approach to embodiment in terms of "the 'inner' and 'outer' aspects of bodily experience" (Clark, 2013:212). Clark explains that "my body is given *both* visually and tactually in terms of a body-as-object, *and* as a volitional interiority, a body-as-lived" (Clark, 2013:212). Sheets-Johnstone explains that phenomenology's "foundational import" is linked to its fundamental concern "with experience and with giving veridical descriptive accounts of experience" (Sheets-Johnstone, 2010:111). Phenomenology prioritises perception over reflection; a phenomenal body is perceptual and pre-reflective. Somatic approaches (for example, the field of somaesthetics) also describe this reflexivity starting from the premise that "I, as soma, both have a body and am a perceiving body" (Shusterman, 2013:8). Thanem and Knights state that "for Merleau-Ponty 'embodiment' denotes the lived, sensorial, perceptual, experiential and active nature of the body, a body which incorporates the mind, and which is embedded and incorporated in the world" (Thanem & Knights, 2019c:35). Csordas combines this phenomenological perspective with Bourdieu's concept of habitus, as a means to draw attention to ways in which practice is informed by the social and the cultural (Csordas, 1990:42). Habitus, as a concept, grounds practice in the body. Bourdieu describes practice as defined by a relationship between:

> on the one hand, [the agent's] habitus with its temporal structures and dispositions to the future, constituted in the course of a particular relationship to a particular universe of probabilities, and on the other hand, a certain state of the chances objectively offered to him by the social world (Bourdieu, 1990:64).

For Csordas, embodiment as a paradigm combines an analysis of perception (in the field of phenomenology) and practice as grounded in the body (through habitus). Spatz extends this methodological perspective on embodiment by arguing that research in embodied technique, as mentioned previously, takes place at "the primary site of living and being" (Spatz, 2020:70). Spatz explains that while practice theory discourses often focus on materials outside the body, embodiment as first affordance works from the understanding that embodied technique is the "primary medium of practice" (Spatz, 2020:71). Focus is returned to the body, which Spatz argues has remained invisible in some conversations around practice, agency and materiality. This view also resonates with approaches in the field of somatics and somaesthetics, which regards the body as "the basic medium through which we live and the fundamental instrument for all performance, our tool of tools, a necessity for all our perception, action and even thought" (Shusterman, 2012:7). Naming embodiment as a paradigm, implies that embodiment leads to knowledge and insight that falls outside of other frameworks. I borrow from Spatz the notion that embodiment can be understood as:

> The zone of ontological engagement in which the dynamic interplays … between perception and action, resistance and accommodation, and problem-solving and problem-finding – occur in the absence of any clear physical distinction between agent and substrate (Spatz, 2020:75).

The dissolve of agent and substrate in embodied technique, which Csordas refers to as a collapse between subject and object, is crucial for understanding embodiment as a methodological approach. The body is both agent and substrate, and technique, as that which structures practice, cannot then be separated from the substrate. Spatz explains this as follows: Rather than assuming "that technique operates upon or with an area of materiality that is distinct from it" (Spatz uses the examples of woodworking with wood or dancing with the body), it is not possible to "separate the substrate from the technique, because we only come to know the substrate through the technique" (Spatz, 2015:65). Spatz concludes:

> We know that there is "something" beyond our knowledge because of how difficult it is to produce rigorous, generalisable knowledge at all; but, by definition, we know nothing about what is beyond present knowledge except its contours, its outline as revealed through epistemic encounters (Spatz, 2015:65).

Spatz offers this realist approach as "a starting point for an entirely new philosophy and politics of performance" (Spatz, 2020:84). Thinking of embodiment as a methodological approach or an epistemic space, the body becomes a site at which questions of sign-significance, practice-theory, and subject-object are confronted (Csordas, 1990:10–11).

In approaching embodiment as epistemic space, Spatz, however, warns against, as mentioned in Chapter One, scientistic conceptions of embodiment (Spatz, 2020:9). Bleeker notes that current trends in dance, theatre and performance studies are closely connected to developments in cognitive science, neuroscience and other related fields (Bleeker, 2015:69). In working across these different fields, Spatz cautions against defending "the legitimacy of embodied knowledge" by relying on the "epistemological dominance of technoscience," something to which scholars of theatre, dance and performance are not immune (Spatz, 2020:9). Spatz explains that many understandings of embodiment have been structured by science, which is thought of as "the quantification and maximisation of reliability" (Spatz, 2020:9). They add that the "fallacy of scientism is that it equates reliability with reality" (Spatz, 2020:9). Thus, according to Spatz, "every time we look to physics, biology, or neuroscience to validate knowledge produced through embodied practice, we subscribe to this kind of scientism" (Spatz, 2020:9). Spatz further writes that:

> What must be rejected is an implicit hierarchy of knowledges according to which the phenomena discovered and constructed by these sciences would be positioned as underlying, underpinning and ontologically prior to the messier and less reliable matters with which embodied practices grapple (Spatz, 2020:12).

In a scientistic conception of embodiment, embodied practices, such as dance, are seen as effects of something else, instead of distinct fields that could radically decentre dominant knowledges (Spatz, 2020:12). Sheets-Johnstone seems to raise a similar point, referred to earlier, when she describes the qualifier embodied as a "linguistic implant" or a "lexical band-aid" (Sheets-Johnstone, 2010:118–122). This also recalls Bowman's earlier-mentioned argument that embodiment often defaults to "embodiment of" (something else) (Bowman, 2019:89).

By contrast, Spatz argues that embodiment as an epistemic space does not lack the rigour that would allow it to be conceived as research without referring to externally located scientific fields. Spatz does not argue against interdisciplinarity, but rather proposes new

understandings of interdisciplinarity and intersectionality in relation to embodied research. This section has engaged with the idea of embodiment as a methodological approach or an epistemic space and borrowed heavily from Spatz (2015; 2020) to support my understanding of technique as embodied. In the next section, I consider embodiment in relation to decoloniality.

Embodiment and decoloniality

Positioning this study as a search for a decolonial choreographic praxis demands that the concept of embodiment be read alongside some of the concerns of decoloniality. In this section, I consider embodiment as a radically open concept, drawing from Ahmed (2006) and Franz Fanon ([1967]; 2008), as materially discursive, drawing from Barad's agential realist ontology that reworks causality and agency, and, first, as a way of rethinking human/environmental relations through the notion of posthumanism.

I have taken from Spatz the suggestion that embodied technique is our "primary medium of practice" and embodiment implies a grappling "again and again with the primary site of living and being" (Spatz, 2020:70–71). Rather than reading this as a humanist return to practice, Spatz argues that this conception of embodiment can be read alongside a radical understanding of posthumanism "which critiques anthropocentrism, eurocentrism, and heteropatriarchy of humanism" (Spatz, 2020:82). They make an important distinction between this kind of critical posthumanism and another variety of posthumanism that is aligned with "techno-capitalist fantasies" that "take little interest in embodiment and embodied practice" (Spatz, 2020:82). Donna Haraway (2016) similarly problematises so-called "technofixes," or the belief that technology can rescue us from the "horrors of the Anthropocene and the Capilocene" (Haraway, 2016:3)."[33]

The first kind of critical posthumanism, however, approaches embodiment as a critique of humanism, and universalism (an issue I return to later) and offers embodied practice as a place

[33] Braidotti explains that the term "Anthropocene," 'describes the current geological era as dominated by human action through technological mediation, consumerism and destruction of the resources of planet earth' (Braidotti, 2019:53n4). The term "Capitalocene" is derived from the concept of the "Anthropocene". While Anthropocene emphasise the centrality of Anthropos, human, Capitalocene names Capital as a "dangerous and exterminating force" on the planet (Haraway, 2016:2).

from which this critique can be exercised and articulated. This sense of the posthuman aligns with Braidotti's conception of posthumanism, which in its rejection of humanism and anthropocentrism, positions the knowing subject "as a relational embodied and embedded, affective and unaccountable entity and not only as a transcendental consciousness" (Braidotti, 2019:1). What follows on one hand, is the notion of a "mind-body continuum," and on the other hand, a "nature-culture continuum," what Braidotti calls "the naturecultural and humananimal transversal bonding" (Braidotti, 2019:1).

This meets Haraway's conception of com-post, a living with, which starts from the assertion that "human and nonhuman beings have always been a companion species" (Timeto, 2021:315). These new materialist conceptions of the posthuman share an ethicopolitical impulse with decolonial thinking and projects (Timeto, 2021:315; Haraway, 2016:218). Spatz, similarly prioritises embodiment ontologically and epistemologically over humanity, which allows a crucial distinction to be made between technology and ecology, refigures human/environmental relations and resonates with decolonial concerns and questions of ethical living (Spatz, 2020:82). Sylvia Wynter further argues that the coloniality of power centres around the overrepresentation of Man (human) (Wynter, 2003:260). Drawing from Quijano, Wynter writes that the world of modernity is brought into being "based on the Racism/Ethicism complex," which causes the idea of human to fall together with western Man (Wynter, 2003:260). She states that unsettling the coloniality of power requires

> A redescription of the human outside the terms of our present descriptive statement of human, Man, and its overrepresentation (outside the terms of the "natural organism" answer that we give to the question of who and what we are) (Wynter, 2003:268).

The colonial order has hierarchically positioned humanness as "the pinnacle of racial and sexual orders that classify racialised and sexualised others as less fully human" (Spatz, 2020:254). Spatz concludes that decoloniality's troubling of the "category of human" allows embodiment to become "a leverage point from which to cut ties with the colonial order of 'Man/Human'" (Spatz, 2020:254).

In addition to embodiment being open to a critique of humanism, it has been argued (by for example, Fanon ([1967]2008), Ahmed (2006) and Spatz (2020)) that embodiment, and philosophical approaches that foreground embodiment, such as phenomenology, are at risk of universalising experience from a specific bodily dwelling (Ahmed, 2006:5). Ahmed employs

the concept of "orientation," which is already central in phenomenology's "very argument that consciousness is always directed toward an object" (Ahmed, 2006:20), to show how "bodies take shape by tending toward objects that are reachable, that are available within the bodily horizon" (Ahmed, 2006:1). She uses the examples of heterosexuality (Ahmed, 2006) and whiteness (Ahmed, 2006; 2007) to argue that, read through a phenomenological lens, structures or historical processes such as whiteness and heterosexuality orientate "bodies in specific directions, affecting how they 'take up' space and what they 'can do'" (Ahmed, 2007:149). Both Ahmed and Spatz draw from Fanon's ([1967] 2008) discussion of phenomenology and race to further problematise these universalist tendencies. Fanon notes that phenomenology's attention to the corporeal schema, which attends to the tactile, vestibular, kinesthetic and visual fields of perception, is not sufficient to capture the "character" (Fanon, [1967] 2008) of embodied reality. Fanon writes:

> Below the corporeal schema, I had sketched a historico-racial schema. The elements that I had used had been provided for me not by "residual sensations and perceptions primarily of a tactile, vestibular, kinesthetic, and visual character" but by the other, the white man, who had woven me out of a thousand details, anecdotes and stories (Fanon, [1967] 2008:84).

These "racial and historical dimensions are beneath the surface of the body described by phenomenology" (Ahmed, 2006:109). Fanon, cited in Ahmed, describes how "being the object of the hostile white gaze" results in "the crumbling of the corporeal schema and its place taken up by the racial epidermal schema" (Ahmed, 2006:109). Embodiment does not present a universal dwelling. Rather, Fanon and Ahmed demonstrate how historical processes result in "differential sedimentation" (Spatz, 2020:74) of embodied technique. Spatz concludes that embodiment needs to be examined "as a complex and multidimensional space" (Spatz, 2020:74).

In addition, this raises the question of to what extent embodiment as an epistemic space can confront the ethical and political questions of decoloniality. Mbembe writes that the struggle of colonial racism "fixates first on the body" and that "very quickly the body becomes a weight – the weight of a 'malediction'" (Mbembe, 2017:110–111). Mbembe further explains that the body can then be found at the centre of "what is fundamentally at stake in the movement of power, the privileged locus for the unveiling of power" (Mbembe, 2017:174). I follow Spatz in making a case for considering "the politics of embodied practice as distinct from those of

representation and spectacle" (Spatz, 2020: 6–7). Spatz suggests that this requires an understanding of embodiment that is not determined by a particular kind of 'mapping' (as in 'the anatomical body' or the 'socially constructed body')" but rather "leaves it radically open as epistemic object" (Spatz, 2020:80).

As discussed in Chapter One, Mbembe (2017) draws attention to the extent to which representation continues to permeate aesthetic, somatic, affective and imagery spaces of African knowledge construction, reminiscent of the thousand details, anecdotes and stories described by Fanon ([1967] 2008:84). Recognising the problem presented by representationalism, and its accepted relationship of word and thing, I am proposing that embodied research and embodied technique offer possibilities for alternative knowledges. This follows Spatz's suggestion that when thinking and writing about performance shifts away from spectatorial methodologies, performance becomes a home for "transformative embodied praxis" (Spatz, 2020:261). In Chapter One, I also drew from Barad's theory of agential realism and her concept of intra-action to support the onto-epistemic nature of my research project. I reiterate some of Barad's theory here to position choreography as a material-discursive practice. I suggest that this meets decolonial thinking, which as previously cited, sees "the very action of knowing" as "an intervention in the world" (Santos, 2014:196).

As mentioned previously, Barad's questioning of the "representationalist triadic structure of words, knowers, and things … rejects the presupposition that language and measurement perform mediating functions" (Barad, 2003:813). Their alternative agential realist ontology "refuses the representationalist fixation on 'words' and 'things' and the problematic of relationality, advocating instead a causal relationship between specific exclusionary practices embodied as specific configurations of the world" (Barad, 2003:814). Barad foregrounds phenomena as primary epistemological units. Phenomena are relations, not independent entities, and they are produced through agential intra-actions (in contrast to the usual "interaction", which presumes the prior existence of independent entities. Intra-action thus offers relation as an ontological starting point (Barad, 2003:815-816). This supports Barad's argument that ways of knowing (measuring, language) are not ontologically separate from ways of being (matter, material bodies). They conclude that:

> The world is a dynamic process of intra-activity in the ongoing reconfiguring of locally determinate causal structures with determinate boundaries, properties, meanings, and

> patterns of marks on bodies. This ongoing flow of agency through which "part" of the world makes itself differentially intelligible to another "part" of the world and through which local causal structures, boundaries, and properties are stabilised and destabilised does not take place in space and time but in the making of spacetime itself (Barad, 2003:817).

For Barad, matter is a "process of materialisation" (Barad, 2003:821), which resonates with philosophical notions of becoming as articulated by Deleuze and Braidotti amongst others. Understanding matter as materialisation resists seeing matter as a "passive blank slate awaiting the active inscription of culture" and the representationalist relationship between matter and discourse as separate (Barad, 2003:821). Barad explains that this challenges Butler's theory of performativity, "which ultimately reinscribes matter as a passive product of discursive practices rather than as an active agent participating in the very process of materialisation" (Barad, 2003:821).

In this study, I approach embodiment as an epistemic space, and embodied research and embodied technique as material-discursive practices, in Barad's sense. This reiterates the earlier-made point that in embodied technique, the agent cannot be separated from the substrate (Spatz, 2015:65). Spatz draws from prior studies to argue that in a very real way, matter changes through technique (Spatz, 2015:37). Using dance as an example, Spatz writes that "when new dance technique is developed, our understanding of the body as the substrate of that technique also changes" (Spatz, 2015:65). This lays the foundation for Spatz's understanding of embodied praxis as transformative. If "*what we know* becomes *who we are*," as Spatz writes, then embodiment and embodied praxis have an important role to play in the creation of alternative epistemologies (Spatz, 2015:56).

In this section, I have read the concept of embodiment and embodied research alongside decolonial concerns and questions. I have suggested that embodiment read against these discourses can be opened up to include posthuman conceptions of the body/embodiment, that embodiment is a radically open epistemic space, and that embodied practice and technique as material-discursive offers embodiment transformative potential. In the next section, I discuss the concepts that will underpin the tracing of embodied technique in my own choreographic and movement practice.

Tracing pathways of embodied technique

Spatz argues that "the object of research in embodied technique is not 'the body' or even 'embodiment' as an abstraction, but technique itself." My aim in this study, is to trace[34] pathways of embodied technique in my own choreographic practice. In this section, I explore how technique may be traced in movement, drawing from Noland's (2009) understanding of sensations that remain interoceptively available, Sheets-Johnstone's (2010; 2015) elaboration of the inner and outer aspects of kinesthetic experience, and a discussion of somatics, somatic research and a somatic mode of attention. The concept of agency runs through these discussions. Finally, I also connect this tracing of pathways of embodied technique to Mignolo's concept of delinking as part of a decolonial aesthesis. I suggest that decolonising embodiment, involves an undoing, deskilling, or detraining and take up Noland's argument that detraining, paradoxically needs "a battery of techniques" (Noland, 2009:154).

Moving through embodiment

Spatz asks what it is like "to move through embodiment as epistemic space" (Spatz, 2020:3). They note that although social epistemologists have asked what the sensation and tactility of moving through knowledge is, their discussions have focused mainly on experiences in scientific and technological fields. Spatz expands these discussions and employs a spatial[35] metaphor for moving through embodiment as knowledge. The spatial metaphor, which Spatz links to the notion of "turns" in academic scholarship, characterises embodied research as "part of an active journey" as well as the "essential process of *knowing together.* I see you turn and may follow you, or I may turn a different way" (Spatz, 2020:4). I suggest that the idea of "knowing together" applies both to contributions towards academic scholarship, as Spatz intends it here, and to the collaborative nature that underpins the research efforts in this study. Spatz further explains that "space situates us. If we are in one place, we are not in another. Space limits our perspective" (Spatz, 2020:4). This situatedness[36] of knowing rejects

[34] I connect this to the notions of "tinkering, tuning and tracking" as discussed in Chapter One.
[35] Spatz links this spatial metaphor for embodiment as knowledge to the notion of academic research as "turn," as in "the linguistic turn, the materialist turn, the decolonial turn, and so on" (Spatz, 2020:4). These turns are not a pivotal action around the same axis, but changes of direction along a path or "part of an active journey, a movement in epistemic space" (Spatz, 2020:4).
[36] Conceptual links can be made here with Haraway's development of "situated knowledges" (Haraway, 1988). This also forms part of a larger feminist materialist framework, as discussed by, for example, in Sauzet (2015).

the “progressive fallacy” that would imply a “singular advance toward complete understanding” (Spatz, 2020:4). Although Spatz notes the relative static quality of shared knowing, they also offer, as discussed in previous sections, that embodied research, and choreography as embodied research, engages a constant movement between the technical/epistemic boundary (Spatz, 2020:2). Further, as discussed earlier, while a performance event is often seen as ephemeral from a spectatorial perspective, performances are, in another sense, and especially from the practitioner’s point of view, durable epistemic locations (Spatz, 2020:9). Melrose, Sachsenmaier and Butcher echo this argument stating that “the timely performance outcome that seems initially to end the enquiry,” will reveal to the practitioner, “a further set of questions, to be re-engaged, and to be worked through, once again, and differently” (Melrose, Sachsenmaier & Butcher, 2013:5). Next, I consider how my own choreographic research, as a moving through embodiment, requires a turn from inscription to somatic attention.

From inscription to somatic attention

Spatz has argued that a dominant trend in performance studies “sees everyday performances (or ‘performativity’) as thoroughly socially constructed, thereby replacing freedom with habit and choice with the unconscious production of social norms” (Spatz, 2015:9–10). This statement speaks to the heart of this study. Spatz’s concept of technique, as discussed earlier in this chapter, proposes a new concept of agency, “one that pays close attention to the relationship between practitioner and practice” and that “extends beyond the conscious mind” (Spatz, 2015:54). Through a reading of Spatz (2015; 2020), Barad (2003; 2011; 2012) and Noland (2009), an alternative concept of agency emerges. Rather than emphasising the inscription of social norms and ideologies on the body (as in, for example, readings of Foucault, Bourdieu and Butler), these reworkings of agency suggest how embodied practice and technique as research may produce variations in performance that are in Deleuze’s words “unpredictable and new” (in Noland, 2009:64-65). Following Spatz’s (2015) theoretical move, I suggest that pulling contemporary dance practices in South Africa away from reading them in relation to western theatre dance and recontextualising them as part of embodied practice opens up possibilities to examine “the depths at which technique changes us through practice, over time and sometimes radically” (Spatz, 2015:8).

In Chapter One, I discussed how discursive readings of the body, closely associated with the theories of Foucault and Butler, may continue to articulate dance and dancing bodies within western patriarchal paradigms (Loots, 1995). Theorists closely associated with the inscription of the body are Foucault and Butler. Spatz writes that for Foucault the body is "inscribed by instruments of power," and Butler refers to the body as "a site where regimes of discourse and power inscribe themselves, a nodal point or nexus for relations of juridical and productive power" (Butler, 1989 in Spatz, 2015:8). Butler writes that performativity should be cast "as a specific modality of power as discourse" (Butler, 1993:188). She adds that "for discourse to materialise as a set of *effects*, 'discourse' itself must be understood as complex and convergent chains in which 'effects' are vectors of power" (Butler, 1993:188). In response Spatz asks: "what is the relationship between knowledge and power in embodied technique? Do we sing the song, or does the song sing us" (Spatz, 2015:8)?

Seeking an account of agency and embodiment that goes beyond constructivist accounts, Noland's (2009) central argument is that movement,[37] and our motility, through kinesthetic experience or somatic attention, is capable of producing innovations. She notes that:

> Kinesthetic experience, produced by acts of embodied gesturing, places pressure on the conditioning a body receives, encouraging variations in performance that account for larger innovations in cultural practice that cannot otherwise be explained (Noland, 2009:2–3).

Noland's choice to refer to "variations in performance," rather than the Foucauldian notion of "resistance" is her way of sidestepping a binary account of power (Noland, 2009:3). For Noland, like Spatz, bodily ways of knowing are bodily ways of transforming. Noland further troubles Butler's theory of inscription as performed, arguing that Butler "neglects to theorise the performing body's proprioceptive, kinesthetic, even affective experience of moving in prescribed ways"[38] (Noland, 2009:171). Noland argues that "it is ultimately kinesthetic[39]

[37] Clark (2013) provides an overview of Husserl's approach to motion, and Sheets-Johnstone's understanding of the importance of kinesthesia in "our ability both to feel and to perceive our own movement" (Clark, 2013:211). Sheets-Johnstone further identifies four basic qualities in the dynamics: tensional, linear, amplitudinal and projectional. A summary can be found in Clark (2013). I do not go into detail here as it is beyond the scope of the study.

[38] Butler does insist that inscriptions are "incorporated," "parodied" and "recombined," however, Noland's argument is that Butler does not account for *how* these "recombinations" take place (Noland, 2009:171).

[39] There are several accounts of kinesthesia, interoception and proprioception and the entanglement of these terminologies (Noland, 2009:10). Sheets-Johnstone points out that some studies of embodiment, in her view, mistakenly foreground proprioception rather than kinesthesia as that which gives us "a felt sense of the dynamics of our movement" (Sheets-Johnstone, 2015:31).

experience, the somatic attention accorded to the lived sensation of movement, that allows the subject to become an agent in the making of herself' (Noland, 2009:171). Several scholars, for example Spatz (2015:23), Noland (2009) and Clark (2013) have argued that this is an overlooked aspect of embodied knowledge.

Noland distinguishes between movement, which she also describes as "kinetic vitality" or motility, from affect as approached by some affect theorists. She argues that motility and other vitality affects often do not carry the same weight in affect theories, which tend to emphasise emotion affects (Noland, 2009:76). Noland, however, draws from Henri Bergson to argue that affectivity and motility are "profoundly intertwined" and that motility should be "accorded ontological priority with respect to affectivity (understood as emotion)" (Noland, 2009:63). Sheets-Johnstone similarly underscores the moving body as our kinetic reality as fundamental to our animate being (Sheets-Johnstone, 2010:119). For Noland, "'vitality affects' refer to a motor order of action such as trembling, shaking, stretching, and 'emotion affects' refer to named emotions such as anger or sorrow" (Noland, 2009:76). Noland makes this distinction, which stems from the field of developmental psychology,[40] to emphasise her interest in "interoceptive sensations related to qualities of movement, touch, sound, and so on" (Noland, 2009:76). Other affect theorists, who also think through movement and the sensation of movement, such as Manning (2009a;2009b) and Manning and Massumi (2014), do not make such a distinction. Manning, for example, describes affect as passing:

> Directly through the body, coupling with the nervous system, making the interval felt. This feltness is often experienced as a becoming-with. This becoming-with is transformative. It is a force out of which a microperceptual body begins to emerge. This microperceptual body is the body of relation (Manning, 2009a:95).

I draw from both Noland, and Manning and Massumi to focus on affect as kinetic sensation (before sensation becomes nameable emotion) that is interoceptively (and proprioceptively) available in my effort to trace pathways of embodied technique. For Noland, as for the way in which I approach this study, the "body is a source of sensory feedback that intervenes between the external world and the internal world either to filter out or focus on certain elements of the exciting environment" (Noland, 2009:63). Borrowing Merleau-Ponty's notion of "protosignification," Noland posits that sensations can take the form of 'proto-signifying

[40] Noland specifically refers to the work of infant psychiatrist Daniel Stern, also referred to by Sheets-Johnstone (2010).

resources', 'not-yet exhausted resources' or 'kinetic possibilities' that can either be "pressed into the service of already established gestural vocabularies or, in privileged cases such as choreography, [be] expanded into a logic of their own" (Noland, 2009:92). She further explains that:

> We can shift our attention from the meanings we are making to the kinesthetic sensation of making them, thereby revealing an alternative approach to the body as 'protosignification', a materiality on which meanings will be inscribed' (Noland, 2009:92).

According to Noland, "Merleau-Ponty refers to this as 'dropping away,' as periods of extended attention to performance" which is a momentary separation "from our semantic projects" (Noland, 2009:92). Attending to somatic experience thus offers alternative understandings of bodily inscription and agency. Writing specifically in relation to Butler's work, Noland notes the neglect of somatic experience has been taken to task "by a growing body of feminist scholarship" (Noland, 2009:244). For Butler, she writes, "there is no recourse to a body that has not always already been interpreted by cultural meanings" (in Noland, 2009:172). There is no prediscursive or extradiscursive body (Noland, 2009:178). Agency and power emerge as a "law of language" (Noland, 2009:188). As Noland explains, according to Butler, gesturing is citational: "all signification takes place within the orbit of the compulsion to repeat; 'agency', then, is to be located within the possibility of a variation on that repetition" (Noland, 2009:188). There is, however, "no subject who does the heavy 'lifting', and signification thus emerges as the result of a purely linguistic law" (Noland, 2009:188). Noland, by contrast, writes that "the gendered body that comes into being in the process of moving is not simply a signifying-body, a corporeal sign" (Noland, 2009:194). She argues that "a kinesthetic, proprioceptive, and somatic experience … exerts a force on language all [on] its own" (Noland, 2009: 194). Citing the example of "discomfort" as a somatic experience that is interoceptively available, Noland further argues that:

> When enacting a gendered gesture produces unpleasant sensations that can no longer be tolerated, when 'efficacy'[41] is eclipsed by tension or pain, then pressure from something other than language has made itself felt. This 'something other than language' is, I submit, agentic' (Noland, 2009:195).

[41] Noland's understanding of efficacy includes both physiological and social efficacy.

This also underscores the somatic nature of this project, which I explore further in the next section.

Body-moving as agentic and a way of tracing/tracking technique

Similar to Spatz, Noland works through various accounts of embodiment and embodied practices (Mauss' (1950) techniques of the body; Bourdieu's (1990) habitus and Merleau-Ponty's ([1945]2012) phenomenological approach). Her focus is movement (Noland prefers the term "gesture") as a source of kinesthetic feedback (as described in the section above), which she argues is agentic. Movement is performative and creates a "kinetic-kinesthetic loop" (Noland, 2009:16), basically understood as sensory feedback. Noland's thesis of a performative is that it leaves a remainder or an excess, but that this remainder is "salient, productive, and interoceptively available, rather than abject, negative and out of reach" (Noland, 2009:17). It should be noted that Sheets-Johnstone critiques the use of the term "sensation" as static or pointillist, as overlooking the dynamics of movement. She argues for a return to phenomenological rigour[42] and the understanding that kinesthesia is foundational to discussions of agency (Sheets-Johnstone, 2015:32). What I take from Noland and Sheets-Johnstone is the idea that, in phenomenological terms, kinesthetic movement refers to the "experience of one's own movement," and that this experience is "readily accessible to any human even if readily passed over by many" (Sheets-Johnstone, 2010:113). Fundamental to this is the understanding that "my body is a physical, spatial body, that is, an object in the world" (Sheets-Johnstone, 2010:113). Sheets-Johnstone emphasises the importance of recognising the body as kinetic, and tactile-kinesthetic,[43] and that:

> Experiencing movement as having an 'inside' and an 'outside'[44] opens possibilities of awareness of how one's own movement resounds semantically not only in one's own kinesthetic experience but in the visually attuned kinetic experience of others' (Sheets-Johnstone, 2010:123).

[42] I acknowledge Sheets-Johnstone's argument, and that some of the terminology used here does meet the phenomenological rigour that she advocates. This is a limitation of my study and can be expanded on in future research.

[43] Sheets-Johnstone explains that "tactility and kinesthesia are indeed commonly intertwined: our tactile-kinesthetic bodies are the bedrock of the dynamic invariants that shape our everyday lives" (Sheets-Johnstone, 2010:120).

[44] Laban/Bartenieff Movement Studies, which has greatly influenced my own practice, is an example of a field of somatic practice that works with the understanding of the inner and outer experiences of movement (Hackney, 2002:36–38).

Clark describes these inner and outer aspects of movement as "our ability to both feel and to perceive our own movement" (Clark, 2013:211). This resonates with the field of somatics, and what Ciane Fernandes (2015) calls somatic research and somatic-performative research. Somatics encompasses several approaches and techniques,[45] without a clear boundary (Spatz, 2015:97). Hanna's (1976) seminal definition is commonly used to describe somatics as "the field which studies the soma: namely the body as perceived from within the first-person perspective" (in Di Giorgi, 2015:69). Fernandes explains that somatics as an epistemological field "relies on a context of receptive and perceptive learning, facilitating sensory connection through dynamic pause and refinement of integrated muscular effort of the whole person and ambience" (Fernandes, 2015:13). She further explains that

> Somatic research is grounded in extensive somatic practice, constitutes itself as a flexible and consistent conceptual apparatus, is structured as a dynamic whole according to its own methodological coherencies related and/or applied to other fields. This research becomes in itself soma, that is, it ceases being an object or a merely quantitative production (Fernandes, 2015:25).

I suggest that what Sheets-Johnstone in a phenomenological sense defines as "kinesthetic experience," what Noland calls "somatic attention"[46] and the "interoceptive availability of sensation," and the above-described somatic research approach, provide the ground from which I trace the pathways of embodied technique in my own choreographic and movement practice. The sensory feedback and the experience of the body-moving remains interoceptively available to the practitioner and makes it possible to return over and over again to embodied practice. Csordas calls this a "somatic mode of attention" (Csordas, 1993:139). The attention given to tracking the moving body is part of embodied research that, in Spatz's words and as cited earlier is, "nor planned nor haphazard but epistemic" (Spatz, 2020:146). Fernandes' notion of the "body of somatic research" as a "soma" in itself further underscores the idea that this kind of research perpetually turns in towards itself.

[45] Fernandes lists several somatic techniques and methods, which include but are not limited to Laban Bartenieff Movement Studies, Feldenkreis technique, Alexander technique, Body Mind Centering, Skinner Release Technique (Fernandes, 2015:12-13). My own somatic practice is informed by Laban Bartenieff Movement Studies.

[46] Another field that relies on somatic awareness is somaesthetics. Richard Shusterman writes that the somaesthetic logic is that "rather than rejecting the body because of its sensory deceptions, we should try to correct the functional performance of the senses by cultivating improved somatic awareness and self-use, which can also improve our virtue by giving us greater perceptual sensitivity and powers of action" (Shusterman, 2013:8).

While I draw from Noland's notion of the interoceptive availability of somatic experience, and the notion of somatic modes of attention, it is important to note that technique as knowledge "is not always available to conscious thought" (Spatz, 2015:50). Spatz clarifies "the nature of technique by suggesting that agency can be sedimented in and as embodiment, even when we are not consciously aware of it" (Spatz, 2015:50). According to Spatz, Foucault's "discipline", Bourdieu's "habitus" and Butler's "performativity" are "all ways of understanding the limits of agency and consciousness in the face of social norms and ideologies" (Spatz, 2015:51). Habitus and performativity, in particular, "emphasise the power of unconscious over conscious technique" (Spatz, 2015:52). These theories thus, according to Spatz (and Noland), "tend to understate the importance of both consciousness and agency" (Spatz, 2015:52). Spatz instead argues for technique as sedimented agency, which compares to Alva Noë's notion of "solid embedding" or John Matthews' "automaticity," which can be described as "a form of deeply sedimented agency that is the hallmark of advanced training in any field" (Spatz, 2015:52).

The next chapters, which consider the dance works that are part of this study more closely, draw from the understanding of somatic modes of attention to trace the pathways of embodied technique that structure these instances of choreographic practice. I acknowledge, however, that these techniques are informed by both conscious and unconscious knowledge. This supports, as mentioned earlier, Spatz's understanding of epistemic practice, which "involves a continuous and mutually constituting transformation, back and forth, between the two categories of conscious and unconscious knowledge, or what one *has* (knowledge) and what one *is* (identity)" (Spatz, 2015:51). In this sense, this articulation of agency in and as embodiment, meets Barad's reconceptualisation of agency as part of a material-discursive practice. For Barad, agency is not an "attribute of 'subjects' or 'objects' (as they do not preexist as such)" (Barad, 2003:827). Rather, agency is a result of intra-action, an intervention in the becoming of matter (Barad, 2003:827). In the next section, I connect the idea of tracing pathways of technique in embodied practice with Mignolo's concepts of delinking as part of a decolonial aesthesis.

Un-doing, de-skilling, de-training

In the context of South African dance, Loots argues that "the culturally constructed body needs to be offered the potential to create and experience unexplored movement patterns in order to generate new cultural practices" (Loots, 1995:56). While the plasticity of embodiment is not unlimited (Spatz, 2015) – in the next chapter I draw from Ahmed's (2006) notion of orientation to explain that bodies can be limited in the pathways that are available and the objects that are reachable to them – the decolonising of culturally and colonially constructed bodies shares concerns with Mignolo's notion of "delinking" (Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2014). As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, Mignolo sees delinking as a necessary practice in a "decolonial aesthesis," which "refers to any thinking and doing that is geared toward undoing a particular kind of aesthesis, of sense, that is, the sensibility of the colonised subject" (Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2014:201). In terms of movement technique, deconstructing or decolonising might then mean detraining, de-skilling, or the undoing of the layers of aesthetic conditioning. The idea of detraining or undoing resonates with practices and techniques in the field of somatics (as referred to earlier), and the somatic techniques I draw from in my own movement practice. Peggy Hackney, for example, in the context of Laban Bartenieff Movement Studies, refers to the repatterning of the body (Hackney, 2002:44-45). In addition, Fernandes suggests that the repatterning principle, which is common in somatic practice, may work on: Decolonising usual and limiting expressive manners, and expand our movement possibilities through re-experiencing the phases of the phylogenetic development[47] (evolution of species) and ontogenetic development (evolution of the human embryo) (Fernandes, 2015:18-19). This thought links critically with the notion of opening up embodiment through conceptions of the posthuman, as discussed earlier in this chapter. This is, however, not a move towards the idea of a "neutral body." In Butler's sense, there is "no such as thing as a 'prediscursive' or 'extradiscursive' moment of being, because all being is being-for-another – appearance, representation, social legibility, citation"[48] (Noland, 2009:178). Referring back to

[47] These ideas are strongly present for me in the work of Tetsuro Fukuhara and Adriana Jamisse, which formed part of the *Any Dance Lab* project.

[48] In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler, citing Ernesto Laclau, writes that "if the name [of an object] referred to a pregiven set of features presumed to belong prediscursively to a given object, then there could be no possibility of any discursive hegemonic variation that could open the space for a political construction of social identities. But if the process of naming of objects amounts to the very act of their constitution, then their descriptive features will be fundamentally unstable and open to all kinds of hegemonic rearticulations" (Butler, 1993:210).

Barad, all doing is also entangled with being, implying that the practice of detraining/de-skilling/undoing is itself a "structuring[49] principle" (Noland, 2009:42). She further explains that "to view the moving body as a 'structuring principle' is not to call for a return to a natural body, defined once and for all" (Noland, 2009:54). Rather, Noland's argument centres on the on the body-moving as "agentic kinesis." Importantly, she adds that while:

> No gesture is ever entirely relieved of social meaning; however, focusing on the sensations produced by acts of gesturing, the subject momentarily detaches movement from meaning, thereby recognising that movement and meaning might be coupled in different ways (Noland, 2009:54).

Referring to examples of modernist painters, Noland notes that while deskilling "was highly necessary" for these artists, deskilling paradoxically, "demanded a "battery of techniques" (Noland, 2009: 154). Drawing Noland's argument and building on Spatz's research trajectory which sees new technique as a necessity for crossing a threshold into new fields, I connect the notion of delinking as part of a decolonial praxis with the need to develop a battery of embodied techniques.

The importance of and preoccupation with deskilling or detraining and articulating new technique as part of a decolonising move is evident in the work of several South African choreographers. Loots, for example, writes that her work with the Flatfoot Dance Company[50] has been guided by the search for a "methodology and praxis for a decolonised pedagogy" (Loots, 2018:ii). Dancer-psychologist, Nobonke van Tonder, who has been involved with several of this study's artistic projects, similarly emphasises the need for detraining while developing a new pedagogy for movement and performance in the Anthropocene. Choreographer Gregory Maqoma[51] draws from various dance genealogies and recombines these elements in complex ways, which he describes as a "cocktail". Hayley Kodesh explains that:

> Maqoma has developed his vocabulary based on a mixture of movements that he has picked up and merged over time. When he describes his style, he explains that his body

[49] Noland attributes the idea of the body as "structuring" to Mauss and his elaboration of Techniques of the Body (*techniques du corps*).

[50] Flatfoot Dance Company began as a free adult dance training programme led by Lliane Loots in 1994 in Durban, South Africa, and was linked to her work as a lecturer at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. In 2003, Flatfoot Dance Company became a "professional full registered contemporary dance company" (Loots, 2018:8).

[51] Gregory Maqoma is a leading South African choreographer. Having trained at Moving into Dance in Johannesburg and P.A.R.T.S in Belgium, Maqoma founded Vuyani Dance Theatre in 1999 in Johannesburg, South Africa (Friedman, 2012b:96).

> has become a mixture of all of his influences, the origins of which cannot be identified in particular movements because of how he combines them (Kodesh, 2006:46).

I would argue that the naming of Maqoma's work as a "cocktail" is reductive as it does not fully consider the knowledge and techniques that emerge through recombination and that structure Maqoma's practice and embodied research process. Considering Maqoma's method as a recombination of epistemic objects, could provide a more precise account of his profound innovations with regard to an embodied practice that centres on recombination. According to Noland, "the experience of recombination can itself produce kinesthetic knowledge; the subject not only recombines existing elements of programs (enunciative positions) but also experiences the elements of these programs on the order of movement" (Noland, 2009:184). Also noteworthy in the above quote is the idea that Maqoma's body changes (the body becomes a mixture of all these influences) as a result of these recombinations. The account of Maqoma's practice supports Noland's notion of "agentic kinesis," Barad's elaboration of material-discursive practices, and Spatz's understanding of embodied technique as transformative. Drawing from Noland, the above example can be read as an illustration of "the emergence of the unpredictable and the new" as a function of "recombinatory audacity" and the deploying of a battery of techniques to deskill and re-skill (Noland, 2009:184). As Noland argues, "performing subjectivity, here, becomes a body-moving rather than a meaning-making phenomenon" (Noland, 2009:184).

This study proposes that understanding the efforts of South African choreographers as epistemological interventions opens up new ways of thinking and writing about South African dance in relation to decolonial concerns and questions. Decolonising requires a battery of techniques. This resonates with Mbembe's argument, drawn from Ngugi, that decolonisation is concerned with "questions of writing and teaching – writing oneself, teaching oneself" (Mbembe, 2015:np), which is inextricably connected to ethico-political concerns, as discussed earlier. By tracing the pathways of this artistic project, the aim is to expose some of the techniques that structured this embodied practice. In doing so, the project engages Spatz's question: "Is embodiment just another one of the master's tools, which will never dismantle the master's house, or can embodiment be counted among the techniques that might dismantle the house of 'the body'" (Spatz, 2020: 252).

Summation of the Chapter

This chapter began with a critical engagement with decoloniality as an epistemological movement (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015:485) to provide a foundation for my understanding of choreography as a decolonial praxis to take forward into the next chapters. Central to this understanding is that choreography is both knowledge-generating and a praxis, a way of thinking, knowing, and doing, and an intervention in the world (Santos, 2014:201). Drawing from Spatz (2015; 2020), Cvejić (2015), Protopapa (2016) and Lepecki (2004; 2006; 2012) at various points, I argued that choreography is akin to philosophical thinking, or an epistemic effort that grapples with the notion of alternative logics and techniques. I referred to Cvejić's understanding of choreographic problems and expressive concepts to suggest how representation, or a focus on the recognisable and the recognised, may be disrupted in favour of a view of choreography as a field of practical experimentation, a probing path. I elaborated on these ideas by drawing from Spatz to position choreography and movement as embodied research, an onto-epistemological endeavour that is characterised by a constant movement across a technical/epistemic boundary. A key concept to take forward is Spatz's definition of embodiment as first affordance, as the primary site of engagement in practices that dissolve any clear distinction between agent and substrate. I further draw from Spatz's understanding of embodied technique as a relatively stable, repeatable and transmissible unit of practice. Referring to the field of somatics, Sheets-Johnstone's (2010; 2015) understanding of kinesthetic experience and Noland's (2009) notion of agentic kinesis and the interoceptive availability of sensation, I suggest that this provides the groundwork from which I intend to trace the pathways of embodied technique in my own choreographic practice and the artistic projects that are part of this study. It should be noted, however, that choreographic practice as an epistemic space and a decolonial praxis is more than an endless seeking of renewal (in the sense of progressive, modernist tendencies). Choreography as a decolonial praxis assumes that questions of knowing are entangled with questions of wellbeing (Soudien, 2012:2–3), and radically considers the aesthetic, political and ethical as co-constitutive properties. Encountering embodiment as an epistemic space alongside concerns of decoloniality creates possibilities for confronting the problematics of humanism and universalism, and for understanding embodied practice and technique as material-discursive and as potentially transformative.

Next chapters

In Chapters One and Two I have critically engaged with the key discourses that inform my study. In Chapters Three and Four I turn towards tracing pathways of embodied technique in three of the artistic works that form part of this study: *Monsters and Fossils* (Chapter Three) and, *Before Naming* and *Extreme Subjectivities* (Chapter Four). Drawing from Cvejić, I suggest that each dance unfolds along a choreographic problem. In addition, each page of the cartography, which includes all works, unfolds along a choreographic problem corresponding to the problem of the dance or project that it engages.

Chapters Three and Four mark a shift in focus and in the style of writing. I draw from Spatz's elaboration of a phenomenotechnical mode of writing to draw attention to and make transmissible the techniques that structure embodied practice. Phenomenotechnique, borrowed from Hans-Jorg Rheinberger (2005) who attributes the notion to Gaston Bachelard,[52] allows Spatz to "emphasise the epistemic dimension of embodied practice as distinct from its instrumental value in the creation of artworks" (Spatz, 2017:196). Similarly, my choice is to articulate the practice and the structuring of this practice through technique from the perspective of the embodied researcher. A phenomenotechnical mode sits between third- and first-person methodologies. Third-person methodologies are aligned with the perception of spectators and emphasise a subject-object split to produce critical distance (Spatz, 2020:112). By contrast, a first-person methodology would be the use of a phenomenological approach to analyse performance, an approach that has had a strong hold on dance writing (Franko, 2011). Mark Franko explains that "the kinesthetic-visual pact of phenomenological description when applied to dance has facilitated the integration of the performer's discourse of sensation with the spectator's discourse of visual reception: an anthropology with an aesthetics" (Franko, 2011:1). Widely used in dance studies,[53] a phenomenological approach focuses on the perspective of the embodied practitioner, in emphasising bodily perception. Spatz, however, argues that this mode insufficiently facilitates

[52] Rheinberger explains that phenomenotechnique is one of the organising concepts in Bachelard's (1884–1962) epistemology. Simply, phenomenotechnique refers to the notion that phenomena are not "found, but invented, thoroughly constructed" (Rheinberger, 2005:315).

[53] Some examples of phenomenological approaches to Dance Studies and discussions of phenomenology and Dance Studies can be found in the work of Sondra Fraleigh (1987), Sally Ann Ness (2011), Ann Cooper Albright (2011), Anna Pakes (2011) and Jonathan O Clark (2013).

the articulation of the durable techniques that structure a particular practice. A phenomenotechnical mode, situated between first-and third-person methodologies, is both "firmly grounded in the experience of the practitioner while nevertheless making qualified claims on consensual reality" (Spatz, 2020:113).

In applying a phenomenotechnical mode of writing to the dance works that follow, the aim is to think from the inside of the dance and articulate instances of embodied practice that are sedimented into techniques that then structure subsequent movement investigations and performances. A phenomenotechnical mode emphasises the notion that "embodied practice is not merely a frame for the circulation of signs but also an empirical investigation into repeatable pathways of technique" (Spatz, 2020:114). This approach calls for a:

> mode of analysis that uses thick technical description to point to unfolding epistemic objects: a mode that defines a field of inquiry by tracing its research edge and which thereby returns cultural analysis to an engagement with philosophical realism at the level of embodiment (Spatz, 2020:115).

Drawing from the concepts and discourses discussed in chapters One and Two, the next chapters and the cartography offer a collection of thought fragments arising from the dances. Each fragment acts as an agential cut, or momentary stabilisation (as discussed in Chapter One), in which to consider the technical propositions made by the dance. These fragments are not exhaustive as each iteration of the dance allows knowledge to shift. In doing so, I follow Cvejić's understanding of Deleuzian process ontology and expressive concepts to argue that these fragments are not an attempt at interpretation in a representational sense, but rather a means to account for the choreographic problem(s) posed by the dance. Finally, an attempt is made to access a phenomenotechnical mode of writing to draw attention to ways in which the dance proposes repeatable and transmissible instances of embodied practice that may contribute towards decolonising notions of embodiment, dance technique, choreography, and training.

CHAPTER THREE: MONSTERS AND FOSSILS

This chapter re-visits and re-iterates the dance work *Monsters and Fossils* (*MAF*) as a way of thinking through themes and problems that are central to this research project. As discussed in the previous chapter, I draw from Lepecki (2004; 2006; 2015), Cvejić (2015) and Protopapa's (2016) understanding of choreography as philosophical thinking as well as Spatz's (2015; 2020) conceptualisation of embodied practice as research. In addition, I follow Manning who describes choreographic thinking as "a proposition to movement-moving that asks how the plane of experience composes, how it remembers, how it becomes, and how it takes form, all in the register of the more- than- human" (Manning, 2016:127). By re-searching through the dance, I ask how techniques that emerge from the dance (in the sense offered by Spatz and discussed in preceding chapters) might inform and shift conceptualisations of choreographic practice, trouble representationalism and open up ways of approaching choreography as decolonial praxis.

MAF was created and performed with my close collaborator Thalia Laric at the end of 2017 at the Theatre Arts Admin Collective, an independent theatre space in Cape Town that aims to be affordable, inclusive and accessible.[54] Lighting was designed and improvised in the performance by Andi Colombo. Dancer-psychologist Nobonke van Tonder[55] became a mentor in the creation process. As with all the projects engaged as part of this study, the practices that unfolded by working on MAF are collaborative and social. *MAF* is an epistemic location, and in Manning's words aims to "invent open problems that bring us together in a mode of

[54] It is significant that most of the works and projects that are part of this study were developed and performed outside of an institutional (university) space. The networks of practitioners and the embodied practices that are linked to the works described here live more vibrantly in what Stefano Harney and Fred Moten (2013) describe as the undercommons, a concept also taken up by Manning (2016). Drawing from Harney and Moten, Gia H Greer describes the undercommons as "a space found in the relationship between people who have been denied resources, and who are joined not by the common use or ownership of space, but by belonging within the community of those who have been excluded" (Greer, 2018:6). In other words, the undercommons as it applies here exists outside the macropolitical space of an institution and is characterised not by its resources but by a community of practice. While I acknowledge the institutional resources that I have had at my disposal during this work, there is a felt tension between working within academia and communities of embodied practice that exist outside institutional walls. This also recalls the point made in Chapter One, that the knowledge generated in this project has already been disseminated through, for example, workshops that are permeated by a micropolitics. The purpose of projects such as *New Dance Lab* (2017) and *Any Body Dance Lab* (2018) were to create communities of practice and research in dance. This kind of work is carried out more successfully by practitioners such as Nobonke van Tonder, and Thalia Laric and Manuela Tessi who lead a project called MusicDance in Cape Town.

[55] Artist Nobonke van Tonder is also known as Tossie and referred to as such in some sections of this writing.

active inquiry" (Manning, 2016:10). The dance draws from techniques of movement improvisation and revisited earlier instances of movement research, one of which was performed at *New Dance Lab*, an earlier project that is also included in the cartography of this study. *MAF* was reiterated through various instances of writing that were gathered in an article for the *Ellipses Journal of Creative Research*.[56] and in the cartography that forms an integral part of this thesis. Deleuze and Guattari argue that "reading a text is never a scholarly exercise in search of what is signified, still less a highly textual exercise in search of a signifier" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983:106)[57] The aim here is not to treat *MAF* as a performance text in search of signifiers and what is signified. Rather, drawing from the conceptual framework offered in the preceding chapters, each research iteration of *MAF* can be considered an agential cut (Barad, 2003), a momentary stabilisation (Sauzet, 2015) that allows for the gathering of research materials and the tracking of the movement of thinking in the dance.

The iterations, which underscore the material-discursive nature of the research process, include the creation and performances of the dance, the creation of an article following the dance, and this writing, all of which produced further insight and shifts in knowledge. The aim of this chapter is to think through the inside of the dance and, utilising Spatz's application of phenomenotechnique (drawn from Rheinberger (2005) as discussed in Chapter Two), to articulate instances of embodied practice that may be sedimented into techniques. These techniques have continued to circulate in subsequent movement investigations and performances and in my teaching practice, drawing attention to their repeatability and transmissibility (Spatz, 2015:32–33). The chapter offers a collection of thought fragments arising from *MAF*. The fragments are not exhaustive. At the end, however, I offer a sample of the embodied practice that informs *MAF*, can be chunked into techniques revolving around the exercising of agency, relationality, and disorientation, and can be repeated and transferred. As such, the inquiry moves in what Spatz has articulated as two directions, first in the direction of research or opening up towards new inquiries, and then in the direction of

[56] The *Ellipses Journal for Creative Research* is a multi/cross-disciplinary, digital, online, and interactive journal for creative research located within the Wits School of Arts. Working on a submission on *MAF* was, though at times challenging, a highly valuable experience as it opened up questions and tensions around the relationship between writing and other documents of the dance.

[57] The original citation is in Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* (1983). It is reiterated in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (1986:xxii). I engage with the latter text.

closing, as an emerging pedagogy begins to take shape. The notion of an emerging pedagogy is crucial to my understanding of a decolonial choreographic praxis and serves to move the focus from the spectatorial aspects of the dances to a wider field of practice that becomes informed by these movement and choreographic inquiries. It is a way of understanding how choreography circulates across bodies as practices, rather than being defined primarily by a performer-audience relationship (Spatz, 2020:98–99). Drawing from Randy Martin (1998), Spatz describes this as a shift from representation to participation (Spatz, 2020:99). Participation is a key concept for Martin who approaches dance as a space in which to study critical methodologies, particularly through concepts such as mobilisation and agency (Martin, 1998:14). While Martin focuses on participation as the social processes shared by performers and audiences (Martin, 1998:36), Spatz considers instead "the iterative elaboration of new technique through practice" (Spatz, 2020:99). This could also trouble analyses of contemporary dance in Africa that focus on a perceived gap between dance performances and the reception by audiences (for example in Pather, 2006). Such analyses privilege performance as dance's primary mode of knowledge dissemination. As a wider field of practice, it is possible to imagine that choreographic praxis, as embodied research, functions according to its own logic and operates and circulates according to its own rate of transfer and multiplication, as its embodied techniques begin to sediment into possible, new pedagogies.[58]

My argument is that a decolonial praxis of choreography aims to disrupt representational logic and is actively in search of, and in the practice of new techniques of the body. Having argued in the previous chapter, drawing from Noland (2009), that detraining and decolonising, requires a battery of techniques, I suggest that techniques that are part of a decolonial praxis must speak to what Guattari ([1989]2000) names an "ecosophy" (referred to in Chapter Two), and which he describes as the ethico-political articulation between the three ecological registers of the environment, social relations and human subjectivity and a 'potentially radical force in the world' (Guattari, [1989] 2000:15;27). Manning, who adopts this concept to elaborate on the idea of choreographing the political,[59] defines an ecosophy as "both ethico-

[58] This point links to Chapter One where I referred to the community of practice and research formed through projects such as *New Dance Lab* and *Any Body Dance Lab*.
[59] I offer a description of Manning's (2016) understanding of "choreographing the political" in Chapter One, page 25 note 17.

political and aesthetic" (Manning, 2016:127–128). In articulating techniques in the dance, I am thus aiming to name units of movement practice and an ethos of making/moving at once.

Choreographic problem: Inscription/haunting stops the body

MAF used somatic investigations, improvisation structures, sensory disorientations, and lighting transformations to explore the appearances and disappearances of our performance bodies. We wanted to ask: how can I be more body; how can I be less body? Pressing and smashing our bodies together and calibrating these forms with light, we imagined at times becoming less than body, reminding us of Cvejić's (2015) expressive concept of "part-bodies,"[60] and at other times, as the light plays tricks on the eyes, becoming more than body, figures of the imagination. Drawing from Mbembe's (2017) reading of "monsters and fossils," two figures evoked by Foucault (1970), the dance positions the (in)stability of representation, specifically colonially scripted representations of identity, which through Coly's (2019) work can be understood as a form of postcolonial hauntologies, as a choreographic problem.

Postcolonial hauntologies, for Coly, combine the Derridean concept of hauntology[61] with Fanon's understanding that "the colonial continues to live on in the timescape of the postcolonial" (Coly, 2019:13). Recalling the discussion in Chapter One about colonial scripts and representation, Coly diagnoses postcolonial hauntology "as a chronic inability to break away from the colonial scene or to think oneself outside of the colonial" (Coly, 2019:13). Our movement research in *MAF*, which leans on various techniques of improvisation (which will be unpacked further in this Chapter), is an attempt to think outside the weight of inscription and haunting. Danielle Goldman (2010), who aligns improvised dance with the Foucauldian

[60] Cvejić uses the expressive concept of "part-bodies" in her analysis of Xavier Le Roy's work *Self Unfinished*. In *Self Unfinished* "part-bodies" manifest as a series of "unrecognisable reconfigurations of the human body" (Cvejić, 2015:80-81). Part-body refers to the Deleuzian understanding of multiplicity. She writes that "'Part-body' does not designate a body lacking completeness, but rather signifies the composition of one or more bodies with movements in which one or more part-bodies keep the double status of the one and the multiple" (Cvejić, 2015:80-81).

[61] Hauntology is proposed by Derrida as an alternative to "ontology" in his work *Spectres of Marx* ([1993] 2006). Reading Derrida, Anneleen Masschelein explains that hauntology is "a philosophy of haunting, of the return of the repressed, in which the spectral takes precedent over being, existence. This new philosophy wants to examine the intermediate or suspended state of the ghost and of fiction – neither dead nor alive, neither here nor there – as exemplary of the omnipresence of the immaterial, the virtual, and the unspeakable in our society" (Masschelein, 2011:139).

notion of practices of freedom,[62] offers that improvised dance is a practice of constantly negotiating shifting constraints (Goldman, 2010:5). I read inscription and haunting as forms of constraint that have the ability to stop the body, to paralyse it. Does the dance offer techniques that can reactivate the body and re-initiate motion?[63]

Importantly, Goldman notes that constraint, which she also calls "tight places" includes class, gender, sexuality and race, but also artistic conventions and physical techniques (Goldman, 2010:6–8). We are haunted by physical techniques and artistic conventions, both of which are informed by colonial genealogies of knowledge and practice, as well as constructs of race, class, gender and sexuality.

In *MAF* we make use of tactility and weight. Weight is poured into another body and weight is shifted. We worked on de-socialising/de-culturalising our bodies.[64] This entails the notion that there are no (in)appropriate places to touch as we do not yet know of these rules. We have no knowledge assumptions about the workings of specific body parts. We cannot assume that our feet know how to stand, and hands know how to bear weight against the floor. This was a note from Tossie:[65] "let the hand simply fall to the ground without using its fully formed knowledge, which has been further heightened through dance training and aesthetic conditioning." This reminds us of Paxton's work in Contact Improvisation. Paxton says:

> I stress that dancers are not people in the social sense but in the animal sense in this kind of dancing, that they should not smile, should not make eye contact, should not talk, that they should just be there as animals, as bundles of nerves, as masses and bones … touching the other bundle and letting that be the work (in Cvejić, 2015:137).

Our starting point in the dance is to take note of the constraints placed on the movement by inscription and haunting. In our movement research, the emphasis shifts from what the body means to how the dance works, or what Spatz and Manning, drawing from Spinoza and

[62] Foucault (2000) argues that liberation is not sufficient to sustain "admissible and acceptable forms of existence or political society" (Foucault, 2000:282). This requires practices of freedom, which Foucault links to the ethics of the care for the self (Foucault, 2000).
[63] This idea links thematically to Martin's (1998) notion of mobilisation. Martin argues that dance is space that generates concepts for critical and political methodologies (Martin, 1998:14).
[64] I recognise that this is a utopia and a thought experiment. In addition, Erika Fischer-Lichte reminds us of the importance of distinguishing between the phenomenal body and the semiotic body (Fischer-Lichte, 2007:232). She explains that "the spectator's attention will oscillate between the perception of the actor as the character or other symbolic system he is representing and the perception of his phenomenal body that refers to nothing beyond itself and the nature of his coming-into-presence" (Fischer-Lichte, 2007:233).
[65] All conversations and collaborations that form of part of this embodied research adhere to the ethical guidelines for research (Ethical Clearance Nr: H18/04/10).

Deleuze, have variously referred to as "what a body can do" (Spatz, 2015; Manning, 2016:86).[66] In asking whether it is possible to work outside signification and recognisable form, the choreographic problem starts as an encounter between the performance of historicised subjectivity as proposed by, for example, the conceptualist philosophy of Foucault and the possibility of open/emergent subjectivity as seen through a phenomenological lens. Todd May summarises these two approaches as "the difference of whether human beings enact performatively the constitution of knowledge or whether knowledge constitutes them" (May in Ness, 2011:25).[67]

What a body can do is also informed by a politics of knowledge and genealogies of practice. Ahmed's (2006) concept of orientation is useful in understanding that the body and the body's options (techniques) are shaped by objects that appear within reach. Bodies take shape, writes Ahmed, "by tending toward objects that are reachable, that are available within the bodily horizon" (Ahmed,2006:2). Our movement research in *MAF* questions the (im)possibility of dehistoricising our subjectivity, of moving without knowledge assumptions, of forgetting what our bodies have been trained to do specifically through various western dance pedagogies that unfold along colonial scripts of dance and dance training, and of moving outside the weight of constraint in the form of inscription and haunting. A central question in *MAF* is whether our bodies that are steeped in practices that unfold along particular orientations can ever extract themselves from these practices. Can a radically emergent subject be found in this movement research context? Can agency be reconfigured? Is it possible to push this idea further still and, as Manning suggests through the concept of *agencement*, "turn away from the notion that it is the human agent, the intentional volitional subject who determines what comes to be?" (Manning, 2016:2).

It is questionable whether our white-presenting and dance-trained bodies have the ability to be outside the weight of these constraints. Do we instead risk positioning our bodies as neutral, reinforcing western orientations (Ahmed, 2006) towards whiteness and particular aesthetic choices that are informed by colonial sensibilities? To what extent does *MAF* risk implying an essential humanity that universalises embodiment and causes humanist views of

[66] "What a body can do" refers to the Spinozist pondering "we do not know what a body is capable of," taken up by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*.
[67] As discussed in Chapter Two, Spatz asks what this means in terms of embodied technique:" do we sing the song, or does the song sing us?" (Spatz, 2015:8).

embodiment to become further entrenched? Having identified the choreographic problem as inscription or haunting that stops the body, the next section explores the figures of monster and fossil, as offered by Foucault (1970) and read through Mbembe (2017), as a way to approach the movement research of the dance.

The figures of monster and fossil

We were drawn to the figures of monster and fossil in Mbembe's (2017) *Critique of Black Reason.* In the passage in question, Mbembe references Foucault's monster and fossil as they appear in his work *The Order of Things* (1970), which is a study of the origins of human sciences. In *The Order of Things*, Foucault introduces the notion of episteme to argue that knowledge is produced in systems or governed by rules unconscious to us. Monsters and fossils appear in Foucault's account of the classical episteme, which is characterised by a process of ordering, or a "taxonomy" as a system of naming and classification. This taxonomic system relies on representations as an essential relation between signifier and signified (May, 2006:48). The project of ordering is mirrored in language. May explains that "as things are brought into a systematic relation with one another, so are the terms that represent them" (May, 2006:51). The monster and the fossil, however, are peripheral figures, "two not-so Classical figures of becoming that 'are perceptible on the [taxonomic] table' but not represented within it" (Hansen, 2018:109). Monster and fossil appear in the "shady, mobile, wavering region between classical and modern epistemes" (Hansen, 2018:109), where words and things "no longer match up as clearly as the classical age thought they did" and elusive depths and dimensions "undergird the visible and its representation" (May, 2006:52).

Monster and fossil become interesting as fringe figures, still present on the outer edges of classification and yet troubling its very (representational) logic. Monster and fossil appear on opposite ends of a continuum – which we imagined as a continuum both in time as well as conceptual thought – with monsters conceived as figures of the imagination and fossils as figures excavated from memory. Foucault explains that "against the background of the continuum, the monster provides an account as though in caricature of the genesis of differences and the fossil recalls, in the uncertainty of its resemblance, the first buddings of identity" (Foucault, 1970:157). Whereas the fossil functions as "a distant and approximate form of identity" and "marks a quasi-character in the shift of time," the monster ensures "the

emergence of difference" (Foucault, 1970:156-157). What struck us in this discussion is how, even though monsters and fossils seem to inhabit different realms, that of fantasy/the imagined/the virtual, and the material/the real/the actual respectively, they can be drawn into the same world and the same (evolutionary) continuum. While they both seem far removed from us, fossils offer a glimmer of recognition while monsters represent something outside ourselves, maybe even the unthinkable. In bringing monsters and fossils into the same evolutionary continuum, fossils allow access to the past, and our first sense of identity, while monsters open up the unknown. In this way it is possible to read the figures of monster and fossil through Braidotti's conception of "all human and non-human entities as nomadic subjects-in-process, in perpetual motion, immanent to the vitality of self-ordering matter" (Braidotti, 2018:36). This offers an alternative approach to the present. Drawing from Deleuze and Guattari (1994), Braidotti writes that:

> Approaching the present therefore produces a multi-faceted effect: on the one hand the sharp awareness of what we are ceasing to be (the end of the actual) and on the other the perception – in different degrees of clarity – of what we are in the process of becoming (the actualisation of the virtual). Both phenomena occur at once, in a non-linear time-continuum (Braidotti, 2018:36–37).

The score of the dance is not an attempt to mimetically approach the figures of monster and fossil. Our movement research starts with the choreographic problem of asking how we might negotiate the constraints of inscription and haunting, and trouble the body's representation, our (human) form and the orientations and ecology of our practices. The dance makes use of a score or an improvisation structure to investigate the choreographic problem. Every time the dance is rehearsed or performed, the problem is approached as re-search. In this way, the onto-epistemic nature of the choreographic process is underscored.[68] The choreography is processual and unfolds in step with the movement of thinking. The figures of monster and fossil become a way to think through the idea of a taxonomy and trouble representational logic.

[68] In this sense, choreography could be described as "nomadic," a concept offered by Braidotti (2018:36). I do not explore the idea of nomadic choreography further as it is beyond the scope of this project.

Taxonomies and whiteness

The fringe figures of fossil and monster are related. They are connected in the lemniscate as opposite poles, one always inevitably becoming the other. Returning to Derrida's understanding of hauntology ([1993] 2000); the present exists only with respect to the past. For Mbembe, haunting speaks to temporal experiences and is a key concept in discourses of decolonisation. Perhaps figures like ghosts and phantoms need to be invoked because they have not found their way into a system of classification. This speaks to a practice and an ethics of working in the margins, in the angles we do not see.

Reading Foucault (1970:156–157) through Mbembe (2017:16–17), monsters and fossils reveal themselves as a taxonomic trap that figures and makes sense of bodies through the European scientific project that was built on the synthesis of the real and the imagined. In our movement research we ask: Can the body be set free from the trapping of monster and fossil; how do these become fluid categories once more? European sciences and their taxonomic systems cannot be thought apart from Europe's colonial project.[69]

Mbembe draws from Foucault's monsters and fossils to point to how the western scientific system shapes narratives of blackness, and consequently whiteness, and the intellectual effects of these narratives in postcolonial spaces. He writes:

> The expansion of the European spatial horizon went hand in hand with a division and shrinking of the historical and cultural imagination and, in certain cases, a relative closing of the mind. In sum, once genders, species, and races were identified and classified, nothing remained but to enumerate the differences between them (Mbembe, 2017:17).

Soudien points to "the obdurate nature of race" as a category (Soudien, 2012:54) and relates this to Deleuze's problematisation of difference as "always derived from and only possible – thinkable – within a pre-existing sameness"[70] (Soudien, 2012:69). Representational logic becomes "seductive" in its "concealing [of] the project of power and hegemony" (Soudien, 2012:70). Drawing from Paul Gilroy (2000), Soudien explains that "the idea of race" was made "epistemologically correct" by the modern sciences (Soudien, 2012:72). Wynter, in addition, provides a seminal analysis of the European internal logic or the "ordering discourses"

[69] An example of ways in which the links between racist ideologies and scientific taxonomic practices were manifested is the 'ethographic exhibition' or human zoo (Blanchard and Couttenier, 2017).
[70] I referred to Deleuze's problematisation of difference and identity in Chapter Two, in relation to Cvejić's treatment of Deleuze and choreographic problems and expressive concepts.

(Wynter, 1984:35) that entangled imagined and real in the idea of race.[71] The figures of monster and fossil as a taxonomic means of bringing together the imagined and the real, offer an analogy for the way in which the subject of race has been produced by the European human sciences and ordering discourses. Mbembe states that "on the great chart of species, genders, races, and classes, Blackness, in its magnificent obscurity, represented the synthesis of these two figures" (Mbembe, 2017:18). The synthesis of monster and fossil opens up the deep problematics of the representation of race and subjectivities. Mbembe, for example, suggests that the synthesis of monster and fossil answers to the unknown other that shaped the European understanding of the black "man". Monsters and fossils can be seen to stand in for the trapping of blackness in the European imagination.

What does this mean for the performance of subjectivity and difference in postcolonial spaces? In South Africa, taxonomy takes on a particular meaning through its history of apartheid, a regime founded on the racial stratification of society at every level. Jean Comaroff notes the shift "in South Africa, from ideology to ID-ology, the -ology of identity" (in Shipley, 2010:670). She also notes the double irony of this ethnic identitarianism, since it "evokes the ghosts of the apartheid past" and also mirrors the "rise of stubborn contradictions that have surfaced between cultural difference and universal citizenship" (in Shipley, 2010:670-671). South African society continues to be entangled with racial classification and representation of colour through the skin of the body.[72] Racial classification appears as fixed, solid, calcified. This is the case too in the performing arts where the body's racial representation as its marker of identity is central. Mbembe describes race as "being both beside and beyond being" (Mbembe, 2017:32). He writes that:

> the truth of individuals who are assigned a race is at once elsewhere and within the appearances assigned to them. They exist behind appearance, underneath what is perceived. But they are also constituted by the very act of assigning […] (Mbembe, 2017:32).

[71] Wynter traces the history of these ordering discourses. She writes that "the order/chaos figuration of a physico-ontological principle of Sameness and Difference was the Axiom about which the mode of cultural imagination, the status-ordering process, the aesthetic and the conceptual ordering rational world view of Christian Medieval world, was founded and represented as divinely caused/ordered" (Wynter, 1984:28).
[72] It is important to note in this regard that even by calling out race, it is often simply reified as a category of thinking (see Soudien, 2012:76). I recognise my own participation in this.

Writing in a phenomenological vein, Fanon similarly draws attention to the historico-racial schema that exists beneath the corporeal schema (Fanon [1967] 2008:84). In addition to the tactile, vestibular, kinesthetic and visual character of embodied reality that phenomenology attends to, Fanon draws attention to a racial epidermal schema that describes the lived experience of being the object of the hostile white gaze (Ahmed, 2006:110). Fanon further explains that:

> racism "stops" black bodies inhabiting space by extending through objects and others; the familiarity of "the white world" as a world we know implicitly, "disorients" black bodies such that they cease to know where to find things -reduced as they are to things among things (in Ahmed, 2006:110).

Ahmed extends this notion to argue that the corporeal schema itself is racialised: "race does not just interrupt such a schema but structures its mode of operation" (Ahmed, 2006:111). Colonialism moreover "makes the world "white," which is of course a world "ready for certain kinds of bodies" (Ahmed, 2006:111). Ahmed explains that the corporeal schema is of a "body at home" so that "if the world is made white, then the body at home is one that can inhabit whiteness" (Ahmed, 2006:111). Wynter, read here through Zimitri Erasmus, similarly contends that "racialised subjectivies are (re)produced by continuously reconstituting subjects considered 'non-European' as not quite human in relation to their assumed-to-be-fully human 'European' counterparts" (in Erasmus, 2017:56). This causes a shift, explains Wynter, "in the western imaginary: from mapping ideas of the human onto the physical cosmos to mapping them into the physical bodies of all non-Europeans" (in Erasmus, 2017:58). This results in a "bio-aesthetic system of figuration" (Wynter, 1984:36). Drawing from Fanon to explain that the Black Man was in many ways a figure and an object, Mbembe argues that whiteness in turn is "a fantasy produced by the European imagination" (Mbembe, 2017:43). Through a process of racialisation and labour extortion, whiteness was "in several regions of the world" transformed into "dogma and habitus" (Mbembe, 2017:45). Fantasy is powerful, explains Mbembe, as it "seeks to anchor itself in the real in the form of an effective social truth" (Mbembe, 2017:45). Ahmed extends this by arguing that whiteness is not only inherited but also reproduced. She explains how the whiteness of white bodies is not necessarily endangered by proximity to "others," but that this proximity may serve to "confirm the whiteness of the body." Bodies that are marked by difference become 'orientation devices' as 'others' might then become resources for extending the reach of the white body" (Ahmed,

2006:128). Referring to bell hooks' (1992) notion of the reproduction of whiteness as "eating the other,"[73] Ahmed explains that the white body extends its reach and acquires colour through "acts of incorporation" (Ahmed, 2006:128). Yet, she argues "becoming confirms nonbeing through how it extends the very surface of being toward that which is not it" (Ahmed, 2006:128).

To what extent then, do the practices circulating in *MAF* – through for example specific improvisation strategies, somatic movement investigations and phenomenological approaches to the body – participate in the reproduction of whiteness? Are the techniques proposed by these practices transmissible, or do they, through acts of in-corporation, extend the reach of whiteness? "White bodies," writes Spatz, "pose a specific problem for decoloniality" (Spatz, 2020:255). Recognising whiteness as a dwelling, as proposed by Ahmed (2006), it is also clear that "whiteness infuses bodies as knowledge, culture, and technique" (Spatz, 2020:256). Spatz, however, also raises the (im)possibility of decolonising white bodies. Viewing technique as "fractal veins that permeate but never entirely fill embodiment, never fully determining what a body can do", Spatz argues that there may thus be differing degrees, levels, and qualities of whiteness, and this raises the question of how to unearth the nonwhiteness of bodies that have been racialised as 'white' (Spatz, 2020:256). How can aesthetic layers of movement practices that orientate bodies towards whiteness be stripped away? How can this detraining, and delinking come about?

Erasmus further argues, through Seshadri-Crooks's (2000) Lacanian analysis of the desire for Whiteness, that the idea of race as inscribed on the body is further kept in place through a fiction of the wholeness-of-being (Seshadri-Crooks, 2000:21 in Erasmus, 2017:49). Erasmus adds that when whiteness fails at this fiction, Blackness may assume this role. She explains that "blackness can be used to offer a fantasy somewhat similar to that offered by whiteness and to foreclose the infinite process of making indeterminate subjects" (in Erasmus, 2017: 59). Extending this thought to the practices in *MAF*, one could also question to what extent certain conceptualisations of embodiment themselves offer a universalised fiction of the wholeness-

[73] bell hooks uses the image of "eating the other" to conceptualise the mechanisms by which desire "for the 'primitive' or fantasies about the Other can be continually exploited, and that such exploitation will occur in a manner that reinscribes and maintains the status quo of 'white supremacist capitalist patriarchy'" (hooks, 1992:367).

of-being. As discussed in Chapter Two, embodiment, argues Spatz, often leans on biomedical understandings of the body. Similarly, Erasmus draws from Wynter (2003) to argue that "biocentric ways of knowing are a version of the same explanatory and genealogical frame at the centre of western humanist, monotheist and binary thought" (Erasmus, 2017:129). Invoking ghosts and phantoms and undoing oppositions between monster and fossil then becomes a rigorous working from and inside embodiment. In tracing pathways of embodied technique in *MAF*, I recognise the humanist and universalist trappings (as discussed in Chapter Two). I have drawn from Ahmed's (2006) concept of orientation to suggest that embodied techniques unfold along pathways that are reachable to us. Next, I turn to Ahmed's understanding of mixed orientations (and towards the end of the chapter, disorientation) to suggest how embodied techniques may contribute to a process of detraining and re-orientation – in Noland's (2009) language, "recombination" or "variation," or in Mignolo's (2018) vocabulary's undoing and redoing, delinking and relinking – as part of a decolonial praxis.

Mixed orientations

Erasmus argues that "racialisation produces located lived experiences" and that "these sites make an epistemological difference in so far as they shape the vantage point from which one opens oneself to the world" (Erasmus, 2017:46). This aligns with Ahmed's concept of orientation and the body as a dwelling place from which certain lines unfold. The previous sections have referred to Ahmed's (2006) concept of "orientation" as a phenomenological question to argue that bodies, and practices, "take *shape* by tending toward objects that are reachable, that are available within the bodily horizon" (Ahmed, 2006:2). She adds that "orientations shape not only how we inhabit space, but how we apprehend this world of shared inhabitance, as well as 'who' or 'what' we direct our energy and attention toward" (Ahmed, 2006:2). In Ahmed's words: "what we think 'from' is an orientation device"[74] (Ahmed, 2006:4).

The choreographic problem of *MAF*, which I have identified as haunting that stops the body, arose in part from my awareness of ways in which my own racial signifier does not line up with

[74] Wynter similarly explains that there is a "connection between the way we identify ourselves and the way we act upon/know the world" (Wynter, 1984:44).

my family's history or the classification I have inherited administratively.[75] Although I am from a mixed-race[76] family, I present as white and benefit from the privilege of this visible whiteness,[77] making me aware of how, what Erasmus terms, the technology of "the look" is at work in how others perceive my race. Erasmus explains that "the look" is one of the central ways through which the idea of race as inscribed on the body maintains legitimacy (Erasmus, 2017). "The look" also maintains the notion that "one can belong to one and only one racial category at any one time" (Erasmus, 2017:52). Racial markers, however, are meaningless by themselves. They "depend on the connotations they invoke when assigning people places in a social structure … 'The look'[78] depends on a racialised mind's eye" (Erasmus, 2017:52). "The look" thus, writes Erasmus, "lends stability to this unstable relation [between signifier or marker and signified] by locating the consistency of racial differentiation in visibility rather than in meaning" (Erasmus, 2017:52). What emerges in Erasmus's writing is that "the look" operates not only as a technology, but as a practice. This awareness of how "the look" keeps my representation fixed in performance, and yet the sense of falling between categories opens up some of the questions posed in this movement research. To support this, I draw from Ahmed's (2006) notion of mixed orientations[79] as a way to "reinvestigate the 'alignments' between body, place, nation, and world that allow racial lines to be given" (Ahmed, 2006:112). Ahmed further explains that:

[75] Erasmus explains that "in South Africa today one's race is taken to be administratively inherited via apartheid's race classification of one's parents. By this logic one is Black, Coloured, Indian or White by bureaucratic fiat" (Erasmus 2017:66).

[76] Although I identify as white and coloured in the South African context, I am wary of essentialist approaches to race. Mohamed Adhikari's (2009) book *Burdened By Race* problematises essentialist accounts of coloured identities in Southern Africa in particular.

[77] Soudien (2012) distinguishes three discourses of white privilege in South Africa: global whiteness, old-new South African whiteness, new South African whiteness (Soudien, 2012:177-179). Although Soudien cautions against certain essentialisms that are housed within such discourses, he also notes that whiteness requires a direct and focused response as "white supremacy is such a totalising experience" that infects "the body, the physical world, the symbolic economy" (Soudien, 2012:12).

[78] Productive links could be made here with theories of the gaze, of which Laura Mulvey's 1989 work on the "male gaze" is seminal, and theories on dramaturgy as a mode of looking in theatre and performance, for example in the work of Bleeker (2008; 2015).

[79] The notion of mixed orientations and mixed genealogies could be linked to discourses on creolisation. Examples can be found in Soudien (2012), Adhikari (2009) and Helene Strauss (2009). Strauss, for example, draws from Françoise Vergès, to explain that creolisation is less about the mechanics of mixing and more about "a bricolage drawing freely [sic] upon what is available, recreating with new content and in new forms a distinctive culture, a creation in a situation of domination and conflict" (Vergès in Strauss, 2009:35).

> the "matter" of race is very much about embodied reality; seeing oneself or being seen as white or black or mixed does affect what one "can do," or even where one can go, which can be redescribed in terms of *what is and what is not within reach* (Ahmed, 2006:112).

The notion of mixed orientation poses an interesting question for embodiment, embodied practice and technique as methods to reinvestigate what bodies can do. My own sense of mixed orientation also has much in common with Ahmed's understanding of "a stranger" (Ahmed, 2006:142). She writes that "while the stranger may not be 'at home,' the stranger only becomes a stranger by coming too close to home" (Ahmed, 2006:142). In other words, Ahmed seems to suggest that the stranger's quality as stranger shows up when they threaten to unsettle a perceived stability or that which appears to be a coherent "home". What can this mean for the politics of embodied practice, which Spatz (2020) captures in the question of what a body can do? Ahmed further suggests that phenomenology from a mixed orientation (as a phenomenology that can account for racial differences) implies beginning with a "mixed genealogy". Such a genealogy would be mixed, as it would attend to how things do not stay apart from other things; a mixed genealogy is one that gets "away" from the lines of conventional genealogy' (Ahmed, 2006:143). Ahmed describes a mixed orientation as arriving "from different worlds … (an imaging that has real and material effects on the way things are arranged)" and argues that this "might help us show how genealogy itself is mixed. When genealogy straightens up, when it establishes its line, we have simply lost sight of this mix" (Ahmed, 2006:143). Applying this conceptual frame to *MAF*, one can ask how an understanding of a mixed genealogy can rework and de-hierarchise the relationships between embodied practices such as dance, as part of the performing arts, and other embodied arts.

I have summarised the choreographic problem of *MAF* as a negotiation of the constraints placed upon the body by inscription and haunting. These constraints include race, class, gender, sexuality, artistic conventions, and techniques of the body that are informed by colonial scripts. I have borrowed Ahmed's concept of orientation to suggest how bodies orient towards objects that are within reach. I have also questioned to what extent ideas of undoing or detraining, and concepts of embodiment, may simply reinforce the reach of whiteness. In the preceding chapter, I drew from Noland (2009) to argue that detraining requires a battery of techniques. If haunting stops the body, then what are techniques that could reactivate it, and how do these techniques open new fields for embodied practice? As I suggested previously in this chapter, techniques for a decolonial praxis name units of movement practice

and an ethos of making and moving at once. They are ethico-political articulations between the ecological registers of environment, social relations and human subjectivity (Guattari, [1989] 2000:15). Next, I draw from Manning's (2016) notion of a field of relation to trace techniques in *MAF*.

Field of relation

In our search for a battery of embodied techniques that could support detraining and reactivation, we reach towards (movement) improvisation practices, techniques, and pedagogies, offered in the networks of experimental practices and practitioners[80] that surround us. This resists the idea of a master narrative and instead acknowledges the localised and specific nature of practices and further, echoes a decolonial ethos, which Mignolo and Walsh explain "is not about inventing new abstract universals" (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018:1). Rather, decoloniality foregrounds relationality to reveal "ways that different local histories and embodied conceptions and practices of decoloniality … enter into conversation" (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018:1). This has much in common with the ethos and methodology of improvisation[81] as a larger field of practice. Improvisation is described by Simon Rose as "'enacted' meaning that sits in the 'realm of experience' and 'doing' which involves 'action and actants (actors)'" (Rose, 2017:viii). As embodied researchers, we operate 'within a larger feedback system' (Honsinger in Rose, 2017:143). One of the more documented practices we draw from in *MAF* is Contact Improvisation, a movement practice developed by Steve Paxton, Nancy Stark Smith and others in the mid-1970s, which has historical roots in American modern dance and is related to "the culture, aesthetic and style of spontaneity in the arts in postwar

[80] Practitioners who have had a significant influence on my work include but are not limited to Lucia Walker, who draws from techniques such as Alexander Technique, improvisation and contact improvisation; Tossie van Tonder, and Manuela Tessi and Thalia Laric who work with various improvisation techniques in performance.
[81] Rose notes the "increasing research interest in improvisation across various disciplines" beyond the performing arts including "psychology, pedagogy, philosophy, sociology, anthropology, law, literature, post-colonial studies, gender studies" amongst others (Rose, 2017:27). As an example, in 2017, the annual meeting of the Consortium of Humanities Centres and Institutes (CHCI) and the accompanying winter school at the Centre for Humanities Research at the University of the Western Cape took place under the theme of 'The humanities improvised'. The theme explored "the multiple ways in which improvisation has enabled and facilitated the study of the humanities, not least in times of great social upheaval" (https://chcinetwork.org/2017-annual-meeting). As a departure point, these meetings questioned ways in which improvisation can be seen as a motor in shifting concepts and shifting relationships, for example between art and humanities, especially in African and South African contexts (https://chcinetwork.org/2017-annual-meeting).

America" (Cvejić, 2015:132). Contact Improvisation traces links to the Judson Church movement of the 1960s and 70s, which Lepecki writes "represents the master narrative of postmodern North American dance" (Lepecki, 2006:21). In the historiography of western theatre dance, Judson is seen as having "brought dance history to its climax and opened up a new world of dance" (Protopapa, 2016:176). Experimentation in European contemporary theatre dance is often seen in relationship to the lineage of Judson (Cvejić, 2015:96). Goldman, however, cautions against simplistic origin myths[82] that place the seeds of improvisation in dance and choreography in the Judson Dance Theatre and Contact Improvisation and that "dominate published dance histories" (Goldman, 2010:15;22). However, the modes of moving-making offered by these experimental forms need to be acknowledged in the genealogies of our training.

Paxton developed Contact Improvisation as a way into movement for untrained dancers. The dance begins as a duet form. Contact, through touch with another body, and through weight-sharing as an extension of touch, offers impulses for movement. Goldman notes that Contact Improvisation has been analysed [83]at length with a focus on certain democratic[84] ideals that are offered by the form. She shifts the focus, however, to improvisation as an "embodied practice of self-readiness" (Goldman, 2010:25). She offers that Contact Improvisation's political potential lies in the ways in which its physical practice trains dancers to ready "themselves for a range of possible situations" (Goldman, 2010:25). In this way, Goldman draws parallels between the training developed by contact improvisers and techniques of the body in nonviolent protest in civil rights movements. She concludes that improvisation has "political power as a vital technology of the self" (Goldman, 2010:25). Cvejić (2015) has argued that there is a limit to any new knowledge that this mode of improvisational approach can offer to a larger field. She notes that even when the body is objectivated as "bundles of nerves, as masses and bones" this improvisational approach to movement refuses "externally posited

[82] Lepecki similarly diagnoses a "disturbing drive that attributes to Judson a totalitarian role in relation to any other forms of movement experiments in the USA in the 1960s" (Lepecki, 2006:21).
[83] Some sources that link contact improvisation practice with politics include Cynthia J Novack (1990) and Ann Dils and Ann Cooper Albright (2001).
[84] Some links could be made here with South African analyses of contemporary dance, physical theatre and performance, particularly from the 1990s onward, that consider methodologies of creation in relation to ideas of democracy. Ketu Katrak, for example, notes Pather's description of his choreographic process as "democratic choreography" and describes Pather's use of public spaces for performance as a "democratic" move (Katrak, 2021:140).

constraints and instead operate[s] within the internally given limits of the body, its experience of time, space, and contact with the other" (Cvejić, 2015:137). My interest, however, is in how improvisation and *MAF* afford opportunities to exercise agency and expand understandings of agentic technology, beyond the necessarily volitional, conscious, and human, as offered by Manning (2016:2), and as agential intra-action,[85] which takes into account the "entanglement of natureculture" (Barad, 2011:132). I use the idea of 'exercising' agency in the sense of practising, working and re-working, tuning in to the elasticity[86] of thinking in the making. Borrowing Barad's language, contact improvisation begins from a relational ontology. Movement unfolds relationally through agential intra-action, distributing and elasticising agency among the movers. Through Goldman's notion of improvising as the negotiation of shifting constraints, it is possible to see improvising as a practice, as exercising, as obtaining techniques for a "full-bodied critical engagement with the world" (Goldman, 2010:5). This understanding of agency is closer to Manning's use of Deleuze and Guattari's *agencement* (referred to in English as 'assemblage'). *Agencement*, according to Manning, breaks down the emphasis on the volition, intentionality, and agency triad as a prerequisite of freedom (Manning, 2016:115). For Manning, subject-centred agency, which assumes that a free individual is a master of their own acts (Manning, 2016:120), describes a neurotypical account of experience. Advocating instead for neurodiverse accounts, Manning argues that experience is collective and ecological (2016:115). Borrowing from Manning, I suggest that exercising agency as technique moves away from subject-based identity to investigate agency in a field of relation, in a co-compositional mode (Manning, 2016:123).

MAF unfolds in a field of relation and contact improvisation as practice affords an ecological and collective[87] experience in which to conduct the embodied research of the working and re-

[85]Barad argues that "iterative intra-activity configures and reconfigures entanglements. Entanglements are not the interconnectedness of things or events separated in space and time. Entanglements are enfoldings of spacetimematterings" (Barad, 2011:139).

[86] Manning describes the movement of thought as elastic. She notes an "important difference between conscious thought and thought that moves with experience in the making" (Manning, 2016:115).

[87] A link can be made here with Freya Vass-Rhee's concept of dramaturgy as a distributed practice among a web of co-creators. Vass-Rhee explains that "the work/play of dramaturgical devising … is distributed across different individuals, social contexts, forms and time-frames" (Vass-Rhee, 2015:100). She adds that "dramaturgical thinking emerges as a function of minds thinking individually, and also thinking about other minds thinking" (Vass-Rhee, 2015:101).

working of agency. I propose that this meets Manning's minor[88] move from body to "body-ing." Body-ing, according to Manning, challenges the body-world split. Body then becomes "a dynamic constellation in co-composition with the environment" (Manning, 2016:115). I connect this with Vázquez's proposition that a decolonial praxis (aesthesis) of dance moves from "the power of enunciation-representation to the capacity of reception" (Vázquez, 2019:34). Vázquez asks, 'instead of becoming the self, can we overcome the self?' (Vázquez, 2019:35). In *MAF* we draw from techniques of (contact) improvisation to track the sensations of pressing, pouring, pushing, and smashing, while also resisting certain aesthetic traits of contact improvisation through, for example, the interruption of flow: moving only when weight causes discomfort and asks for a re-initiation of movement. I borrow from Manning's understanding of touch as technique. She explains that as a "technique of the moving body touch incites the body to direct its movement" (Manning, 2009b:212). Manning also asks: what if the body cannot begin to move? She describes a case study[89] of post-encephalitic patients who suffer a particular neurological condition that causes a loss of the ability to activate the body into movement. It is not a case of paralysis but rather a case of the body's loss of the ability to begin to move (Manning, 2009b). Manning refers to this state as "inertia" or the inability to activate the body, which I connect to the choreographic problem of inscription as haunting the body. Manning further explains that, "inertia does not imply a total loss of movement: it suggests an inability to activate a change in state. Inertia is "the property of a body by virtue of which it tends to persist in a state of rest or uniform motion" unless enacted upon by an external force" (2009b:213).

Manning develops a philosophy of movement that understands movement not as displacement but as a translation from incipience to activation, which she calls pre-acceleration[90] (Manning 2009:214). "What is ordinarily thought of as movement," she writes, "is better understood as preacceleration, which is the virtual propulsion out of which

[88] I understand Manning's (2016) evocation of "the minor gesture" in line with the notion of a micropolitics of practice.
[89] This refers to Manning's 2009 article "Taking the next step: touch as technique." In the article she refers to a case study by Oliver Sacks.
[90] This concept is further explored in Chapter Four which is structured around *Before Naming (BN)* and *Extreme Subjectivities (ES)*.

displacement emerges" (Manning 2009b:214).[91] Touch, and here weight-sharing, are then techniques that can enact upon the body as an external force to allow the body to take a small/big leap from incipience to activation. This implies that the leap from incipience to activation can be practised and exercised. Structured by this technique, the movement explorations become repeatable and transmissible. Touch and weight-sharing in *MAF* offer the basis for co-composition, allowing the dance to unfold in a field of relation, and to track possibilities for initiation and activation of motion.

Scores and unfolding choreography

The workings of the dance are like an evolution of thought. We start stacked on top of another in the mind-space of one organism. The score of the dance consists of trying to get all eight limbs in coordination and collaboration with each other. We do this by sharing and pouring weight into each other's bodies and the floor. This becomes a mechanism to shift the focus from the outline of our own form, imaging our bodies as one creature. By paying attention to the points of connection with the supporting surface of the floor and each other's bodies, we ask: how does this eight-limbed, two-headed creature stand up? Once standing is achieved, we try to separate. Sometimes we succeed and other times the dance ends without having reached this objective. The progression is glacier-ly slow.

As mentioned earlier, the score of the dance is not an attempt to mimetically approach the figures of monster and fossil. Rather we make use of a score or an improvisation structure to investigate the choreographic problem. The choreography unfolds in a relational field as discussed above, and might be called nomadic,[92] in the sense offered by Braidotti (2019:36). Moving away from subject-centred agency and a subjectivised approach to improvisation that leans on notions of self-expression (Cvejić, 2015:128), the choreography unfolds through the actualisation of the virtual. In our movement research we move among the compositional virtualities (rather than possibilities) surrounding the choreographic problem. Brian Massumi explains that "the body is radically open, absorbing impulses quicker than they can be

[91] Manning explains that in dance, preacceleration "is felt as the virtual momentum of movement's taking form before we actually move … It does not necessarily foretell where a movement will go. Incipient movement preaccelerates a body towards its becoming" (Manning, 2012:6).

[92] Braidotti develops a nomadic or vital materialism. She explains that in this system "all human and non-human entities are nomadic subjects-in-process, in perpetual motion, immanent to the vitality of self-ordering matter" (Braidotti, 2019:36).

perceived" (Massumi, 1995:89). This reworks our thinking about the body because "something that happens too quickly to have happened actually, is virtual" (Massumi, 1995:91). Massumi adds that "the body is as immediately virtual as it is actual. The virtual, the pressing crowd of incipiencies and tendencies, is a realm of potential" (Massumi, 1995:91).

The improvisation score offered by *MAF* moves among compositional virtualities and trains a reworking of the present. The idea of a score conjures associations with the field of music and is used in varying ways in the context of improvisation.[93] Rose makes the important point that while improvisation is often seen in opposition to composition,[94] improvisation is more accurately understood as composition unfolding in not-predetermined ways[95] (Rose, 2017:21).

My understanding of choreography in *MAF* as unfolding, resonates with artist Lisa Nelson's use of "tuning scores", which Noë likens to Wittgenstein's language games and describes as "spontaneous ensemble composition" (Noë, 2007:122). Tuning scores rely on the phenomenological understanding that "we enact our perceptual world by attuning ourselves to it" (Noë, 2007:126) and the fundamental idea "that our worlds are made by us through our dynamic coupling with our surroundings" (Noë, 2007:127). The notion of tuning scores, moreover, link conceptually to Spatz's use of tinkering, tuning, and tracking as the doingness of embodied research (discussed in Chapter One). Tinkering, tuning, tracking, and tracing mark the unfolding of the choreography as well the re-iteration of knowledge from the dance in research activities after the performance events.

I connect this understanding of improvisational scores to Midgelow's suggestion of an embodied dramaturgy, which counters conventional understanding of dramaturgy, and choreography. Midgelow (2015) notes that improvisation has often been placed in binary opposition to dramaturgy. She writes that:

> Historically it could be argued that dramaturgy has been interested in the ways meaning(s)can be carefully crafted and constructed, while improvisation resists any such controlling mechanisms – with movement, structures, and meanings occurring in

[93] Rose, who explores improvisation in the context of music and pedagogy, makes a distinction between improvisation that makes use of score and so-called free improvisation (Rose, 2017:19).
[94] This recalls earlier-mentioned arguments around the relationship between choreography and writing (see Chapter One and Two).
[95] Chapter Two explores the idea of indeterminate stories further.

> emergent fashion, unplanned and unknowable prior to the moment of performance (Midgelow, 2015:107).

Dramaturgy has historically been seen as a critical practice that operates from an outside perspective. Midgelow, however, draws attention to the "embodied, inside" qualities of improvisation to reposition dramaturgy as a consciousness or sensibility that is simultaneously activated and articulated during the moment of performance (Midgelow, 2015:122). Midgelow further theorises this dramaturgical consciousness as an interplay of perception and memory, which she conceptualises through a phenomenological lens. In our movement research, the dance unfolds along our modes of attention and tactile perceptions. Midgelow's understanding of memory, which she argues is at work in improvisation, can be added. She describes memory in improvisation as the body's ability "to move without the need to consciously perceive the details involved in every action because body memory is essentially tacit and mediates the basic experience of familiarity and continuity" (Midgelow, 2015:114). While *MAF* taps into the familiarity and continuity of body memory and sensation, the dance extends into unknown virtualities by binding our bodies as an "eight-limbed, two-headed" entity. *MAF* as a choreographic problem emphasises the virtual as a dimension of the present. Engaging a search for a decolonial choreographic praxis, *MAF* questions, through the metaphoric use of fossil and monster, how dance may be conceptualised not as a collection of cultural elements, signifiers, or an interaction of danced texts, but as a timespace where ancient (memory), and unknown and yet to come (imagination), are in close proximity, exceeding in Vázquez's terms "the temporality of contemporaneity" (Vázquez, 2019:22).

Next, I consider duration and the notion of (post)human subjects through the figures of monster and fossil.

Duration and (post)human subjects

In asking whether monster and fossil can be redeemed, rather than seen as a synthesis of imagined and real as in the category of race, we question the (im)possibility of working away from the taxonomic trapping presented by these figures and towards open, emergent practices and subjects that challenge temporal divisions between memory and imagination. This inquiry aligns with decoloniality in its attempt to delink from a linear concept of time, which is key to the history and praxis of western knowledge (Mignolo, 2018:365). A linear concept of time, for example expressed by creating oppositions between concepts such as

tradition and modernity, "creates mirages in which colonial differences transform differential coexistences into being behind in time" (Mignolo, 2018:365). Monsters and fossils as a choreographic concept offer a proposition for differential coexistences being held in one body and circulated across bodies. The use of time in *MAF* mirrors this. As offered before, the dance unfolds glacier-ly slow. Aside from instances of falling and losing balance, the dance resists a change of pace. The progression of the dance is also the duration of the inquiry. The score lines up with the amount of time it takes to state the choreographic problem. Sound and score determine a stopping point for *MAF*, but the asking of the question could continue, supporting Spatz's notion that "duration cannot circulate as a sign of itself because it always takes exactly as long as it means" (Spatz, 2020:243).

So what I remember[96]
re-member
is that we start one stacked on top of the other
like stones
gradually
waiting
for the weight
to drop, to shift, to slide into another formation
like a glacier
it's heavy
Your weight presses me into the ground
and stretches my skin
it is so slow and heavy, the two parts might as well be one
we have to stay close, because if we fall too far away there is nothing
to press into, press onto, press onward
it hurts
the desire to find another shape to be in when gravity weighs so heavy and body parts differentiate to a pile of limbs on the floor
functions not yet known

[96] Performative writing after *MAF* by Thalia Laric.

strength just a squeezing contracting press

it's so slow

and sometimes it shakes or quivers with exhaustion

or distorts into a de-socialised contortion

drooling and drooping

fingers and feet land on the ground first thing

first they don't choose the part that should

they don't know how

they only know

gravity, pressing, squeezing, ceasing

try to get up

is this my leg?

is that your pelvis?

we are a mush of a person muddled

together

a monstrous form

I don't know where I start or you

begin

I need your leg to stand up

your arm to hold on to

I cannot control

it will not listen

try to stand

this is not my body

my body is not my body

failure in multiple directions

we are halfway there

standing on borrowed structures, borrowed time

it can fall, it will fall, it does fall

and lands where it lands to start again

good luck

are you human?

is this up or down?

I want to go back

you can never go back

time only goes forward with the consequence of your efforts

crash clank squeeze moan

new structures forming, new dimension to perceive from

upright, reborn

lighter

biped

leave

two separate entities

attempt to find their feet

separate

By moving as an eight-limbed, two-headed creature, paired with appearances and disappearances through the use of lighting transformations (effected by the choices made by a lighting technician as the dance unfolds), the dance challenges the visual presentation of a recognisable human form. Fanon, who points out how the corporeal schema is interrupted by race, also declares that he is "a human being, and that is all. The Other can dispute this quality, but they can never rob me of it ontologically" (in Mbembe, 2017:46). Is it possible to dance like this? To ask that one is witnessed as human being only? In considering a decolonial take on phenomenology, specifically as elaborated by Husserl,[97] Mignolo (2018) goes further than reclaiming humanity and asks that the category of human itself is reworked. Husserl conceives of the history of modern philosophy since the Renaissance as "the struggle for the meaning of man" (Mignolo, 2018:374). As discussed earlier in this chapter through the work of Wynter and Erasmus amongst others, Mignolo explains that the ordering discourses of Europe made the idea of Man/Human "the measuring stick for classifying and ranking lesser Men/Humans, including European women and the rest of the people" (Mignolo, 2018:362).

Does a focus on identity imply being drawn to fossil, a returning to the past, to memory? Should we instead, especially in the artistic and academic space, turn our concern towards the

[97] More particularly, Mignolo draws from Husserl's *Philosophy as a Rigorous Science* (1911) and *The Crisis of European Sciences* (1936).

monstrous? What would it mean to immerse ourselves in the monstrous? To engage in the genesis of difference. Is this the task of decolonial choreographic strategy, to go into the unknown, towards monstrosity? This task asks us to deal with everything at the limits, all liminal figures. It implies thinking outside category, outside all categories. Or does monstrous stand for an obsession with the grotesque, with extreme identity markers? Monstrous identities? Recalling Coly's (2019) diagnosis of postcolonial haunting, to what extent does a tendency to exhibit the monster answer to the way in which colonial scripts exhibited its others? By conflating the fossil and the monster in performance, are we assuming this inextricable link? To what extent does performance in South Africa continue to play out the figures of monster and fossil? To what extent do performances continue to bind the factual and the marvellous, much like European knowledge and scientific tradition? (Mbembe, 2017). To what extent does the representation of margin as either freak or unrecoverable past affirm monster and fossil as fixed categories? Can monster and fossil be redeemed?

Writing in the context of South African live arts, Bettina Malcomess offers that "all too often, the performing body, queer and especially black, is reduced to a signifier of non-being and a site of symbolic violence" (Malcomess, 2019:195). Drawing from Jack Halberstam (2014), Malcomess writes that the replaying of tropes "simply flow right back into the discursive machinery that produces bodies of colour as perpetually out of line, out of time, out of whack, and out of work" (in Malcomess, 2019:195). This reiterates, as mentioned in Chapter One, the risk of what Spatz calls a threshold ontology which reifies difference as a trope of excess (Spatz, 2020:20–21). Writing in the context of gender, Spatz proposes a possible shift from threshold to technique, as a means of radically opening up the concept of embodiment itself (Spatz, 2020:24).[98] This entails thinking from difference rather than thinking about difference.[99] As Barad argues, this suggests:

> A way of thinking about the nature of differentiating that is not derivative of some fixed notion of identity or even a fixed spacing. Indeed, what is the nature of difference if

[98] Arguing for an understanding of gender as technique, Spatz writes that "there are research projects in and through gender, whose outcome is not new knowledge about gender but rather new gender" (Spatz, 2015:211).

[99] Although they are not interchangeable categories, this argument could be extended to consider embodiment and disability, or embodiment and childhood. *The Tree Song* (2019), which falls outside the scope of this study, but was created while still occupied with the questions of this study, takes tentative steps in this direction by creating dance performance for babies and toddlers from the perspective of babies and toddlers who use hearing technologies to access sound.

> differentiating doesn't happen in space and time but in the making of spacetimemattering (Barad, 2011:124).

While both phenomenology and decoloniality entail "an experiential story of researching, living, sensing, thinking, reasoning, and being in the world, doing what we do while we live" (Mignolo, 2018:362), decoloniality as a praxis of living is concerned with undoing the centrality of the Man/Human category to include all living organisms (Spatz, 2020:254). Embodiment as conceptualised by Spatz, "troubles the category of human, as human corporeality overlaps in so many ways with non-human being" (Spatz, 2020:254). In this conceptualisation of embodiment, the liminal figures of monster and fossil are no longer a taxonomic trap for racialised others but are potentially reclaimed as a "posthuman knowing subject" (Braidotti, 2019). It is important here to note that Mignolo critiques Braidotti's articulation of the posthuman. Mignolo explains:

> By asking what it means to be human, decolonial thinking rejects the ontology and epistemology of the human and of humanity. As decolonial thinker, once I know what Human/Man means, I do not want to be human. But instead of simply rejecting its content and adding a prefix (posthuman), decolonial thinkers start by asking how these concepts came into being: when, why, who, and what for? (Mignolo & Walsh, 2019:35-36).

Acknowledging these philosophical tensions[100], I draw from Braidotti who explains that the posthuman should be not taken as "either an apocalyptic or as an intrinsically subversive category" (Braidotti, 2018:35). Rather:

> The posthuman is normatively neutral and it does not automatically point to the end of species, let alone to post-power/gender/class/race/species relations between members of the species. As a figuration, the posthuman is both situated and partial – it does not define the human condition, but offers a spectrum through which we can capture the complexity of ongoing processes of subject-formation (Braidotti, 2019:35–36).

Embodiment then is not a neutral concept. Embodied practices, as argued earlier, may act as orientation devices causing bodies to line up with certain techniques and directing attention toward particular objects within embodied research. This echoes Spatz's notion that embodiment has both decolonial and neocolonial potential (Spatz, 2020). Borrowing from Audre Lorde (1984), Spatz asks whether embodiment remains "just another one of the

[100] The cross-overs and philosophical tensions between discourses in decoloniality and posthuman discourses propose potential avenues for future research.

'master's tools'" or whether it may "be counted among the techniques that might dismantle the house of 'the body'" (Spatz, 2020:252)?

Disorientation

In *The Order of Things*, Foucault writes:

> Observation from the seventeenth century onward, is a perceptible knowledge furnished with a series of systematically negative conditions. Hearsay is excluded, that goes without saying; but so are taste and smell, because their lack of certainty and their variability render impossible any analysis into distinct elements that could be universally acceptable. The sense of touch is very narrowly limited to the designation of a few fairly evident distinctions (such as between smooth and rough); which leaves sight with an almost exclusive privilege, being the sense by which we perceive extent and establish proof … To attempt to improve one's power of observation by looking through a lens, one must renounce the attempt to achieve knowledge by means of the other senses or from hearsay (Foucault, 1970:132-133).

Score of *MAF*: *Wherever you are, and however you are placed, close your eyes. You still know where your head is, where your feet are, how far your elbows are jutting out and how your spine is shaped. If you were asked, you would be able to draw an outline of yourself.*

The dance disrupts your proprioceptive and kinesthetic sense, it tricks it. I can only take my attention to the contact point between me and my partner in the score. I can, to an extent, still sense my own outline, but I am not able to calculate the whole of our joint pattern. If I had to draw the outline of our two-headed, eight-limbed figure, I would not be able to. I cannot predict where the next movement is and what the next shape will be. It means moving in darkness, in the unknown. Our bodyminds are trained in pattern recognition, to fill in the gaps.

MAF is an exercise in perceptual disorientation. As discussed earlier, what Erasmus calls the technology of "the look," and what in this context could be called the *practice* of "the look," produces a "racialised mind's eye" (Erasmus, 2017:52). She writes that "the tyranny of 'the look' produces the tyranny of identity politics whether on the part of dominant or subjugated people" (Erasmus, 2017:63). However, "a critical consciousness enables one to recognise both the ways in which one's subjectivity is shaped by the dynamics of 'the look,' and the self-deceptions of these dynamics" (Erasmus, 2017:64). Erasmus also draws attention to the difficulty of undoing 'the look'. She explains that:

> Attempts to argue that the idea of race as something visible is a socio-political construction with Eurocentric, imperial and colonial foundations have little power to counter the effects of 'the look', with the supposed immediate and obvious evidence it provides (Erasmus, 2017:66).

Echoing Foucault's notion of sight as a privileged sense (Foucault, 1970:132–133), Erasmus writes that "tracking bodily movements in space and time lends itself to uncritical thinking and doing with one's eyes, a practice privileged by Euro-modern epistemologies which favour the ocular over the auditory" (Erasmus, 2017:67). I could add here the other senses (the sensory array of sight, smell, taste, proprioception, the kinesthetic, vestibular, temperature and pain), in addition to the auditory. In search of ways to undo 'the look', Erasmus proposes the need for "adversarial conceptual manoeuvres" or "adversarial aesthetics" (2017:68), which I read alongside Mignolo and Vázquez's (2019) proposal of a decolonial aesthesis and delinking as a decolonial option. She writes that "through adversarial aesthetics we learn that bodies do not deceive, 'the look' deceives" (Erasmus,2017:68). "The look," in other words, is a "form of unethical practice" that needs to be undermined "as a regime of knowing race'" (Erasmus, 2017:68-69). I suggest that Erasmus' adversarial conceptual manoeuvres can be read alongside Ahmed's (2006) notion of "disorientation" as part of a queer phenomenology. Ahmed writes that "phenomenology is full of queer moments" or "moments of disorientation" that occur before bodies are reoriented (Ahmed, 2006:4). She writes further, that "moments of disorientation are vital. They are bodily experiences that throw the world up or throw the body from its ground" (Ahmed, 2006:157). She describes disorientation as a "switching of dimensions", as might occur in the action of turning around and away from an object that you were facing. Describing this scene, she writes:

> Then behind you, someone calls out your name. As if by force of habit, you look up, you even turn around to face what is behind you. But as your bodily gestures move up, as you move around, you move out of the world, without simply falling into a new one. Such moments when you 'switch' dimensions can be deeply disorientating. One moment does not follow another, as a sequence of spatial givens that unfolds as moments of time. They are moments in which you lose one perspective but the 'loss' itself is not empty or waiting; it is an object, thick with presence. You might even see black lines in front of your eyes that block what is in front of you when you turn around. You experience the moment as loss, as the making present of something that is now absent (the presence of an absence). You blink, but it takes time for the world to acquire a new shape (Ahmed, 2006:158–159).

In *MAF*, the dance starts disrupting conditioned patterns that are experienced as constraint. In binding our senses together and trying to tap only into the felt, the touch and the weight shifts (our attention/awareness is severely restricted), the mind enters a darkness, a space of unknown. Eyes are closed, downcast or applied to blur vision in order to exercise channeling into the tactile. Darkness produces the sense that you do not know whether you are making contact with an arm or a leg. You lose sense of where your partner's body is in space, where their verticality is, how they are oriented. You could be touching a knee and mistake it for a shoulder. This trick disturbs our pattern recognition of the body.

MAF exercises sensory, and especially visual, disorientation. In this movement research, disorientation is proposed as a technique to counter dominant practices of looking and shaping the body. The dance asks how disorientation as a technique might inform choreographic practice, and modes of looking that inform choreographic practice. Disorientation, approached here as a technique, becomes an adversarial manoeuvre and a decolonial option.

Pathways of embodied technique in *MAF*

To end this chapter, I offer a phenomenotechnical account of a sample of the embodied techniques arising from *MAF*, and descriptions of some of the ways in which these techniques have been repeated in other contexts, outside the making and performance of *MAF*. This functions both as documentation as well as a way in which to trace how techniques of *MAF* are becoming part of an emerging pedagogical practice. I suggest that these techniques may form part of a decolonial choreographic praxis, with the understanding that they are never prescriptive and only ever optional.

There are two movers in this score. The score can be adapted to a solo format using a wall, a piece of furniture, or another surface that can be used to apply pressure.

1. *Start stacked one on top of the other, balancing like rocks, on your side, in a foetal form. Integrity of bones keeps you stacked, one balancing, one weighed down. Two skeletons, two masses stacked and merging. Pouring into each other. Gravity does the rest.*
2. *Skin begins to slide, glacier-ly slow. Any sudden movement is an aberration. The movement is slow and continuous. Falling down, but not apart, only into and onto.*

Pressing towards surfaces of skin, of ground of body and bodies. One body falling slowly into the other.

3. *A many-limbed creature. The other's legs are your legs, are your arms. Practice being both bodies. Press into and onto your many parts. One many-limbed creature pushing into itself, pressing anything against anything. There is no proper way to place a hand on the ground or body, let it land in any way it lands. Let any part be anywhere. Stay close, no stretching out. Forget alignment, you have not learnt this yet, you only have pushing and pressing. Pain or discomfort inspire movement.*
4. *Ascending; the idea of a direction upward. Try to stand up. Try to organise your many limbs and bits to press and push and function as a holding structure. Eyes are only half open, often closed, you are not an identity, not socialised, only feeling and sensing and discovering how to organise mass. Try to stand up. Only when finding a vaguely vertical shape with a skull somewhere above the legs and the feet somewhere below the hips can the pressing and pushing towards the other cease.*
5. *Explore the possibility of separating. It cannot be quick. Subjectivities are so densely bound and pressed into each other. How to come apart from the massive mass of intertwinement. Come to stand. Come to stand separately.*

Repeating technique/Noticing an emerging pedagogy (1)

Sample of workshop materials to exercise adversarial seeing/looking:

Tactile

Work in pairs. One person begins to move towards sensation, finding stretch and opening in the body: Your eyes are open. The other person uses the touch of the hands to trace their partner's movement: Your eyes are closed. Both partners: resist the desire to lead or to be led. Stay in this tactile connection for a while. Explore through space. Come to a pause. Switch roles.

Repeat the first exercise. This time, mover, close your eyes. The person using hands-on touch: keep your eyes open. Explore through space. Resist the desire to lead or to be led. Come to a pause and switch roles. Compare these different states of experience.

Visual disorientation

Work in pairs. Make a movie of your partner with your eyes. Zoom in, zoom out, change your angle. Let your camera pan across. Create jump cuts. Vary your speed. Both partners perform the task at the same time. Superimpose objects and images. Move in and out of focus.

Repeating technique/Noticing an emerging pedagogy (2)

During the *Any Body Dance Lab* project, I became especially aware of the weight of inscriptions and hauntologies. The project involved six weekends in early 2018 with about fifteen artists participating in movement and composition workshops and creating performances. The weight of inscription, thinking about inscription and postcolonial spectres seemed to produce stuck-ness. I saw this again during 2020,[101] while facilitating movement in virtual spaces. Techniques from *MAF* were repeated in a new context.

1. *Find a wall. If a wall is not available, make use of an armchair. If you are seated at a desk, make use of your chair and the surface immediately in front of you. Work with a camera and/or other witnesses.*[102]
2. *Move in order to spread your skin onto the wall. Try to bring all parts of your skin in contact with the wall. Some parts are difficult to spread and expose to the wall. Accommodate your shape to bring more of your skin in contact with the wall. Observe your breath, hum and sigh as needed. Keep your eyes closed. Sense your inner environment.*
3. *Once the whole body has found contact with the wall, turn this into a spreading, pressing, pushing dance. Begin to tune into your own body's density against the wall. Sense variations in tone and density in this spreading, pressing, pushing dance. Notice the body's changing consistency, the potential to condense and de-condense. Continue to explore breath and sound. Tune into vibration against the wall. Keep the eyes closed, stay internal.*
4. *Continue this spreading, pressing, pushing dance. Begin to open your eyes and take in more of the environment that surrounds you. Continue to tune into your own tone and*

[101] 2020 necessitated online teaching of movement due to the Covid-19 pandemic.
[102] Witnessing as embodied technique is explored further in Chapter Four.

density, and begin to bridge into the environment, reach out into space, to other nearby objects and surfaces. Notice any change in sound, unvoiced and voiced consonants may come into play. Play with being both inner and outer. Sensing your inner environment while bridging to the outer world.[103]

5. *Now begin to 'co-compose' the dance with the wall. Sense how you both shape and are being shaped by the wall. The moving sounding body and the wall are inextricable. In the words of Manning:*

> Each touch is much more than a tactile sensory input. It is a hearing-with, a seeing-through. To take the next step is never simply to touch the floor again. It is to feel the shapeshifting of spacetime, to hear the wall's approach, to express the parameters of the room expanding and decreasing. It is moving to sense the weight of the body's proprioception, to 'ground', to 'body' (Manning 2009b:212).

Stay in a "dance of attention" (Manning & Massumi, 2014). Witness yourself and others. Notice the camera witnessing you. Witness generously and responsibly. Paying attention "not to, but with and toward, in and around. Undecomposably" (Manning & Massumi, 2014:4).

Summation of the chapter

In this chapter, I have argued that *MAF* is an instance of choreographic thinking, of embodied research that is veined, to use Spatz's terminology (2015:44), by practices in dance-making, embodiment and improvisation that surround us. I identified the choreographic problem of *MAF* as the haunting of inscriptions, artistic conventions and physical techniques that constrain and stop the body. Using monsters and fossils metaphorically, *MAF* offers a view of choreography as a co-compositional field of relation, with the possibility of undoing subject-centred agency, and moving through disorientation in favour of a moving-making that is collective and ecological. The dance unfolds among compositional virtualities and aligns with notions of (post)human corporeality to trouble postcolonial hauntings, which function as orientations, risking the continued reaching towards humanist and universalist understandings of embodiment. The purpose, however, has been to ask, if haunting stops the body, what techniques might *MAF* offer to re-initiate motion. In confronting haunting as

[103] This exploration could be read through the lens of Modes of Shapes Change in the Laban Bartenieff Movement Studies lexicon, which is a current influence in my movement and teaching practices.

constraint, I draw from Mignolo and Walsh who argue that "undoing is doing something; delinking presupposes relinking to something else. Consequently, decoloniality is undoing and redoing; it is praxis" (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018:120). Mindful of Guattari's ([1989]2000 ecosophy, the sample of the embodied research materials described above offer units of movement practice as well as ethico-political articulations of technique. *MAF* revels in disorientation, allowing the time it takes as techniques and emerging pedagogies begin to take shape.

In Chapter Four, I turn to *Before Naming* (2018) and *Extreme Subjectivities* (2018).

CHAPTER FOUR: BEFORE NAMING AND EXTREME SUBJECTIVITIES

This chapter thinks through the practices and embodied techniques that emerged in the creation and performance of two dance works: *Before Naming (BN)* and *Extreme Subjectivities (ES)*, both created in 2018. *ES* was created with collaborators Thalia Laric and Nobonke van Tonder, and *BN* with Thalia Laric. Both works were first performed separately at the Theatre Arts Admin Collective in Cape Town, and then again as a double bill in Cape Town and at the Nunnery at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. *BN* was reiterated as a performance at the Confluences[104] conference in Cape Town in 2019 and as a workshop as a way of sharing the movement research and embodied techniques that structure the dance. As with *MAF*, lighting for both works was designed and improvised in performance by Andi Colombo. *ES* followed on from the process of *MAF*, during which Van Tonder had been a mentor. When *MAF* concluded, we wanted to make a work together. *BN* is the third in what I have come to think of as a series of works. The three works share research concerns, and each work re-iterates these inquiries through an instance of embodied practice. This recalls Melrose, Sachsenmaier and Butcher's insight, mentioned in Chapter One, that performance reveals "to the practitioner concerned a further set of questions, to be re-engaged, and to be worked through, once again, and differently" (Melrose, Sachsenmaier & Butcher, 2013:5). In addition, it supports the idea that knowledge is inscribed through the making of new work (Melrose, Sachsenmaier & Butcher, 2015:90). In Spatz's sense, this describes the technical/epistemic boundary which is characterised by continual movement. Spatz writes that as we move forward into new fields (the unknown or the epistemic), they "gradually become sedimented and 'deposit' into the known," becoming technique (Spatz, 2020:2–3).

BN and *ES*, as with all the projects that are part of this study, explore choreographic alternatives to representation. Can we make dances that avoid referring to objects outside of the dance? Is it possible to avoid settling on the aboutness of the dance and instead, stay inside its doing, its workings? At the heart of this research project is the problem that representation marks a "gap between image and essence" (Mbembe, 2015:n.p.) and the damage this gap has caused to understandings of what it means to be human. Mbembe writes

[104] Confluences is a biennial conference on research in dance that was started in 1997 at the University of Cape Town School of Dance, now part of the University of Cape Town Centre for Theatre, Dance and Performance Studies.

that decolonisation then entails "the elimination of this gap" (Mbembe, 2015:np). In this chapter, I draw from Manning and Massumi (2014) and Manning (2009a ;2009b; 2016) to support the idea that working beyond "the realm of representation" means "moving in counterpoint with language" (Manning & Massumi, 2014:50). *ES* and *BN* offer embodied practice as a way of exercising the limits of language with the aim to confront representation as a dominant logic. In similar ways to *MAF*, *BN* and *ES* use improvisation scores and somatic approaches to delve into this embodied research and suggest how choreographic praxis may offer pathways toward the unpredictable and the new (Noland, 2009:64–65). Our desire was to imagine a pre-linguistic field of experience. Manning and Massumi (2014) refer to fielding, and an environmental mode of awareness as ways to interrupt the rush towards representation. Having problematised the narrow understanding of human when viewed through the historical lens of European modern sciences in Chapter Three, I now turn to Manning and Massumi who draw from neurodiversity as a place to think philosophically, to explain that "human" acts as a shorthand for neurotypical, which in turn stands for the use of language as a dominant mode of expression and an immediate focus "on humans to the detriment of other elements in the environment" (Manning & Massumi, 2014:3). They further explain that neurotypical experience is expert in separating objects from their field of relation, opening up the field to its affordances and "clearing the stage for an overshadowing human subject to cast his presence in its place, in order to take personal credit for the field's environmentally emergent accounting for itself" (Manning & Massumi, 2014:7). Neurodiversity by contrast, opens itself up to, what Manning and Massumi call "a dance of attention," which denotes not the "attentiveness of the human to the environment but attentiveness *of* the environment to its own flowering" (Manning & Massumi, 2014:6). The human, here dancer, choreographer or mover, is decentred as a subject and volitional agent in the creation of the dance.

These concepts serve as a support to think through the embodied techniques of *BN* and *ES*, which expand, and in part, re-iterate ideas offered in the previous chapter through *MAF*. This chapter returns to co-composition, fields of relation, and discussions of agency by suggesting how these dances offer techniques to exercise environmental perception and alternative understandings of subjectivity. Witnessing emerges as an important technique that underscores the ethico-political nature of moving-making in the context of a decolonial praxis.

Towards the end of the chapter, I offer a sample of the embodied practices drawn from the dances to trace the pathways of embodied techniques that offer possibilities for an emerging pedagogy. In addition, I include a self-interview conducted after *BN*, which also forms part of the cartography. First, however, I turn to ideas of continuity, discontinuity, and time to suggest how choreography as a decolonial praxis may foreground the emergence of story-ness[105] as a way to disrupt the linearity of preconceived and predetermined stories and ideas and confront the problematics of representation as they relate to colonial scripts of dancing bodies in a South African context. As *ES* and *BN* share research concerns, I shift between these dances in the discussions below.

Story-ness as emergent, patient, and unassuming suggestions of story

BN and *ES* offer a place to think through ideas of time, its perceived linearity, and the unfolding or emergence of stories through the dance. I suggest that the choreographic problem of *BN* and *ES* is double, questioning how to remain in the pre-linguistic, before the rush to name objects and events sets in, and how to avoid the predetermined story. *ES* revisited the earlier movement research of *MAF* (discussed in Chapter Three), which is similarly in search of ways to undo constraints of physical techniques and artistic conventions informed by dance training. In *ES*, desire – I want, I like, I love – became a mechanism for moving and the dance was guided by an awareness of the body's sensations rather than form, theme, or narrative. We covered our heads and faces in white clay[106] that functions chronometrically as it dries and cracks over the duration of the dance to produce a white powder that falls off our bodies and onto our clothes and the floor. The movement progression is slow, drawing the spectator/witness's[107] attention to the dancer's act of perceiving change in the body. The dance resists reading as archetypal figures and beginnings of narratives disappear as soon as they appear. Like *MAF*, movement or image only means as long as it lasts. When you watch the dance as witness, or I imagine, as spectator, the archetypes shift depending on where you

[105] The term story-ness is borrowed from improvisation teacher Julyen Hamilton.
[106] The use of white clay in performance is reminiscent of several cultural practices across the world. Matike et al. (2011), for example, discuss the ceremonial use of clay for body painting in South African Xhosa culture. Butoh, a form of Japanese performance, is also often associated with white face paint. The clay used in *ES* was kaolin clay, which has formed part of Nobonke's performance practice in the past, and which draws from Butoh and body weathering influences.
[107] This concept is developed later in the chapter.

are in the room. *ES* is not characterised by an absence of signs, but rather by the accumulation of innumerable, momentary signs and images. Despite the dance's drastically slow movement progression, the images occur in quick successive flashes, challenging the degree to which recognition can take place. The linearity of time is ruptured through these shifting archetypes and dropped narratives.

Time, described by Merleau-Ponty ([1945] 2012) and read here through Mbembe, is "that which one inevitably encounters on the path to subjectivity" (in Mbembe, 2017:120). Mbembe links time to subjectivity, memory and remembrance, and explains that time, memory and remembrance "each fundamentally constitutes a form of the presence of the past (and of its traces, remains, and fragments) within consciousness"[108] (Mbembe, 2017:121). Furthermore, he writes that "time is experienced by attending to the senses (seeing, hearing, touching, feeling, tasting"[109] (Mbembe, 2017:120). Yet, the understanding of subjectivity that *BN* and *ES* are tending towards is not about privileging an individual human agent who is, in Manning's words, volitional and intentional (Manning, 2016:140). Rather, Manning, who views subjectivity from the perspective of autistic (neurodiverse) perception argues that "subjectivity is in the making, in the field. Subjectivity is not felt as predetermining: it is connected to the field of experience as it in-forms it" (Manning, 2016:140). Body (here the human) and world (the field of experience) are not directly separable. As Mbembe argues through his analysis of Black novelistic writing, time, memory, and remembrance are approached through a mingling of place and body (both human and animal) (Mbembe, 2017:123-124). This conception of subjectivity is linked to processual concepts of time and becoming[110] as associated with the philosophies of Bergson and Deleuze respectively, read here through Cvejić (2015). Cvejić argues that approaching performance as processual means that "the perception of change isn't entangled with the past that disappears, but … is instead joined with the past that persists in the present" (Cvejić, 2015:199). Drawing from Bergson (2002), she further explains that perception thus "is contemporaneous with the making of memory" and "doesn't completely coincide with an immediate present, the here and now" (Cvejić, 2015:201) which renders Bergson's present "ambiguous or difficult to distinguish from

[108] This can be connected to Derrida's understanding of haunting and the notion of postcolonial hauntologies as drawn from Coly (2019) and discussed in Chapter Three.
[109] The senses could be further distinguished to take into account additional senses including pain, temperature, kinesthesia and proprioception.
[110] The concept of becoming was touched on in Chapter Three through Braidotti (2019).

the past and the future" (Cvejić, 2015:201). Important for this argument is the understanding that "duration[111] is coextensive with becoming," and that one of the characteristics of becoming is that it "isn't identical with a given flow of nature, but it is a matter of *composition*, *constructed* continuity and *problem* expressed in terms of *time* rather than space"[112] (Cvejić, 2015:201-202 [emphases in the original]). Manning takes these concepts further through a reading of Alfred North Whitehead's[113] process philosophy. She explains that in Whitehead "there is no external subjectivity to the event" (Manning, 2016:133). She writes:

> The subject, as in Whitehead, is not the activator of the act but what emerges in the act. Whitehead calls this emergent individual "the subjective form" of the event. How the event coalesces into itself is its subjective form. This subjective form, the subject of the event, the event's speciation, does not necessarily resemble a human subject. The subjective form is how the assemblage of the event's composition comes into itself (Manning, 2016:133).

Furthermore, Manning argues that the emphasis is not on the "continuity of becoming," but rather on the "becoming of continuity" (Manning, 2016:135). Process is not infinitely open, but "punctuated" (Manning, 2016:3). In *ES*, and in *BN*, we tried to avoid taking up narrative suggestions in order to stay with and in the emerging, co-composing field. Dropped narratives and disappearing archetypes and figures punctuate a linear unfolding of the event. I read these instances as moments of discontinuity inserted to slow down the rush towards separating the field out into a logic of causes and effects or the foregrounding of volitional subjects. Paradoxically, it seems to me that something about the dance has to speed up.[114] Our starting point was not a fixed story, but a commitment to engage with what emerges from the field through perception – a practice of oscillating between the near future, the present and the near past.[115] Both *BN* and *ES* enact an approach to the present that includes "an awareness of what we are ceasing to be (the end of the actual)" and "the perception – in different degrees of clarity – of what we are in the process of becoming (the actualisation of

[111] Bergson writes that "restored to its original purity," duration "will appear as a wholly qualitative multiplicity, an absolute heterogeneity of elements which pass over into one another" (Bergson, 2004:258).
[112] Cvejić is citing Deleuze's (1991) work *Bergsonism*.
[113] A mathematician and philosopher, Whitehead provided an important base "for both process philosophy and process theology" (Doll, 1993:142). A key concept in Whitehead's work is relationality. Whitehead's work has also influenced thinking on education and curriculum (Doll, 1993:143).
[114] This can be linked to Manning's concept of preacceleration, which she describes as "the virtual force of movement taking form … in dance, this is felt as the virtual momentum of a movement's taking form before we actually move" (Manning, 2009:5–6).
[115] This concept is drawn from the teaching of improvisation artist Julyen Hamilton in a workshop on time and composition (Amsterdam, January 2019).

the virtual)" (Braidotti, 2019:6-7). The dances try to linger in the moving of present, in incipience,[116] in the occurrence of "ceasing to be" and "becoming," both of which take place, as Braidotti notes, in a non-linear time-continuum (Braidotti, 2019:36-37). Manning explains that "to see the potential of worlds in the making … involves becoming more attuned to event-time, the nonlinear lived duration of experience in the making" (Manning, 2016:15). The field of relation, still according to Manning:

> Is always actively co-composing with the actual in its emergence: the virtual, felt in its effects, is always active in the actual – this is what makes it real. When this or that experience differentiates itself from the field, when it becomes this or that, it has therefore altered the wider field of experience. The field … has changed in nature (Manning, 2016:117).

These understandings of duration and becoming offer a powerful antithesis to dominant, western and modernist conceptions of time, which see time as "uniform succession, as infinite, constant and irreversible" (Critchley, 2016:19),[117] Simon Critchley adds that time in this modernist conception is figured as an arrow "pointing towards the future; it is future-oriented, progressivist, indeed revolutionary" (Critchley, 2016:19). An alternative politics of time, according to Critchley, proposes a "pluriform, finite, intermittent idea of time" or *times*, that "do not come in quick succession: the future is no later than the past and the present is something inherently unstable. Times are happening at the same time" (Critchley, 2016:21). Decolonial thinkers, in their unpacking of the entanglement of modernity/coloniality, take up the critique of the universality of time. As Santos (2017) explains, linear time as a basic assumption of Western epistemology (Santos, 2017:159-160) is questioned and replaced by the understanding that there is no universal simultaneity, or absolute time and space (Santos, 2017:35). Vázquez, in addition, argues that chronology and "chronological narratives are at the heart of the modernity/coloniality systems of oppression" (Vázquez, 2009:2). He writes that "the critique of modern time shows that modernity is the time that rejects the past, affirms the present as the site of the real, and construes the future in the semblance of a teleology" (Vázquez, 2009:4).

[116] Incipience is related to preacceleration and Manning's emphasis on the immanence of movement, or "how movement can be felt before it actualises" (Manning, 2009:6). Manning explains that "incipient movement preaccelerates a body towards its becoming" (Manning, 2009:6).

[117] I should be noted that there are various lenses through which to approach time. Later in this Chapter, I draw from Mbembe (2017). For a further discussion on decolonising time see, for example, Katarina Tuinamuana and Joanne Yoo (2020).

To disrupt this teleological reach, I suggest that *BN* and *ES* propose discontinuity as an embodied technique to rethink the forward flow of narrative and the assumed, conventional boundaries between future, present and past, as argued above through Bergson (2002; 2004), Cvejić (2015) and Manning (2009a; 2009b; 2016). Vázquez offers an additional proposition by thinking through Arendt's[118] conception of the "event" (Vázquez, 2006). He explains that Arendt's work "blurs the tacit boundary that lurks in modern forms of representation between a 'dynamic' present and a 'congealed' past" (Vázquez, 2006:43), reminiscent of the metaphoric use of monster and fossil as discussed in Chapter Three. Arendt, writes Vázquez, gives "voice to ambivalence" and thus "defies the chronological syntax of modern history" (Vázquez, 2006:46). Important to this argument, Arendt offers an account of revolutions as events, rather than "chronologically organised historical processes" (Vázquez, 2006:48).

I borrow the idea of "story-ness,"[119] to name the momentary bits of story that emerge and weave in and out of the dance. Story-ness replaces narrative or story which carry with them the feeling of an overarching logic. Story-ness describes patient and unassuming suggestions of story in improvised performance. A semblance of logic builds up retrospectively as the dance unfolds; continuity is constructed through the becoming of the dance. Vázquez explains that in focusing on the eventfulness of revolutions, Arendt "strives to rescue the dimensions of history … which are lost in the teleological chains of explanation that proceed from the modern habits of representation" (Vázquez, 2006:48). Arendt further argues that politically, the fallacy of this representational approach lies in the fact that "the whole realm of human action" is described and understood "not in terms of the actor and the agent, but from the standpoint of the spectator who watches a spectacle" (Arendt, 1990:52). She adds that "this fallacy is difficult to detect" because:

> All stories begun and enacted by men (sic) unfold their true meaning only when they have come to their end, so it may indeed appear as though only the spectator, and not the agent, can hope to understand what actually happened in any given chain of deeds and events (Arendt, 1990:52).

Arendt proposes an alternative by approaching event as event in contrast to modernity's construction of history as a "piling up of data emphasising historical continuity" (Vázquez,

[118] I approach Arendt here predominantly via Vázquez as I am interested in the direct application of her ideas to decoloniality. I also draw from Arendt's (1990) *On Revolution*.
[119] I borrow this term from improvisation teacher Julyen Hamilton. I encountered the term through working with collaborators Thalia Laric and Manuela Tessi.

2006:53). By drawing attention to eventfulness, Arendt brings into focus the event as "beginning." She sees revolutions as events, moments of foundation, or beginnings, and argues that "teleological representations of history cannot account for the enduring strength and ongoing presence of the moment of foundation"' (Vázquez, 2006:49). Arendt emphasises the unpredictability of events as beginnings. I see an analogy for the dropped narratives, shifting characters and discontinuous moments of story-ness in Arendt's description of beginnings. She writes that:

> It is in the very nature of a beginning to carry with itself a measure of complete arbitrariness. Not only is it not bound into a reliable chain of cause and effect, a chain in which each effect immediately turns into the cause for future developments, the beginning has, as it were, nothing whatsoever to hold on to; it is as though it came out of nowhere in either time or space. For a moment, the moment of beginning, it is as though the beginner had abolished the sequence of temporality itself, or as though the actors were thrown out of the temporal order and its continuity (Arendt, 1990:206).

Questioning how pathways of embodied technique may reach toward the unpredictable and the new within a choreographic praxis, I ask: If each movement is a new beginning, how can beginnings be exercised as an embodied technique? Recalling Bergson's (2004) earlier-mentioned concept of duration, which suggests blurry boundaries between future, present and past, decoloniality turns specifically to reworking modernist concepts of time. Vázquez explains that "the modern determination of the past coincides with the idea that the future is predictable" (Vázquez, 2006:54). Arguing against chronological time, Vázquez states that history has "a changing 'actuality' and hence that it moves in the open direction of the future" (Vázquez, 2006:54). The past is actual, "but in an unapparent virtual state, it belongs to absence" (Vázquez, 2006:54). Presence then, "can be seen as the trace of what recedes into the past, of what is virtual" (Vázquez, 2006:54). This echoes Braidotti who, drawing from Deleuze and Guattari (1994), explains that "the force of the present … does not coincide completely with the here and now" (Braidotti, 2019:36). Vázquez concludes that "by questioning the relation between what appears in presence and what remains in absence, the structure of time, the past-present-future divide falls apart" (Vázquez, 2006:54). As Mignolo and Walsh (2018) argue, this fundamentally challenges a "Western-imagined fictional temporality" and opens up the possibility for coexisting temporalities (Mignolo and Walsh, 2018:3). In the idea of event then, continuity is questioned and "notions of beginning and permanence are entwined" (Vázquez, 2006:54). The embodied practice of *ES* and *BN* creates

a space to exercise the blurry boundaries and continual oscillation between near past, present and near future. This embodied research was taken further in the making and performance of *All At Once* (2018),[120] also part of this project, which explored improvising a unison composition among four players as a practice of divining the near future. Writing in reference to the Black novel, Mbembe notes that time is predominantly:

> Paradoxical, since it is never fully anchored in the present, nor is it ever completely cut off from the past or the future. It is a time of differential duration whose laws are those of disjuncture and simultaneity (co-occurrence)' (Mbembe, 2017:122).

This paradoxical state of time explains, according to Mbembe, the importance of "divinatory practices" (Mbembe, 2017:122). In addition, he writes that the structure of events, "but also the story that one tells of it, its narration" are consequently constituted by a "radical state of uncertainty" which "makes any attempt to assign fixed identities impossible" (Mbembe, 2017:123). Returning to Arendt and Vázquez, the temporality of a beginning exceeds the present, "it remains active in time" and moves towards an open future. *ES* and *BN* exercise this approach to time and provide techniques for a decolonial choreographic praxis. I suggest that exercising time, beginnings and discontinuity resonate with Mbembe's conception of a ghostly paradigm, as a literary figure (and which I propose to take up choreographically). Mbembe describes this ghostly paradigm as an intertwining of the dead and the living and writes that in this paradigm:

> Time is neither reversible or (sic) irreversible. There is only an unfolding of experience. Things and events roll out on top of each other. If stories and events have a beginning, they do not necessarily have a proper end. They can certainly be interrupted. But a story or an event might continue on in another story or event without there necessarily being a filiation between the two. Conflicts and struggles might be resumed from the points at which they stopped. But they can also be followed upstream, or begun again, without a sensed need for continuity, even if the shadow of the old stories and events always lurks behind the present. … Everything functions according to a principle of incompletion. As a result, there is no ordered continuity between the present, the past, and the future. And there is no genealogy—only an unfurling of temporal series that are practically disjointed, linked by a multiplicity of slender threads (Mbembe, 2017:148).

Story-ness is lightly held. Continuity is not rushing forward but broken up and constructed by the eventfulness of beginning. Beginnings are not held together by causal relations but by

[120] *All At Once* was created in collaboration with dancers Thalia Laric and Manuela Tessi, and pianist Coila-Leah Enderstein, and took up Tessi's research interest in improvising unison as a practice of divining/predicting the near future. The work is included in the cartography.

"slender threads" (Mbembe, 2017:148). As stated previously, the linearity of time is ruptured through shifting archetypes (*ES*) and dropped narratives (*ES* and *BN*). Exercising this approach to time called for resisting our inner dramaturgical drive and the desire/need to become attached and name events, actions, and suggestions of story.[121] By practising to avoid predetermined, imposed stories and narratives, space is left for story-ness to emerge as a result of time passing. Combined with the process philosophy of Whitehead, encountered here through Manning (2009a; 2009b; 2016), I suggest that this understanding of choreography also calls into question to what extent our choreographic choices can be attributed to us as volitional and intentional agents. Drawing from Manning, emergent story-ness in the dance, which is taking form in a co-compositional field, implies that there is no external subjectivity to the event. Rather, the dance takes on a subjective form (in Whitehead's terminology, and as cited above), which describes "how the assemblage of the event's composition comes into itself" (Manning, 2016:133). In addition, there is no clear distinction between knower and known in this relational experience. Reminiscent of Barad's agential cut, which cuts together apart in one movement, Manning writes that knower and known are "defined not in advance of the occasion but in the midst" (Manning, 2016:139).

In the *BN* rehearsals, we began to pay attention to actions in time, in space, our habits, preferences, compositional and temporal choices, and noticing at times the rush with which we seek to impose ideas. Rhythm was clearly revealed and became more complex with the introduction of recorded music. Patience was a concern that came up often – patience to trust the experiential and the awareness of the process of our movement research. Patience with ourselves and with time passing. We worked to calm down, to mean more by doing less, and following Noland's (2009) notion of agentic kinesis (as discussed in Chapter Two), to inhibit, edit and update movement with each moment of the field unfolding, as stated previously. Time passes differently for the dancer and the spectator. How to move as a beginner. The next section looks at what it might mean to remain in a space before things are named and suggests that beginning can be practised as embodied technique.

[121] A conceptual link can be made here with postdramatic theatre, which includes characteristics such as the non-hierarchy of theatrical elements and the simultaneity of signs (Lehmann, 2006:86–87).

Before things are named/Beginning as embodied technique

The title of *BN* came out of many post-rehearsal discussions and our anxiety about firstly, naming a dance work without knowing what the work is 'about' (in a representational sense) or how it works (what its internal logic or 'thought' is) and secondly, that once it is named it is unchangeable (its research may not continue transforming it) and we are fated to perform multiplying and ever-fading representations of the thing. Borrowing from Manning and Massumi, *BN* tries to capture a mode of thinking while "already in the act" (Manning & Massumi, 2014:vii). How could we stay in the mind-space of 'just before something is named'? How could we keep the composition moving forward without stopping to name things; before the logocentric mind steps in? Our desire was to isolate a pre-linguistic field of experience, which Manning and Massumi suggest leans on an environmental mode of awareness. As discussed earlier, Manning and Massumi describe an environmental mode of awareness, which they also refer to as a "dance of attention," as "the attentiveness of the environment of expressibility tending toward a determinate expression yet to come" (Manning & Massumi, 2014:5).

The rehearsal processes for both *BN* and *ES* consisted of clarifying our movement research and developing a score[122] that could hold the research in a performance setting. The score is a framework to keep researching and approaching thought/acts with space for new discoveries to be shared with spectators. Our movement research for *BN* and *ES* offers a practice that trains the senses to guide compositional choices. A focus on sensory information lets us access, sharpen, heighten, and even distort perception, making use of disorientation[123] as technique. The dance proposes that staying in a space before naming takes place requires being in a perceptual realm, rather than a cognitive one, and going beyond even the phenomenological approach to perception. Manning and Massumi note that while phenomenology is often approached to "restore the experiential field's fullness," phenomenology's "field of immediate experience is always already subjective or pre-subjective" (Manning & Massumi, 2014:17). An environmental mode of awareness, by contrast, does not depart from the subject, but rather from the field without immediately separating out objects contained within it and categorising these objects as affordances. As

[122] The notion of a score is discussed in Chapter Three.
[123] Disorientation as technique is discussed in Chapter Three.

discussed in Chapter Three, this kind of experience is collective and ecological, moving from subject-centred agency towards *agencement* or assemblage.[124] In the words of fellow practitioner and collaborator Manuela Tessi: How can I compose from a place of disappearing in the composition?[125]

I link the concept of an environmental mode of awareness to the idea of multiple beginnings created by each shift in the dance as a narrative is dropped, or a new one is taken up momentarily, only to be dropped again. As argued above, I suggest this choreographically troubles the notion of time as continuous and story-ness as chronological and unfolding logically through causality. *BN* specifically, although *ES* also engages these concepts, became an investigation into the operations of time as discussed in the previous section. Out of the practice, the space 'before things are named' emerged as a concept of importance. We colloquially named this space 'immediacy', but now that I reiterate the research again, it seems to have more in common with a sense of indeterminacy and urgency. By not fixing the composition to predetermined plans, time is freed from the confines of things we have thought of before. Mathilde Monnier and Jean-Luc Nancy point out that "'immediacy' is not 'a convenient word' as it does not account for the gap between oneself and the movement" (Monnier & Nancy, 2012:69). In their written conversation, they explain that even though the medium of dance is dance and therefore 'inseparable from the body and thus from oneself, that which appears behind the dance is 'I'' (Monnier & Nancy, 2012:69). Monnier explains that "we [dancers] work in this gap – in this ever-changing gap between an exposition of 'I' and that which I dance" (Monnier & Nancy, 2012:69). Thus, according to Nancy, "there is no immediate (except 'water in water' or A=A, the flattest identity principle)" (Monnier & Nancy, 2012:69). What we named the space 'before naming' is more accurately a time gap or a small interval between the dancer and the dance. The interval seems to be associated with

[124] Assemblage, or *agencement* in the original French, is theorised by Deleuze and Guattari in their 1987 book *A Thousand Plateaus*. Deleuze and Guattari conceptualise assemblage in relation to a book. They write: "There is no difference between what a book talks about and how it is made. Therefore a book also has no object. As an assemblage, a book has only itself, in connection with other assemblages and in relation to other bodies without organs. We will never ask what a book means, as signified or signifier; we will not look for anything to understand in it. We will ask what it functions with, in connection with what other things it does or does not transmit intensities, in which other multiplicities its own are inserted and metamorphosed, and with what bodies without organs it makes its own converge" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987:4). Manning returns to using *agencement* instead of assemblage, to draw attention to the "sense of movement and connectibility, of processual agency" that is contained within the concept (Manning, 2016:123).

[125] All conversations and collaborations shared in this thesis adhere to the ethical guidelines of research (Ethical Clearance Nr: H18/04/10).

quickness and, like our title *BN*, with the notion of existing before language, recalling Martinez's (2012) notion of the "maybe" as a vacillation of knowledge and a linguistic rupture. Manning proposes a similar understanding of concepts as "events in the making" (Manning, 2009a:5). She explains an event in the making as "a thought on the cusp of articulation – a prearticulated thought in motion" (Manning, 2009a:5). For Manning, to create concepts "is to move with language's prearticulations. In this mode of thinking/feeling, language does not yet know what it means" (Manning, 2009a:5). *BN* aims to move in prearticulated thought, in the sense used by Manning, and is interested in discovering something about the moment before a movement takes off, lands, and becomes nameable. Manning's (2009a; 2009b) concept of "prearticulation" and Massumi's (1995) understanding of affect, further elucidate this interval or time gap. Massumi explains that affect, which for the sake of his argument he describes as "intensity," is "not semantically or semiotically ordered" (Massumi, 1995:85). As discussed previously in Chapter Two, affect precedes emotional qualification. Massumi writes that "an emotional qualification breaks narrative continuity for a moment to register a state – actually re-register an already felt state (for the skin is faster than the word)" (Massumi, 1995:86 [emphasis in the original]). The speed of skin and touch is what we associated with staying in a perceptual realm and an environmental field. The space before things are named thus aims to describe an attending to sensation, shift or change in a mode that is faster than language. Massumi further describes intensity as a "state of suspense, potentially of disruption" (Massumi, 1995:86). This does not mean passivity, rather, according to Massumi, the interval is "filled with motion, vibratory motion, resonation" (Massumi, 1995:86). Sitting between active and passive, an attending to the field already unfolding. Yet, more than this, Massumi offers that the registering of intensity takes place beyond perception and, as mentioned earlier, thus provides a theoretical approach beyond phenomenology. Massumi refers to neuroscientific research.[126] that involves EEG monitoring of research participants, to explain a "missing half second" of intensity and in the registering of sensation (1995:89-90). Experiments using stimulation with cortical electrodes showed that "stimulation was felt only if it lasted more than half a second, the minimum perceivable lapse" (1995:89). Massumi writes that the "missing half second" led the researcher to speculate that:

[126] Massumi is referring to the research of Benjamin Libet, described in John Horgan (1964).

> sensation involves a "backward referral in time" – in other words, that sensation is organised recursively before being linearised, before it is redirected outwardly to take its part in a conscious chain of actions and reactions (Massumi, 1995:89).

Is it then possible to exercise the interval, the time lapse of before naming? Is it possible to work with this kind of speed?[127] Massumi notes that there is similarly "a half-second lapse between the bodily event and its completion in an outwardly directed, active expression" (Massumi, 1995:90). However, he also writes that "the half-second is missed not because it is empty, but because it is overfull, in excess of the actually performed action and of its ascribed meaning" (Massumi, 1995:90). Massumi explains: "something happening out of mind in a body directly absorbing its outside cannot exactly said to be experienced" (Massumi, 1995:90). Intensity offers a different logic to perception. The body does not merely absorb impulses in a linear time fashion. The missing half second calls for a reworking of the body and of the "higher" functions such as volition, as it means that certain reactions take place "in the brain but outside consciousness" (Massumi, 1995:90). Manning (2016) similarly argues that volitional, intention and agency as conscious events are overemphasised in neurotypical accounts of individual freedom (Manning, 2016:117). Rethinking volition and consciousness through the missing half second offers alternative ways of understanding collective, ecological experiences (Manning, 2016:117). Returning to Massumi, this proposes a body that "is radically open, absorbing impulses quicker than they can be perceived, and because the entire vibratory event is unconscious, out of mind" (Massumi, 1995:89). The body is also reworked in relation to time. The missing half second causes present to be lost, "passing too quickly to be perceived, too quickly, actually to have happened … Something that happens too quickly to have happened, actually, is *virtual*. The body is as immediately virtual as it is actual" (Massumi, 1995:91).

Similarly, I recognise an overfull field in *ES*, composed of momentary signs and images, shifting and dropped narrative threads. As discussed in the previous section, the over-layering of images troubles the stability of representation. Drawing from neurodiversity as a mode of being, Manning and Massumi write that "the autistic becomes the field, integrally co-

[127] Although I perceive this interval as fast, speed might not be the most appropriate term here because of its association with ideas of progress and modernity. Vázquez notes that the literature around the "modernity/coloniality research agenda" shows us that "we cannot see ideas of progress, modernisation, universality, and the like, without thinking of exploitation, violence, and segregation" (Vázquez, 2009:3).

compositional with it" (Manning & Massumi, 2014:11). In the field, language arrives late and "moments are defined by what your senses are compelled to attend to" (Mukhopadhyay in Manning & Massumi, 2014:13).

Manning and Massumi (2014) explain that "the moment is the subject. The subject of the experience is not the human but the fielding of the event itself" (Manning & Massumi, 2014:14). Researching in the improvised scores of *BN* and *ES* is a place to exercise the virtual/actual temporal understanding of the body and an environmental mode of awareness in which the moment is subject. When do things become thinkable and nameable? Becoming thinkable takes up a lot of time. Sensing is faster than thinking. Perception is as fast as touch. Drawing from Massumi and Whitehead, Manning (2009a; 2009b) expands these ideas into a philosophy of movement in a way that reminds me of improvisation and composition teacher Julyen Hamilton's work. Hamilton offers that the touch of the floor concretises the body and possibility for movement, and that those beginnings can be exercised as a way to enter into action instantly.[128] Movement does not require a preconceived idea. You don't have to feel it. You don't need an idea to activate the body. As Massumi writes, "the body is as immediately abstract as it is concrete; its activity and expressivity extend, as on their underside, into an incorporeal, yet perfectly real, dimension of pressing potential" (Massumi, 1995:92). Manning (2009b) suggests that touch, much like in Hamilton's exercise, "operates as a technique of the moving body, inciting it to direct its movement … to touch is to activate relational movement toward" (Manning, 2009b:212). Manning, as already referred to in Chapter Three in relation to *MAF*, develops a philosophy of movement that understands movement not as displacement but as a translation from incipiency to activation, which she calls preacceleration, and further that "incipiency is crucial to displacement" (Manning, 2009b:214). She continues, "What is ordinarily thought of as movement, is better understood as preacceleration … which is the virtual propulsion out of which displacement emerges" (Manning, 2009:214). To arrive at preacceleration, Manning argues that the idea of "taking form" must first be explored. Taking form, she explains, is part of a "vocabulary of movement that foregrounds incipience rather than displacement" (Manning, 2009a:5). Following Bergson's emphasis on "the immanence of movement moving: how can movement be felt before it actualises." Manning's concept of

[128] Notes from improvisation workshop with Julyen Hamilton, January 2019.

preacceleration "refers to the virtual force of movement taking form" (Manning 2009a:6). She writes:

> In dance, this is felt as the virtual momentum of a movement's taking form before we actually move. Important: the pulsion towards directionality activates the force of a movement in its incipiency. It does not necessarily foretell where a movement will go. Incipient movement preaccelerates a body toward its becoming (Manning 2009a:6).

The small/big leap of preaccerelation can be exercised. Exercising the preacceleration interval, or the time gap before naming takes place, may mean that the path of movement can be altered, that you can inhibit, update and edit movement in the moment of incipience. I understand from Noland (2009) that inhibiting, updating or editing in the preacceleration interval is a form of agentic kinesis, but that this agency is one that co-composes with the field that is already unfolding and available within an environmental mode of awareness. The improvised scores of *ES* and *BN* offer a choreographic praxis that exercises incipience and preacceleration as a time gap before naming.[129] Exercising beginnings as embodied technique supports the breakdown of linear time and causality between actions and images in the dance. Troubling the idea of predetermined scripts, the body is approached as radically open and story-ness as emergent. Moving and co-composing in this open, unfolding and relational field needs a particular mode of attention. In the next section, I turn to this mode of attention, or what becomes 'witnessing' as an embodied technique to delve further into ethico-political articulations of choreographic praxis as a decolonial option.

Witnessing as technique

Witnessing emerged as a technique in both *BN* and *ES*. The first time we encountered witnessing as a technique was through Van Tonder's work *Powers of Lightness* (2017). Although a solo dance performed by Van Tonder, *Powers of Lightness* includes the presence of a dancer-technician on stage, who through working with a handheld light becomes a heightened witness in the space and in the performance. I first saw Laric in this role and later had the opportunity of exercising the witness-role myself when *Powers of Lightness* was performed again. I say 'heightened witness' because the dancer-technician manipulating the

[129] This links to Midgelow's understanding of dramaturgy as part of an improvisational practice, discussed in Chapter Three.

light in the dance makes explicit the relationship Van Tonder sets up between herself/her performance and the spectators. The heightened witness models a particular mode of looking and formulates Van Tonder's request to the spectators of her performance, that they too become witnesses in the space. Phelan traces theatre's understanding of "witnessing through the fields of psychoanalysis and political ethics" (Phelan in Etchells, 1999:13) In dance, witnessing as a term and concept is found in the practice of Authentic Movement (Cvejić, 2015; Hendricks, 2010; Stromsted, 2009). Authentic Movement structures its practice around the roles of a mover and witness. As described by Tina Stromsted:

> The mover/client closes her eyes, waits, and then, witnessed by her therapist/witness, moves in response to body-felt sensations, emotions, memories, movement impulses, and/or images. The witness provides a safe, contained, and receptive presence, maintaining an awareness of her mover's bodily expression as well as her own embodied experience (Stromsted, 2009:202).

Authentic Movement also includes the notion of an 'inner witness', which refers to the capacity to maintain awareness and bring conscious reflection to one's own movement (Stromsted, 2009:202). Tim Etchells distinguishes between audience witnesses rather than spectators, which arises from a political way of thinking about artmaking. He writes that "to witness an event is to be present at it in some fundamentally ethical way, to feel the weight of things and one's own place in them, even if that place is simply, for the moment, as an onlooker" (Etchells, 1999:17). Phelan extends this notion through a psychoanalytic account of witnessing trauma, which argues that:

> Witnessing only occurs well after the trauma itself has ceased. That is, during the unfolding of the live traumatic event the witness has no consciousness that he or she is becoming witness; one concentrates on surviving. To solicit an ethical witness in a theatre event requires one to trust that the border of the performance exceeds its spatial and temporal boundaries (Phelan in Etchells, 1999:13).

This act of witnessing, exercised so meticulously in *Powers of Lightness*, later found its way into other works that are part of this research project: *MAF*, *ES*, *BN* and *All at Once*. Reflecting on these works, it is clear to me that witnessing emerged as a performative and compositional focus, a technique in the sense used by Spatz (2020), to describe the mode of looking and experiencing the performance while performing.[130] The notion of witness and witnessing may

[130] Although it is not the focus of this study, an added consideration could include the mode of looking to which spectators are invited. This offers a possibility for future research.

offer a basis for a particular configuration of the relationship of the performers/performance to the audience or public, although the primary focus of this study is the embodied practice of the performer/choreographer rather than the reception of the works by an audience. Witnessing as technique also reiterates Spatz's earlier-mentioned point that decolonising embodiment requires a move towards a larger umbrella of embodied arts by dissolving not only genre-boundaries, but also divisions between performers and spectators, as a way to displace spectatorial methodologies (Spatz, 2020:250). As I make more sense of witnessing as a technique, it also seems that the idea of witnessing not only outlines an ethical perspective to the act of 'spectating' but that witnessing also affects how time operates and is made sense of in performance, recalling the earlier discussion in this Chapter.

Early on in the process of *ES* (a technique we carried over to *BN*), we began practising witnessing as embodied technique, moving from paying attention to one's own body's sensations to witnessing a fellow dancer in the act of paying attention to their own sensations. We started by quite literally stepping back from the dance in order to witness. Later this evolved to being able to witness while still being in the dance and witnessing became involved with the work of the eyes – practising disorientation, blurring vision to monitor personal sensation, and focusing in order to witness – as well as the other senses tuning and tracking the shifts and changes in the dance. Witnessing altered the perception of time, making time elastic. 'In' the dance, time was slowed – becoming expansive – as my heightened awareness zoomed in on microscopic sensations. When I became a witness, I was drawn out of this expansive sense of time to return to seconds and minutes. Seconds and minutes were also measured by the drying, cracking and becoming powder of the white clay we had smeared on our heads and faces. Witnessing over a longer time, I could start to see not only movements unfolding but also archetypical forms emerging through the journeys and subtle interactions of the other dancers. The slowness of the dance draws attention to the dancer's act of perceiving change in the body creating the possibility for the witnesses (both the dancer witness and the spectators) to become aware of changes taking place in their own body (even if it is a movement of discomfort). Reading the work is not possible as archetypal figures and beginnings of narratives disappear as soon as they appear. When you watch the dance on film or, I imagine live, the archetypes shift depending on your vantage point.

We aimed for a situation in which spectators could be invited to be witnesses who are mutually implicated in the performance and become co-present with us the performers. We experimented with the effect of witnessing and how to create a state of co-presence. Hans-Thies Lehmann (2006) describes co-presence as a state in which "it is no longer clear whether the presence is given to us, or whether we, the spectators produce it in the first place" (Lehmann, 2006:142). Lehmann likens the aesthetic experience of co-presence with the experience of shock. Drawing from Karl Heinz Bohrer's (1994) aesthetics of fright, Lehmann argues that the fright or shock is not triggered by an object, "story or an event, but by fright about fright itself" (Lehmann, 2006:143). He writes that this kind of experience:

> can be illustrated by the experience of being *startled* when we suddenly realise we are missing something or cannot remember something – we cannot say what – and this not-having-or-not-knowing suddenly enters our consciousness as an experience of emptiness – a signal we cannot interpret but that nevertheless affects us (Lehmann, 2006:143).

"This experience of lack," Lehmann writes, "takes place at the seam of time" (Lehmann, 2006:143).

We extended this idea of witness to give ourselves the opportunity to witness the other during the performance. The audience is witnessing us witnessing each other. We are being watched in how we watch. We are observing ourselves being observed while observing. We are observing ourselves being observed by the one other (co-performer) and by many others (spectators).

Can the witness intervene in a representational framework? Phelan writes that "the relationship between the real and the representational, between the onlooker and the given to be seen, is a version of the relation between self and other" (Phelan, 1993:3). I suggest that witnessing supports the exercising of beginnings as embodied technique that interrupt predetermined stories and instead allow the emergence of story-ness. Witnessing as a simultaneously ethical and aesthetic technique affirms that, in Mbembe's words, "to be a subject is no longer to act autonomously in front of an objective background, but to share agency with other subjects that have also lost their autonomy" (Mbembe, 2015:n.p).He (2015) adds that this kind of agency and power goes beyond human existence and questions conventional understanding of life. I suggest that (dis)continuity, beginning and witnessing as embodied techniques disrupt conventional understandings of performance as communication

under a simplistic and outdated transmitter-receiver model.[131] As Barad demonstrates through her concept of agential realism, nature's existence is indeterminate. She explains that:

> If the indeterminate nature of existence by its nature teeters on the cusp of stability and instability, of possibility and impossibility, then the dynamic relationality between continuity and discontinuity is crucial to the open-ended becoming of the world which resists acausality as much as determinism (Barad, 2011:139).

I propose that the embodied techniques of (dis)continuity, beginning and witnessing provide pathways towards open-ended becoming, which aligns with the ethos of a decolonial choreographic praxis.

An emerging pedagogy from *ES* and *BN*

To end the Chapter, I offer a sample of the embodied practice that emerged in *BN* and *ES*. Working from the understanding that embodied technique is repeatable and transmissible, I suggest that *ES* and *BN* offer pathways toward embodied technique that support a decolonial choreographic praxis and that over time allow a pedagogy to emerge. I also propose that reworking understandings of continuity and discontinuity disrupts conventional understandings of curriculum as a linear and scaffolded organisation of concepts. Van Tonder[132] offers that this entails a practice of ontology, working with "what is" and challenging the teleological reach of the material, its idea of progress. An emerging pedagogy unfolds in retrograde. Recalling Spatz's notion of the trajectory of embodied research as both "cyclical and reversible" (Spatz, 2020:7), the logic of the practice unfolds backwards in time. This is related to the experience of learning improvisation and learning as improvisation, which Rose describes as "ongoing, and continuously changing through its processes," rather than "a fixed object of study" (Rose, 2017:162). Or, as William E Doll writes from the perspective of postmodern education, a transformative curriculum needs "the 'right amount' of *indeterminacy*, *anomaly*, *inefficiency*, *chaos*, *disequilibrium*, *dissipation*, *lived experience*" (Doll, 1993:176 [emphasis in original]). In addition, as I argued in Chapter Three, a decolonial praxis of choreography entails embodied techniques that simultaneously name a unit of

[131] See Barad, 2011:135.

[132] All conversations and collaborations included in this thesis adhere to the ethical guidelines for research (Ethical Clearance Nr: H18/04/10).

movement as well as an ethical concern. In describing a sample of the embodied practice from *BN* below, I draw attention to the body and embodiment as places of inquiry and suggest that this kind of artistic practice and aesthetic work always already contains the possibility for an ethical engagement. As discussed in Chapter Two, a central concern in the movement of decoloniality is the question of what it means to lead an ethical life, while critiquing the Eurocentrism and anthropocentrism embedded in Western, colonial systems of thought. In the context of academic research, however, especially within institutions, ethics is often a procedural term. Kelly W Guyotte and Aaron M Kuntz, for example, note that "it often seems that the ethical questions we ask when teaching qualitative research are offered as a means to conclude methodological conversation" with ethical review boards oftentimes "giving the 'last word' on what is ethical, effectively nailing down rather than opening up ethical deliberation" (Guyotte & Kuntz, 2018: 259). This methodological conversation, however, is anything but closed off in the artistic process and is embedded in the practice of movement and moving in relation to other bodies. It makes little sense to externalise ethical questions and separate them temporally and methodologically from the artistic process. The mover adopts a state of listening and receptivity.

Sample of embodied practice from BN[133]

We start with the tactile. Find a partner. One person offers pressure through the hands to different parts of the other's body. Receiving pressure from your partner's hands, press back into it. Move from press to press, expanding into the resistance. Find new places to press from and press into. Explore density and tone.[134] *Expand three-dimensionally. The hands-on partner now starts to use other parts of their body to offer the pressing towards. Press towards each other's mass to transform your shape. Use resistance to power movement and open pathways. Allow a dance to develop through this tonal dialogue. What is the nature of this dance, this touch, the possibilities of your curiosity,*[135] *the movement research, the character, the quality?*

[133] *BN* presented as a workshop at Confluences 10, University of Cape Town, 2019. (See Conference Proceedings.)
[134] We use density and tone as explained and practised in the work of artists and composition and improvisation teachers Nancy Stark Smith and Lucia Walker.
[135] Curiosity is a through-line in the teaching of contact improvisation teacher and artist Lucia Walker.

What is the nature of this pressing, pushing dance? Allow its particular expression to develop and transform … Find end. Bring it to stillness. Switch roles and start again.

Walk through space. Notice yourself, your posture, how you are holding the body, shoulders, breath, spine…neck, head, eyes. Are you seeing?[136] *What are you seeing? Notice your feet making contact with the ground receiving pressure, holding you upright. Feet and eyes – how do they connect? Come to a pause. Where is your attention? Are you more conscious when walking or pausing? What can you see? As you walk forwards, what are you moving towards? What are you moving away from? What is in your future? What is in your past? Choose to see and move towards or away. Notice time passing and how this can be experienced spatially in the time it takes to move towards or away – future or past. Come to stillness – come to present.*

Walk and pause. Notice the walk and pause of others in the room. Where do you put your pause in relation to theirs? Can you notice a rhythm beginning to develop? What is the duration of your pause, of your walk? Find variation. Notice your preferences, your habits. What is the music doing? How does it affect you? How do you walk and pause in relation to what you see and what you hear? How do you walk and pause in relation to other people and the emotional chemistry (intensity/affect) of being near and far, synchronous or rhythmical in time and spatial organisation?[137]

Find a partner. Dance close to them using your eyes as a camera lens that can only see at close range. Let your eyes lead your movement, let your movement serve your eyes. Moving around each other's bodies to different parts of each other at close range. Where do you put your pause? How does moving fast or slow affect what your eyes can see? Explore upside down, scanning, blurring, focusing. Try the same at mid-range – at far-range. How does the work of the eyes change the way the body moves – how does movement change the visual experience?

As a solo exploration we keep connected to the work of eyes and the work of pausing. We extend our movement research to exploring places in the body that are able to fold. Like origami. When a part of the body folds or extends, what is being revealed and what is being concealed?[138] *Where is your awareness? Pause, see, fold, don't let there be any activity in your*

[136] "The work of the eyes" is a central technique in artist Katie Duck's teaching of composition.
[137] Rhythm of pause and musicality are key techniques in the practice and teaching of artist Manuela Lucia Tessi.
[138] This practice is borrowed from artist and teacher Manuela Lucia Tessi.

body that you are not aware of. See yourself. What is exposed, what is concealed. What can you see? Where do you put your pause? Are you more conscious while moving or pausing? What is the rhythm of your folding and pausing? How is the music affecting this? What happens when rhythm comes through environmental sound – sonic information? Are you aware of your rhythm/time choices? See, fold, pause. Be attentive, perceive.

Find a partner. One will dance, one will witness. Continue the movement research of folding and exposing. How does this experience change when you are being witnessed? As you witness, commit completely to holding your partner in this movement research experience. Observe the finest of detail – time, choice, shape, tone, pause – Observe generously, witness with the greatest sense of responsibility. Offer your wisdom and understanding. Switch roles.

Now we dance together – can we bring this movement research into our dance? Seeing, pausing, folding, being clear and aware. Witnessing self and other. Observing with responsibility and generosity. Pause patiently. Let yourself be aware of time and rhythm, choices in space. The effect/affect of the other. What is the nature of the dance? Which stories emerge, can you allow them to swim in and out, start midway, disappear, come in and out being before naming?

BN: Self-Interview

As stated in the introduction to this chapter, I conclude the chapter with a self-interview conducted after the creation and performance of *BN*. The self-interview is included in the online cartography that accompanies this thesis. The self-interview was an attempt to keep writing forward, while resisting the need to edit and trying to capture some of the thinking that took place in the action of moving and making. Written over two years before this writing here, the self-interview gestures towards the nature of embodied research as a movement, a journey or a trajectory, which Spatz explains is both cyclical and reversible, as discussed in Chapter One (Spatz, 2020:7). This writing, like the cartography, exposes the deep structure of embodied research.

Can you say something about the title? Why did you call the dance Before Naming?

We had a very hard time deciding what the title would be. Sometimes you start with the title, it comes to you very clearly. But this time, we were well into the work and we just could not

decide what the title would be. And there was a constant pressure about it, because you have to call it something, purely from a practical perspective: we needed a poster, we needed to send out information about the performance so we could have an audience. And you can't do any of that without a title. We had a lot of options though. We nearly called it Folding Patterns, because that was one of the movement mechanisms we were working with. But it didn't feel quite right. To name the dance after one movement mechanism. It felt dry, technical and I wasn't sure that this was the only thing the dance was doing.

Why was it so difficult?

It wasn't the only thing that was difficult. We are trying to work with improvisation as a technique and with the idea of composing in real time. And at the same time, I had in the back of my mind my research topic around representation, and I was wondering how to stay away from representation in the title. I didn't want the title to point to a meaning or theme, because then the work is only seen in relation to this theme. Now it feels obvious that finding a title was so difficult because as soon as you name something, you are in danger of trying to represent whatever you named it. As soon as you name it, it becomes a thing and we were looking for a way to hone our improvisational senses and techniques without the dance becoming fixed, without it becoming a thing. We often had this conversation after doing the dance, we'd say that was a good run, but we mustn't become attached to that version of the dance. How can it be new next time? I personally worried a lot about the first performance, because I thought that it would become fixed. That every performance after that would become a copy of the first. Like screen printing, where every copy is a paler copy of the last and eventually it's the end, you run out of ink or whatever. I don't know how much Thalia was thinking about this, although I think it was a shared concern, but I wanted to know that the dance could be renewed every performance. Every performance the dance would exist for the first time.

So does that explain the title 'Before Naming'?

I think it does. I think that once we realised we were fighting this kind of fixity or trying to avoid the dance becoming a copy of a previous dance, we got a lot closer to finding our title. I remember sending a whatsapp message – in one of our lengthy whatsapp conversations

about this – that said: where is the mind before you name something? Before you know what it is, where is your mind?

That's interesting. So that became your title?

Yes. It made sense that that became our title. Although we went through a process of learning to love it or learning to accept it. We both kept forgetting it, it was difficult to hang on to as a title. So, maybe it wasn't the best title, because it took a long time to feel right, to feel like it was the right fit. And it makes me think that perhaps it's not such a bad idea after all to name something after a mechanism, because that's a way to avoid pointing to a narrative in the title. Or something that simply says what the dance is made up of. Something like 'dance for two dancers with recorded music and improvised lighting design'. That's kind of postmodern, reminds me of those early Merce Cunningham dances *Sixteen dances for soloist and company of three.* It's dry and technical but it avoids narrative or an idea of meaning attached to the dance. It's abstract. It allows you to see whatever you want to see. But, on that note, I still think we needed to find the title 'Before Naming', because with a purely mechanical title, you are disregarding the thought exercise or the philosophical exercise that is contained in the dance. With a mechanical title, I think you are in danger of the audience member saying 'oh, this is an abstract dance, it doesn't mean anything, it's just movement'. I think the title is helpful in pointing to the thought of the dance or the thought of the dance, which is different from the mechanics/workings[139] of the dance.

What do you mean by that, the thought of the dance versus the workings of the dance?

I'm not sure that I completely understand what I mean by that. I haven't really made that distinction before, and I'm not sure they are entirely separate. I think when I talk about the mechanics of the dance, I'm thinking about the particular movement mechanics or physical investigations that provide the material, the movement material for the dance. When I talk about the thought of the dance … what do I mean … I think I'm thinking of how does the dance work, what is the internal logic that the dance is working out? But you're right. Now that I think about it again, these things are not separate. The workings of the dance is the thought that is being articulated in the dance as it is danced. How does it come to be? What holds it

[139] Perhaps now I would call this technique as that which structures embodied practice, after Spatz (2015; 2020).

together? We thought a lot about the workings of the dance. At a certain point, we asked ourselves: how can we stay in the working (also the thinking) of the dance, as opposed to being in the showing of the dance?

Explain this difference a little bit more.

The showing of the dance comes back to this idea of the representational I mentioned earlier. When you're showing the dance, I assume there is an existing dance, it has been worked out, even if it still includes improvisation, but what is being shown is a copy of an earlier version of the dance. When I think about being in the working/thinking of the dance, I think it requires a different kind of presence. It really becomes about: how is the dance unfolding, working for the first time, in this moment? How can I as a performer respond to its prompts, the relationships that I am experiencing for the first time with my co-performer, the space, the light, the sound, the audience? Maybe this is just a small distinction of words, but I think that it is an important distinction to make, because philosophically it is actually quite different, and it leaves room for a bit of an epistemological shift.

Where did you come across this idea of the workings of the dance?

I think partly, in Cvejić's book *Choreographing Problems*. She looks at a number of contemporary European choreographers and argues that their works, rather than presenting meanings, instead offer and enact a particular problem in the choreography itself. Right at the beginning of the book, she writes something like "don't ask what does it mean, but how does it work." And this of course offered a lot of interesting possibilities for me in my questioning of representation and representationalist frameworks in dance. I've been looking for ways in which to avoid representation, if this is even possible. I'm willing to accept that this may not be possible since we're working with bodies. But still, I'm interested in making dances that avoid referring to objects outside of the dance.[140] Is it possible to stay just with what the dance is doing, without thinking of the dance as being a mirror image of an outside world?

[140] I am thinking here about representation and how representation marks a gap between image and essence (Mbembe, 2015). This idea aligns with Manning and Massumi's conception of fielding and affordance (Manning & Massumi, 2014). Phelan also writes that "the excess meaning conveyed by representation creates a supplement that makes multiple and resistant reading" (Phelan, 1993:2).

Why are you interested in representation and questioning representationalism?

Representationalism, as I understand it, is the reliance on the idea that language, and dance as another kind of language, stands in for things or ideas in 'the real world'. Karen Barad talks about an over-reliance on language, I include dance in this, as an accurate mirror of the world. I'm interested in how contemporary dance, when it relies on this kind of meaning-making, recycles colonially scripted representations of the body and ideas of dance and imported notions of how dance is made. Achille Mbembe writes about Africa and the problem of representation. He says something like: in Africa the relation between words and the real world is shattered. The mirror is inaccurate and unreliable. Colonial scripts have taken on such power, even in our imaginations, that we cannot trust what the mirror reflects back to us. And if we cannot trust it, the mirror needs to be shattered, or at least we need to look for a way to work outside the representationalist economy, where we do not accept the relation between a word and a thing as a given or as true.

What does this mean practically?

Going back to Cvejić's question "don't ask what does it mean, but how does it work?" I think when a dance focuses on the meaning-making, or as soon as a dance is about something, tells a narrative, there is a risk of getting stuck in representation. When South African choreographers juggle with signs, they are revealing how treacherous language and representations are, by playing with signs and images. They're drawing attention to ways in which colonial scripts operate covertly through a kind of juggling action in the work. This is very important work. But, it's risky. I think it might still trap you in the economy of representation, just in a different way, you're still talking to it. How do conventional ways of making dance continue to colonise the body? What if we forget what the work is about and concentrate on the method?

Talk to me about method then.

Your questions are not very interesting. They're quite open, but maybe that allows me to just talk. The last couple of performance projects have all been collaborations. *Before Naming* too. Thalia and I both came into the space with our own movement research interests. We've worked together for quite some time so we share a lot of interests and we have a good sense of how we each like to work, but we still bring our own stuff. And in essence, we then set out

to create a work together from a shared research interest through a process in which neither one of us is the sole creator or the sole author of the work. Thalia has been investigating this for a bit longer. In her work, she talks about collective authorship of a work, and what I've come to understand as a kind of distributed agency.[141] Agency is often distributed to performers in, for want of a better word, more 'conventional' modes of choreographing, but I think what we're trying to do is to not defer to a choreographer/director, or even worse, a dramaturg. So, I think this is also different from what in theatre and dance contexts is called 'workshopping' or 'devising'.

Maybe you can tell me more about the idea of democratic choreography and highlight how this might be different from collective authorship.

The idea of democratic choreography, I think of a process where the choreographic material is sourced from the performers, their lived experiences, their inner world and their personal vocabularies. The choreographer is not imposing movement onto the dancers' bodies, but they're still providing the frame that will hold the work together. In this way 'democratic choreography' is different from the idea of collectively authoring a work. In a situation where every participant is an author, each person is also fully responsible, completely accountable for what they bring to the composition and how the composition unfolds because of their actions.

This sounds weighty, like it's a heavy burden to carry so much responsibility.

The burden, if you can call it that, of composing is shared. The responsibility is held lightly, so that the work starts to work, instead of the performers forcing the work. In the format of democratic choreography, the responsibility and accountability still fall to the choreographer. I do think that choreographers are able to give performers some of the responsibility in a work and sometimes do. The choreographer's touch can be light, but ultimately a frame is still

[141] I am borrowing the idea of distributed agency from dramaturg Freya Vass-Rhee (2015) who writes about "distributed dramaturgy." Studying the dramaturgical process of dance-maker William Forsythe's ensemble, Vass-Rhee writes that "the work/play of dramaturgical devising in Forsythe's ensemble is distributed across different individuals, social contexts, forms and timeframes. Initial shared dramaturgical conceptions serve as boundary objects that might remain central, or serve only as productive waypoints in the devising process, informing, coming to be informed by, or interlocking with the danced dramaturgies as these aggregate and proliferate" (Vass-Rhee, 2015:100). The difference here is that I am thinking about the dramaturgy taking place in real time in improvised performance, which links with Midgelow's writing on dramaturgy in improvisation, which requires "the purposeful activation of embodied thinking while foregrounding the importance of memory, perception, and composition" (Midgelow, 2015:106).

imposed. A radical shift would be for everyone in the composition to hold the same amount of responsibility and accountability.

Why do you think a more radical shift is needed?

It comes back to the weight of representation in dance and dance-making. I've been reading Ashraf Jamal's *Predicaments of Culture in South Africa* (2005). What I took away from this writing is the idea of trapped imaginary, where all imaginations are held up to a particular (dead) moment in time, and where the laws of perception that characterised apartheid society continue to operate. How can an oppressed imagination be freed? How can something new emerge? I think that dance and the conventional relationship between a choreographer/creator and dancer is such a great metaphor for how imagination can take on an oppressive role. The dancer's body is traditionally the interpreter and never the author of the choreographer's imagination. The choreographer's imagination, including how close you can get to the unimaginable, may be enacted on and through the dancer's body.

That sounds extreme. Let's go back to Before Naming. Where are you before naming something? Where are you before you know what it is? How do you collectively author/create/make? Is it possible to be in the same thinking place? Is a dance without meaning, not irrelevant?

Summation of the chapter

This chapter has offered a thinking-through of *ES* and *BN* as two further instances of embodied practice that are part of this research and that offer the possibility for the articulation of embodied techniques and an emerging pedagogy as part of a decolonial choreographic praxis. The choreographic problem in these dances revolves around how to remain in a pre-linguistic realm, in a space before naming and fixed meanings, as well as how to avoid the predetermined story, which I liken to a colonial script. Discontinuity, story-ness as emergent suggestions of story, slender threads of causality and the exercising of beginnings as embodied technique, emerged as ways to confront the idea of a forward-flowing narrative and teleological understandings of modern time that form part of the colonial matrix of power. *ES* and *BN* continue explorations of agency and subjectivity also present in *MAF*, by offering choreography as a co-compositional, ecological field of relation. This understanding of agency

and subjectivity that does not depend on classical ideas of volition and intentionality (explored here through Whitehead and Manning) meets Barad's conceptualisation of the agential cut, which rethinks "modes of causality" and suggests that "the question of agency is linked to ontological indeterminacy rather epistemological uncertainty" (Barad, 2011:134). To move in this radically open, indeterminate field, I suggested that witnessing becomes a necessary embodied technique. As a mode of attention and moving, witnessing emerges as part of an aesthetic and compositional as well as an ethico-political practice.

Chapter Five offers the conclusion of this study.

CHAPTER FIVE: RETURNING TO THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

I began this study by problematising modes of analysis that view contemporary dance primarily as text and the dancing body as discursive. At the centre of my research question is a critique of representationalism, which drawing from Barad (2003), I defined as an over-reliance on language. Representationalism is built on the notion that there are words and things and that words, or other forms of cultural representation, offer an accurate reflection of reality. Thinking about contemporary dance practice in South Africa, I am critical of remaining in a discursive domain and the way it limits the extent to which hegemonic knowledge structures can be troubled. I drew from Mbembe (2015; 2017), Lewis (2011) and decolonial thinkers such as Mignolo (2018), Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015), Vázquez (2006; 2009; 2019) and Santos (2014; 2017) to argue that the critique of representation is central to any project of decolonisation and decoloniality. As cited in Chapter One, Mbembe writes that in Africa, "the world of words and signs" operates with a force that is "capable of emancipating itself from all anchoring in reality" (Mbembe, 2017:13). Discursive methodologies risk recrafting colonial scripts and keeping contemporary dance practices locked in a framework that sees them as responses to the aesthetics and practices of western theatre dance. Drawing primarily from Spatz (2015; 2020), I proposed a shift from representation and the spectatorial methodologies that have frequently been privileged in dance and performance studies, to the practices that circulate across bodies of practitioners and in experimentation, performance and the micropolitics of workshops, as a way to open up an alternative logic.

To search for conceptual tools outside representation, I turned to my own movement practice asking how I, as an embodied researcher, might explore pathways in choreographic practice to disrupt text-based representationalism in South African dance studies. Additional questions that flowed from this central question included how contemporary dance in Africa might be thought of outside the canon of western theatre dance; how the questions "what is South African dance?" "What is African?" and "What is contemporary dance in South Africa?" might be asked outside the politics of representation and the frameworks created by colonial narratives; and finally, what it might mean to think of choreography as a decolonial praxis. I offer a summary of the discussions in each chapter before responding further to these questions.

Revisiting the central arguments in preceding chapters

Chapter One offered a conceptual overview of the central problem of this inquiry and reflected on my understanding of representation and representationalism particularly in relation to South African contemporary dance and Dance Studies. I drew from Barad's (2003; 2011; 2012) new materialist perspective which offers that entities are not ontologically separate and determinate, but that their ontological status depends on relation. Barad calls this intra-action which can be defined as a performative and emergent event (Tikka, 2018) and a way to understand that ways of being and ways of knowing are entangled. This shifts the focus from questioning the correspondence between words and things to practices, doings and actions (Barad, 2003:802). I combined this concept with certain understandings from practice theory and the sociology of science, as elaborated by Spatz (2015; 2020), to begin to align my understanding of choreography with embodied practice and embodiment as central aspects of knowledge formation. I positioned this research project as artistic research which brought to the fore particular tensions between theory and practice, and artistic practice and writing that run throughout the study. While I have chosen not to devote a separate chapter to a research methodology, I refer to Barad's understanding of an agential cut as a momentary stabilisation to describe the instances of writing, making, and performing that are grouped together in this research project. In keeping with the onto-epistemic nature of this study, the method is articulated after the facts. Chapter One also introduces the cartography, a term borrowed from Braidotti (2019), as an integral component of this study. In Chapter One, I suggest that the cartography, which assembles writing and other research documents, could become a way of tracking the production of knowledge in this research process.

Chapter Two critically reflected on decoloniality as an epistemological movement and provided the foundations for my understanding of choreography as an epistemic endeavour, as embodied/movement research and as a decolonial praxis. Key to this argument is that choreography is knowledge-generating and a praxis: a way of thinking, knowing, and doing. I referred to Cvejic's (2015) understanding of choreographic concepts to suggest how representation, as a focus on the recognised and the recognisable, may be disrupted in favour of a view that considers choreography a field of practical experimentation. Cvejic (2015) shifts the focus from what the dance is about to how the dance works. Drawing from Deleuzian philosophy, she offers that choreography unfolds along a choreographic problem that

develops a corresponding expressive concept. I combine this understanding of choreography with Spatz's conceptualisation of embodied technique, which has become a central concept in this project. Spatz (2015; 2020) arrives at a definition of technique as a unit of knowledge that structures any embodied practice. This unit of knowledge is relatively reliable, repeatable, and transmissible and thus transforms the conception of dance as a fleeting performance event to a durable epistemic location that practitioners return to over and over again and that, over time, sediments to form new principles and fields of practice (Spatz, 2020:1-56). Choreographic practice through this lens is conceived as embodied research and the body as both agent and a place of inquiry. This perspective offers ways to make sense of my own practice, which increasingly sees choreography and pedagogy as intertwined, a view which emerges towards the end of Chapters Three and Four. In Chapter Two, I furthermore refer to the field of somatics, as a field that has influenced my own movement practice and understanding of kinesthetic experience (Sheets-Johnstone, 2010; 2015), as well as agentic kinesis and the interoceptive availability of sensation (Noland, 2009). These notions offer a foundation for the way in which I return to my own work and to probe my own practice for pathways that lead to embodied technique. What began to emerge in Chapter Two, through Guattari's ([1989] 2000) concept of an "ecosophy" and Manning's (2016) application thereof, is the idea that a decolonial praxis of choreography combines ethico-political and aesthetic concerns. The pathways toward embodied technique that the following two chapters grapple with, take into account that technique for a decolonial choreographic praxis names a unit of moving and an ethics of art-making and of living all at once.

Chapters Three and Four think through[142] three choreographic works, that form part of this artistic research project: *Monsters and Fossils (MAF)*, *Before Naming (BN)* and *Extreme Subjectivities (ES).* Each work unfolds along a particular choreographic problem and reiterates and re-visits the probing pathways that structure these dances through various instances of writing. The choreographic problem in *MAF* (discussed in Chapter Three), is identified as the haunting of inscriptions, artistic conventions and physical techniques that constrain and stop the body. I ask, if haunting stops the body, what techniques might *MAF* offer to re-initiate motion? Chapter Three forges links with improvisational dance practices, and offers touch, co-

[142] My use of "thinking through" follows Manning and Massumi's (2014) understanding of a "thought in the act."

composition in a field of relation, and disorientation as pathways towards embodied techniques. Using monsters and fossils metaphorically and reading these figures through Foucault (1970) and Mbembe (2017) respectively, *MAF* troubles ideas of a taxonomy based on identity and difference. In addition, using Ahmed's (2006) concept of orientation, *MAF* confronts ways in which my own practice may continue to reach towards whiteness, as well as humanist and universalist understandings of embodiment. Chapter Four, which centres on *BN* and *ES*, further aims to trouble representational logic by asking how dance can avoid predetermined stories, which I liken to colonial scripts, and stay in a pre-linguistic realm, a place before naming takes place. Chapter Four considers the interruption of forward-flowing narrative logic alongside decoloniality's problematisation of the teleological reach of modern time which forms part of the colonial matrix of power. I borrow the idea of story-ness and Mbembe's (2017) notion of a logic that is held together by slender threads to propose a breakdown of cause and effect that forms part of the predetermined story, to imagine how choreography might be a place and a practice that allows new, not-predetermined stories to emerge. Techniques arising from *BN* and *ES* include the exercising of beginnings and witnessing as a mode of looking and being in the dance. I drew from Manning and Massumi (2014) and Manning (2009a; 2009b; 2016) to rethink concepts of subjectivity and agency and to propose a subjectivity that is enfolded within the environment and the event itself. Tessi (2021) describes this most clearly by asking "how can I compose in order to disappear from the composition?" and Van Tonder names this "extreme subjectivities."[143] Towards the end, Chapters Three and Four include samples of the embodied practice that emerged from the movement research, which gesture towards relatively reliable, repeatable, and transmissible technique, and an emerging pedagogy. These samples suggest how I re-encounter these dances and technical propositions in my teaching practice, and how they contribute to my own understanding and application of choreography as a decolonial praxis.

Though not discussed in a separate chapter, the cartography is an integral component of this thesis. The cartography emerged intuitively as a way to collect various research documents. In retrospect, it became a thinking tool, a way to answer and question both the relationship between practice and theory, and shift from the ephemerality of the performance event to

[143] All conversation and collaborations that are part of the embodied research process adhere to the guidelines for research as stated in the ethical clearance application (Ethical clearance nr: H18/04/10).

creating a space to re-make, re-iterate, re-engage, and reflect on the choreographic practices that are part of this study.[144] The cartography allows for some of the deep structure[145] of embodied exploration to be exposed in ways that this writing alone could not achieve. It is both an archival document for witnessing and part of the knowledge creation of this research project. While the thesis elaborates on three works (*MAF, BN* and *ES*), the cartography includes other works and projects, namely *Assembly*, *New Dance Lab*, *Any Body Dance Lab* and *All At Once*, that each became thinking places for this research project. The cartography functions as a map that charts the instances of embodied practice that are part of the research journey over time, and also reveals to me, writing this in hindsight, how each of the projects returns to similar and the same questions repeatedly. The cartography enacts the research methodology by offering a collection of momentary stabilisations, assembling instances of practice, writing and other research documents, while realising that alternative configurations of these documents remain possible and viable. The cartography also reveals the collaborative character and the intricate networks of practice that run through this research work and that surface its micropolitics, a point I will align below with the idea of a decolonial praxis. In this way, the cartography underscores the notion that "knowledge production is multiple and collective" (Braidotti, 2019:33). Much of the work in this project involves thinking and doing alongside and with others. Finally, the cartography enacts the meandering and onto-epistemic nature of this research process, offering possibilities for troubling the relationships between practice and theory, as well as writing and other performance documents, and for articulating the idea that the knowledge shared among practitioners has already taken flight and been transformed before the writing of this inevitably outdated report. The cartography, which holds the creative component of this study, grapples with the gap between artistic practice and writing, and as such suggests ways in which research practices themselves may be decolonised.[146] On the final page of the cartography, entitled *From here…*,[147] I articulate how

[144] It is worth noting that this aligns with the idea of recursion (instead of repetition) in postmodern approaches to and understandings of education. Doll (1993) notes the difference between repetition and recursion. He writes that while repetition is designed to improve set performance' within an open frame, recursion 'aims at developing competence – the ability to organise, combine, inquire, use something heuristically. Its frame is open' (Doll, 1993:178).

[145] The term deep structure is borrowed from notions of deep learning and deep structure learning used in the field of machine learning. See for example, Ian Goodfellow, Yoshua Bengio and Aaron Courville (2016).

[146] Spatz (2015) argues for embodied research as a necessary focus for decolonising the university.

[147] *From here …* is written in the form of a manifesto after artist Yvonne Rainer's 1964 *No Manifesto* and other artists who have also responded in this form. Examples include *Yes Manifesto* (2005) by Mette Ingvartsen and *Maybe Manifesto* (2011) by Bruno Freire (in Lepecki, 2012: 98–99).

the pathways towards embodied technique emerging from this research journey, begin to take shape as principles that inform my artistic and pedagogical practice.

Pathways towards embodied technique/responding to the research questions

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, the aim of this study has been to disrupt text-based representationalism as a dominant framework by seeking alternative ways of conceptualising choreography and contemporary dance and by shifting the focus to practice and the perspective of the embodied practitioner. This impulse stems from a sense that representation and the identity politics that are often argued through representation are too limited in their scope to address the colonial matrix of power (Grosfoguel, 2011:n.p). Grosfoguel, for example, argues that while "subaltern identities could serve as an epistemic point of departure for a radical critique of Eurocentric paradigms and ways of thinking … 'identity politics' is not equivalent to epistemological alterity" (Grosfoguel, 2011:n.p). While I acknowledge the significance of the politics of identity and representation in cultural practice and performance in the South African post-apartheid context, this study contributes to the existing scholarship by engaging with the idea of a decolonial choreographic praxis as a question of epistemological difference. This follows Santos' (2017) argument that creating distance from the Eurocentric critical tradition involves "including it in a much broader landscape of epistemological and political possibilities" (Santos, 2017:145).

This project, drawing from Spatz (2015; 2020), views the choreography of contemporary dance as epistemic and as embodied/movement research. Key to this argument is that experimentation – another word for research that recalls the ideas of tinkering, tuning, tracking and even intuiting that have entered the discussion at various points of this thesis – moves the research edge, opens new thresholds and when these thresholds become repeatable and transmissible, create instances of relatively reliable, new techniques (Spatz, 2020:2; 25–26). Drawing from Mignolo, I have argued that a decolonial praxis requires delinking from colonial ways of seeing, doing, and thinking and relinking to something else, a praxis of undoing and redoing (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018:120). Contingent upon this notion, I propose that a decolonial choreographic praxis takes form through rigorous research into new embodied technique. By tracing the pathways of embodied technique in my own practice, I confront instances where this practice orients towards whiteness and humanist and

universalist understandings of embodiment, and where the practice offers divergences and possibilities for new technique. I also suggest that these techniques are exposed through what I have called an emerging pedagogy. Instances of practice are identifiable as relatively reliable, repeatable, and transmissible through re-iteration in new performance projects, but importantly also in the practice of teaching, where knowledge is circulated across bodies, spaces, and times. This offers an alternative way of viewing the impact of work that is labelled experimental. Pather, for example, writes about the gap between contemporary African dance and contemporary African audiences (Pather, 2006:13) and, cited by Friedman, that "the more esoteric[148] the work, the smaller the audience" (Pather in Friedman, 2012b:101). While the politics of spectatorship is an important question and distinct from the questions asked here, I suggest that there are other practical pathways for the dissemination of the knowledge that structures performances that have often remained outside discursive analyses of dance performance in the context of South African dance studies.

For my own work, which involves teaching movement and physical theatre in a South African university, this research responds to the question: what kind of dance/movement technique should be taught as part of a curriculum that engages the challenge of decolonisation? The question "whose dance are we teaching" has played an important role in South African dance scholarship as noted by Friedman (2012b:101) and Loots (2018) amongst others. It is also a crucial question in relation to current calls to decolonise the university (Mbembe, 2015; Santos, 2017; Vázquez, 2019). From this perspective, the question "whose dance are we teaching" relates to broader questions about who is speaking, who is listening, and which epistemologies inform both the content and the methodologies of teaching and learning. Grappling with these research questions throughout this process, I notice the biggest shifts in my teaching practice. Disorientation, witnessing, reactivation through touch, story-ness as emergent suggestions of stories, composition as relational and ecological by way of a disappearing subject, and beginnings as interruptions of narrative flow have become part of the lexicon of my teaching practice, and are ways to invite students into movement research. I trace these ideas to the embodied research carried out as part of this study and through the

[148] I am aware of the potential vagueness of the word 'esoteric'. I am interpreting it here as 'experimental' and outside what might be considered mainstream performance.

practices of others who weave in and out of this study and see them as offering pathways towards embodied technique.

These particular pathways of embodied technique offer insights for my personal practice of making and teaching contemporary dance and movement. They are not recipes for decolonising a movement practice or ingredients for a decolonial choreographic praxis. However, unsatisfied by discourses that offer plurality and hybridity as responses to these questions, as encapsulated by terms such as fusion,[149] what this research process aims to offer is the possibility of an alternative logic. This research does not claim the invention of new, decolonised technique, but rather grapples with ways to think about and name differently what many South African contemporary dance practitioners are already doing. To name experiments not as responses to colonial aesthetics, but for what they are: epistemic endeavours that transform practices, and open up possibilities for new techniques, principles, and fields (Spatz, 2020). As gestured to in Chapter Two, what could be the impact of viewing the work of choreographers such as Gregory Maqoma as more than cocktails of cultural texts and as recombinations of epistemic objects that produce new technique? Emphasising the epistemic dimensions of these practices is a way of reclaiming and radicalising the term 'technique', which in the context of South African contemporary dance is still often aligned with techniques of western theatre dance. I also see this as a way to decentre the role of the choreographer in the creation and sedimentation of new technique in favour of a view that sees new technique as a result of practice and movement research carried out by and in the bodies of movers, across bodies of practitioners and in the unfolding co-compositions of movers and their surrounding environment.

Additionally, emphasising the epistemic dimension of movement research as praxis, revalues practical experimentation in embodiment and dance as relevant fields of research in academic institutions. By drawing attention to contemporary dance as a practice, like so many other practices of the body, new alignments become possible among various fields of research. As Spatz articulates through the term "embodied arts" (Spatz, 2020:247–249), this turn towards practice (and away from representation) not only allows the breakdown of genre boundaries

[149] Loots has problematised the romanticised idea of fusion as a kind of "multicultural dinner table" (Loots, 2018:23). She notes that fusion often fails to take into account political and economic contexts in the pursuit of artistic harmony (Loots, 2018:23).

between the various performing arts (theatre, music and dance), but also facilitates new alliances between performing arts and other areas of research that can be productively approached through the paradigm of embodiment such as gender, sexuality, race, indigenous knowledge, digital media studies, or agricultural studies to name some examples that suggest avenues for possible further exploration. This point, drawn from Spatz, echoes Braidotti's suggestion that the category of posthuman as a way of troubling universalist ideas of Man (sic) (Braidotti, 2019:31) opens up a "transdisciplinary exuberance, … producing new fields of scholars," which Braidotti names critical posthumanities (Braidotti, 2019:31). I suggest that thinking about contemporary dance and choreography as praxis, as knowledge-generating and as a way of knowing, offers options for formulating alternative epistemologies and reaches towards decolonial articulations that disrupt the dominance of colonially scripted representations. Praxis entails the entanglement of thinking and doing, and as I have argued through Guattari's ([1989]2000) concept of an ecosophy, as applied by Manning (2016), a decolonial praxis links aesthetics with a politics and an ethics.

Writing in the context of dance improvisation, Goldman (2010) draws from Foucault to argue that liberation, while necessary at particular spatio-temporal junctions, needs to be accompanied by practices of freedom. Foucault, also cited by Goldman, states that:

> When a colonised people attempts to liberate itself from its colonisers, this is indeed a practice of liberation in the strict sense. But we know very well, and moreover in this specific case, that this practice of liberation is not in itself sufficient to define the practices of freedom that will still be needed if this people, this society, and these individuals are to be able to define admissible and acceptable forms of existence or political society (Foucault, 1994:282-283).

Foucault connects these practices of freedom with the ethics of the care for the self. In the context of a decolonial praxis, and mindful of the limits of Foucault's epistemological framework,[150] care could be expanded through Manning's understanding of subjectivity as *agencement*, decentring the subject and volition as hallmarks of agency, to include a planetary and distributed understanding of care. I further borrow from Goldman who argues that rather than reifying ideas and ideals of freedom, "practices of freedom", which I link here to the idea of a decolonial praxis, entail a constant shifting and "negotiation" of constraints (Goldman, 2010:27). In this sense, I propose that what I named here as disorientation, witnessing, the

[150] Santos warns that Foucault's disciplines are in danger of being falsely universalised (Santos, 2017:156–157).

interruption of narrative logic, the exercising of beginnings, offer pathways for embodied techniques that practise the negotiation and shifting of constraints. A decolonial choreographic praxis is structured by technique that is aesthetic and ethico-political, traces and questions orientations towards whiteness, humanism and universalism and offers a logic outside of representation by turning towards practices as knowledge-generating and ways of knowing.

Limitations of the study inviting new research avenues

For this study, I have chosen to approach the research questions through my personal movement, performance and teaching practices which intersect at various points with the practices of others. I am, however, aware of the limitations that this poses for the research. As mentioned earlier, rather than claiming the creation of new technique, this research project contributes to languaging the experimentation already taking place in the practices of South African practitioners. Moving forward this research would need to consider more extensively the embodied techniques, practices and emerging pedagogies that are being developed in the micropolitical interventions of the undercommons and outside dominant urban spaces.[151] Drawing from understandings of improvisation that influence my practice, I also note the significance of immediacy or exercising preacceleration as essential political tools for making contemporary dance in the undercommons, where resources such as time and space are often limited. A more extensive practice review, focusing on specific case studies, that traces pathways of embodied technique could involve developing phenomenotechnical accounts that contribute to further establishing methodologies for training, research and practice in dance and other embodied arts as part of a growing body of work on epistemologies of the South.[152]

I have argued that inherited ways of moving and making dances are open to transformation through pressure exerted over time, the possibility of agentic kinesis, and an ecological, relational understanding of agency. Yet, as Goldman notes in relation specifically to dance

[151] I am thinking of examples such as, but not limited to the embodied research and extensive teaching practice of Nobonke van Tonder, improvised performance projects such as MusicDance in Cape Town or the residency programmes of the Forgotten Angle Theatre Collaborative and the related My Body My Space performance festival, based in a rural part of Mpumalanga province in South Africa.

[152] For my understanding of epistemologies of the South I refer to Santos (2014) and Santos (2017).

improvisation and which I apply to the techniques of a decolonial praxis, “there are times when no degree of improvisation skill is sufficient to extract oneself from a situation of duress” (Goldman, 2010:124). At various times in the research journey, I have questioned the relevance of working in micropolitical spaces when social injustices, articulated in and through the body, remain highly visible in all aspects of South African society. I draw from Manning’s (2016) use of major and minor gestures to navigate these questions. She writes that

> the unwavering belief in the major as the site where events occur, where events make a difference, is based on accepted accounts of what registers as change as well as existing parameters for gauging the value of that change. Yet while the grand gestures of a macropolitics most easily sum up the changes that occurred to alter the field, it is the minoritarian tendencies that initiate the subtle shifts that created the conditions for this, and any change (Manning, 2016:1).

This is also a reminder that there is a need, as Loots (2018) argues, to trace these research questions in the political and economic contexts from which they emerge, and to combine them with thorough readings of macropolitical and systemic issues of power, patriarchy, racism and capitalism. In addition, while the research draws on the works of feminist scholars, including Loots (1995; 1999; 2012; 2015; 2018) and Barad (2003; 2011; 2012) at different points, it could be productive to revisit these research questions by looking more closely at the intersections of decolonial and feminist readings of practice and feminist ethics of care. Decolonial discourses are continuing to be widened through, for example, the inclusion of Afro-feminism such as in the work of Sylvia Tamale, who “recognises the dynamics of gender within the struggle for new ways of being” (Tamale, 2020:10). Finally, while this research points towards the possibility of an emerging pedagogy, future research could turn to a more rigorous excavation of my own pedagogical practice provoked by the embodied practices that emerged in this process.

Concluding remarks

This research project imagines a framework for thinking and talking about, as well as practising and making contemporary dance outside the dominance of representationalism. This entails a shift from focusing on the fleeting aspects of performance and privileged spectatorial perspectives to thinking through dance as practice that is structured by durable knowledge, namely embodied technique. By tracing the pathways of my own practice through a series of

projects and performances, I offer that instances of movement research, embodied practice, or dance-making are epistemic spaces that open possibilities for eliciting new technique. Having problematised representationalism as a central area of critique within the decolonial movement in the global South, I argue that a focus on embodied technique provides options for a decolonial choreographic praxis. The term praxis signals the entanglement and interchangeability of thinking and doing that characterises this project.

The cartography as an integral component to this writing enacts this praxis and offers momentary stabilisations or agential cuts that mark shifts in knowledge over the course of this research journey. The cartography reiterates as well as inevitably transforms the knowledge in this project by assembling instances of writing and other research documents. I conclude the cartography with *From here…*, which exposes ways in which the embodied techniques traced in this research begin to take shape as principles that inform my artistic and pedagogical practice. Emerging from this research is the understanding that the embodied techniques that form part of a decolonial choreographic praxis gesture towards an ethos of art-making and of living at once, and circulate within communities of practice and research.

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APPENDIX

Links to creative work

An integral part of this study is its creative component, which is gathered in an online cartography. Hyperlinks to the creative works have been provided throughout the thesis to reflect the interweave of practice and theory, and the meandering path and non-linearity of the research journey that characterises this study. The pages of the cartography can be accessed directly by clicking on the titles of the works.

Access to the cartography requires a stable internet connection. It can only be accessed on a desktop or laptop (it is not possible to access the cartography on a cellphone or tablet). Because of the size of the content, please allow time for the webpages to load. A list of the weblinks is provided below:

Cartography homepage: https://kristinajohnstone.com/

Assembly: https://kristinajohnstone.com/assembly/

New Dance Lab: https://kristinajohnstone.com/new-dance-lab/

Monsters and Fossils: https://kristinajohnstone.com/monsters-and-fossils/

Extreme Subjectivities: https://kristinajohnstone.com/extreme-subjectivities/

Any Body Dance Lab: https://kristinajohnstone.com/any-body-dance-lab/

Before Naming: https://kristinajohnstone.com/before-naming/

All At Once: https://kristinajohnstone.com/all-at-once/

From here: https://kristinajohnstone.com/from-here/