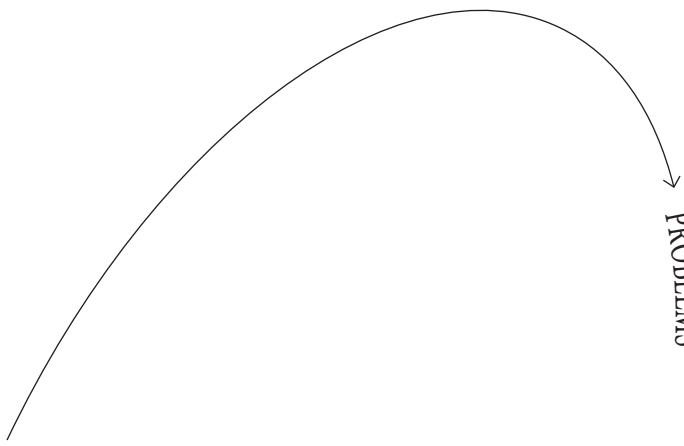SEEING

PROBLEMS

On the invention of, and research into, the problematic research question 'Can I dance a perception?'

SEEING PROBLEMS

On the invention of, and research into, the problematic research question 'Can I dance a perception?'

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"I wonder if a perception can become a movement. Is a perception prolonged in time as it manifests itself in a movement? Will it transform or change? And if so, can I keep my attention on that perception as it changes with the moving body?"

The above set of questions led me into the artistic research that will be unfolded in this paper. Although they are posed as questions on perception they stem from a critique on my own paradigms of how movements can be invented and created in the making of dance performances. Previously I presumed dance movements could either originate from a subject matter within the realm of human conceived concepts such as 'social politics', 'identity' or 'the collective', thereby making dance through conventional processes of translation, interpretation and expression. Or, alternatively, movement could originate from an exploitation of a physical reality such as the floor, a space or gravity in a kind of 'negotiation' or 'conversation', as for example in the Contact Improvisation practice by Steve Paxton. Both cases imply taking use of an object of perception whether it being conceptual or physical in the creation of movements, and as a consequence both overlook the act of perception itself. We might instead ask:

Can I dance a perception?

One main characteristic on this research was the way in which it alternated between three modes of research: the invention, stating and substantiation of a problem; research in theory; and research in action. Each mode of research will be unfolded in a separate chapter, having said that, it is important to note that each mode both verified, substantiated and problematized one another thereby giving rise to new thoughts and new active experimentation. The separation of the three modes and the resulting composition of the text does therefore not account for the way in which the research progressed.

In the first chapter "Problems as research method" I will explain the way in which I used problems as a generator of thoughts referring mainly to the book *Choreographing Problems* by Bojana Cvejić. In the second chapter "Research in theory" I will look into Henri Bergson's idea of perception in his book *Matter and Memory*. In the third and last chapter "Research in action" I will explain the thoughts that gave rise to the problem 'Can I dance a perception?' during the creation of the trio 'No title', together with descibe the very first propositions for tackling this problem during the making of the solo 'How would I know if I haven't seen?'.

The book *Choreographing Problems: Expressive Concepts in European Contemporary Dance and Performance* by Bojana Cvejić provided the main inspiration for the methodology used in the research and creation of 'No title' and 'How would I know if I haven't seen?'. The seven performances this book takes as a departure was made between 1998 and 2007, and together they distinguish themselves by the kind of thought their conceptual practice both give rise to and arise from. Practices Cvejić place and treat within the philosophical theme of 'problems' ("CH.P." 1).

The conceptual nature of the seven works explored in *Choreographing Problems* stem from their invention of constraints wherein new kinds of experiences with producing dance was made. These experiences, Cvejić argue, "can't be subsumed under knowledge, but should instead be regarded as a problematic encounter" ("CH.P." 29). The concept of 'encounter' derives from the 20th century philosopher Gilles Deleuze's critique on representation in his book *Difference and Repetition*, and is the framework Cvejić applies to explain the critical departure of the seven works. Although the concept of encounters is that which Cvejić utilises to philosophically account for these practices, the idea that they are problematic is what gives it its name. Deleuze's encounters fundamentally problematize our ability for recognition as a consequence of a received sensation that cannot be met with an image in thought. It, so to speak, exceeds the limit of common sense and as a result a "discordant play" of "perception, memory, imagination, understanding [and] judgment" is happening to us (Cvejić, "CH.P." 29).

To ask 'Can I dance a perception?' is to invent a problem by constraining my ability to making dance purely from a perception itself. This entails a process of cause and affect that is unable to be represented to me as an image since only the object of perception can have an image in thought, while the mechanism of perception has no image, it is, to us, pure experience. Just as the problems stated by each of the seven works explored in *Choreographing Problems* dancing a perception does not have an image of representation. A different kind of thought is therefore needed to explain how it can be conceived and to this Cvejić draws upon Deleuze's concept of 'anti-representational thinking'. A representation is, for Deleuze, a mode of thinking that reduces information into identity rather than difference, and is therefore only able to create the already recognised and recognisable (Cvejić, "CH.P." 36). As opposed to representational thinking, the kind of thinking Deleuze wants to distinguish has a relationship between sensation and thought that stays problematic, and will as a consequence force thought to invent itself and "affirm difference prior to identity" (Cvejić, "CH.P." 36-7). Deleuze assign this anti-representational thinking the power of creation because of its ability to bring something yet unexciting into being (Cvejić, "CH.P." 37-8). Or rather, bring into being that which do not have an image of representation. As an alternative for the inability to conceive

something in a representation Deleuze propose a concept of ideas. Deleuze's ideas are not constructed through similarities aiming at identity. On the contrary, they are differential. They, so to speak, depend on differences rather than similarities, and exist in thought as a field wherein various interconnected and interdependent faculties cross and meet (Standford).

The problem constitutes itself as a generator of new experiences, since our senses must transcend themselves in order to go beyond what they normally can represent (Cvejić, "CH.P." 40-41). A real problem, when understood in relation to Deleuze's concept of encounters, does therefore not resolve itself with proposed solutions. As long as the sensations received cannot affirm an identity, which is to say that it cannot present itself as an image, a problem with all its differential faculties, Cvejić argues, "continue to transform itself and force thought to learn beyond knowledge" ("CH.P." 40). However, the force of the encounter can give rise to an idea constructed by differences. The problematic encounter has, to put it differently, the power to produce thoughts. The thoughts that the problem of this research produced in active experimentation will be elaborated in chapter three. But before that, a theoretical ground from which the experimentation took its departure will be unfolded in the next chapter.

After the methodology used in this research has been explained and argued for in the previous chapter the following chapter will take its departure from Henri Bergson's book *Matter and Memory*. Here I will develop the theoretical ground on which the research question was actualized in different movement researches in the process of making 'No title' and 'How would I know if I haven't seen?'. In *Matter and Memory* Bergson conducts an enquiry into the both independent but also interconnected planes formed by matter and perception on the one hand and time and memory on the other. This investigation is a quest for understanding the relation of matter and mind and thereby position itself within the classical philosophical 'body-mind problem' ("Matter" par. 1). Matter and Memory's subtitle 'Essay on the relation of body and spirit' does more than state this clearly, it also suggests 'spirit' to be memory as 'body' is matter.

Before laying out Henri Bergson's idea of the concept of perception it is important to note that this chapter of course does not attempt to argue for or against the theories posed in a larger philosophical context. Furthermore is Bergson's *Matter and Memory* only the point from where this chapter will depart and circulate around, since a few secondary sources will help with articulation and clarification. What will now be unfolded are only selected concepts within a vast field of knowledge on perception, which have served as sources of inspiration and have proved themselves useful for this research.

Henri Bergson's does not strictly speaking see a perception as that faculty of the brain that constructs a representation as an image to our consciousness. Instead, the brains faculty is rather to suggest motor possibilities of the body towards an object. In this respect the brain function just as the reflex actions of the spinal cord as it is always oriented towards action and therefore only differ from it by degree and not in kind (Bergson 23). However, as opposed to the reflex actions of the spinal cord, which translate sensations directly into movements, the brain functions as an intermediate between the movement received and the movement selected, in a process of analysing information from the senses and suggesting and selecting possible actions for execution (Bergson 12). Or in other words, perception is nothing else than the process of a nervous system receiving movements and expanding them into voluntary actions (Bergson 19). Perception should therefore be understood as a sensorimotor mechanism, hence a perception is in fact already part movement, and even though sensing must first take its part the whole of perception has its explanation in the body's tendency to act, to move (Bergson 23).

By defining perception as the process of suggesting possible actions the logic follows that the greater amount of information a living being can receive the greater amount of possible actions will be suggested to its consciousness (Bergson 16-17). They allow the information that does not serve any function to pass unnoticed while that which does "become perceptions by their very isolation" (Bergson 17). The real world is therefore reduced in the act of perception as it only

draws that information which is useful, and as a consequence the perceived world is not the whole of reality but can only be less. Gilles Deleuze states this view clearly with his reading of Bergson in *Bergsonism* by saying that a "perception is not the object plus something, but the object minus something, minus everything that does not interest us" (24-5). This means that we will have to understand a perception of matter to be different from the reality of matter, being to be different from being perceived. However, to Bergson, the difference is only by degree and not in kind, since the objects full reality and our perception of it share the elements and faculties of the parts that interests us (18).

Although it has just been explained how a perception is a sensorimotor process, there is no perception without memories. In fact, every perception is full of memories and is mixed with a great amount of details taken from past experiences (Bergson 14). However, this information is not taken at random, instead it only adds information into a perception insofar as it is relevant to our situation. By relevant, we should once again understand useful movements, or suggestions of movements. Bergson therefore presents two distinct forms of memory: motor mechanisms; and independent recollections (47). The first could be understood as actions that are performed in immediate response towards an object. Put differently, it does not present our past to us, but acts it. Which is opposed to independent recollections that do indeed present to us our past in the form of images. Images we can discover and select useful actions from (Bergson 50). In either form of memory, their final determination is movements. Therefore memory is also only seen as stored motor impulses waiting to be augmented into our perception when they become relevant to our present situation, either as a readymade response, or as possibilities of actions. To act is therefore to encourage memory to narrow itself into a useful movement, and in the case of independent recollections it is to give up the memory image that suggests the possible and make it actual in movements (Bergson 69).

As living beings conscious perception is limited to those parts, and aspects of those parts, which movements can affect, there must be a correspondence between the perceived and the movements executed. And, this correspondence is a result of the fact that they both are a function of a third factor, which is the indetermination of the will (Bergson 20). The nervous system is seen as a center for all the external points in space it can receive information from, and each of these points can make an "appeal to my will and to put, so to speak, an elementary question to my motor activity" (Bergson 23). Such a question is in fact the perception in itself, since it does nothing but suggest what effect a movement can have on an object. In this regard, it is up to our will to filter that information out we might need to fulfil our needs with an action. However, in the case of this research my will might filter out a lot of useful information as it inattentively expand into habitual

movements. To this, Bergson's explication of the mechanism of attention could allow a more conscious decision making possible.

Attention is, Bergson argues, a faculty to render a perception more intense. It manifests itself in an attitude of the body that at first inhibit movements. Yet, shortly after more subtle movements appear in the body that attempts to retain the relation of sensation and movements, or as Bergson puts it, attempts "to retrace the outlines of the object perceived" (65). With these movements attention begins its collaborative work with memory. As long as attention is kept on an object our memory attempts to recollect information of the object, or similar objects, and project it unto our image of it. As long as these details do not suffice a greater appeal is made to memory, which in return enriches the perception (Bergson 66). We should as a consequence see perception as a circuit where a perception meets the mind, and in return projects back its image to check for its accuracy (Bergson 67). They, so to speak, uphold each other in equilibrium by their constant negotiation. The most profound aspect of the theory Bergson here lays out is that memory takes up such a big role in the mechanism of both perception itself, but also the attention we might adopt towards an object. It is in this regard not the amount of sensations gathered at once that intensify a perception, but rather all the information gathered over time and prolonged into the present resulting in a coexistence of both memory and sensations, past and present. We can, with the use of attention, thereby not only perceive objects with an automatic recognition resulting in habitual movements, as explained earlier, but also recognise attentively by giving up its useful effects, a notion Bergon calls 'attentive recognition' (64-66). Bojana Cvejić applies this notion of attentive recognition in *Choreographing Problem*s when explaining how one might approach movements as the object of perception. When inhibiting one from extending a perception into habitual movements the sensorimotor mechanism is broken, and as a result one becomes the perceiver of ones own body (Cvejić, "CH.P." 71). How this idea, together with the rest of the thoughts on perception was taken into active experimentation will be the aim of the next chapter.

'No title' was a dance trio made in collaboration with Ismini Slijper, Björn Loykens and Zsofia Temesvari, and the creation process defined this research by giving rise to the problem 'Can I dance a perception?'. Hence at the outset of this first creation this problem was not evident yet. Instead, this creation departed from wondering how a perception of gravity is constructed through sensations, and how we could possibly intensify these sensations. Gravity has been a general interest of mine for long but only became current as I read the book *Gravity* by Steve Paxton. The book moved me by its poetic description of the role gravity plays on both our physical and psychological nature. Although this book inspired me it is important to separate the point of departure of 'No title' from Paxton's own Contact Improvisation technique, which I conceive of as an active research into how one can exploit the force of gravity upon ones body to expand possibilities of moving. As an attempt to pose an alternative to this approach I wanted to explore how the dancers and I could intensify the experience of gravity. To sum up these thoughts and take them into active experimentation two leading questions was proposed for the four of us to explore together and to share the knowledge we gained between us.

How do we sense and perceive gravity?
Can we intensify this perception?

We, as human beings, are in a constant negotiation with gravity in order to act out our intentions through movement. Yet, it seems that we do it unconsciously most of the time. We can walk, bike, lift, push and pull etc. while talking, singing and thinking etc. In other words, with the reference to Henri Bergson's notion of perception, we can easily expand our perception of gravity into habitual movements. But, could we by bringing our attention towards gravity sense or perceive it with our full consciousness? Could we intensify this sensing, perceiving and experiencing? As a way to take these questions into experimentation the focus was set upon 3 main sensations that, in my intuitive understanding, make a perception of gravity possible: the touch and pressure of the ground unto our bodies; the sense of weight (through the sensation of the water of our bodies being pulled down); and the vestibular system (the sense of balance and spatial orientation). A method of research naturally developed from attempting to focus on each of these specific sensations and perceptions; attention was guided (through setting up a fixed and detailed physical movement task) to a sensation that (in collaboration with others) constructs a perception of gravity. We where, so to speak, attempting to directly apply Bergson's concept of attentive recognition, on the hypothesis that we where taking out the useful effect of movements. Three of such tasks made up the three parts (or scenes) of the final creation, and each of them where done very slow, calm and precise. Not only did we naturally do the task in this way, we simply could

not keep attention to the sensations affected by gravity if we tried moving faster. It struck me how accurate this is in relation to Bergson's writing about attention. That, at first there is an inhibition of movements, but soon after more subtle movements appear to try to retain the understanding of the object through a synthesis of sensations and movements.

The act of guiding ones attention towards a sensation was at first only a means for intensifying a sensation. However, at the point in which the creation of 'No title' had finished and the creation of the solo 'How would I know if I haven't seen?' was about to begin the act of paying attention became increasingly clear to me as that process which might be able to produce movements, more than just generate a quality of moving. Having said that, if we use a task with a predetermined set of movements to allow our attention to stay on our perception of gravity, are we then dancing a perception, or are we dancing while perceiving? The intuitive answer would be that we are in fact just dancing while perceiving, meaning that the genesis of the movements cannot be traced back to a perception but to a fixed task. This can be said to be that fundamental encounter, which gave rise to the problem that this research is investigating, and resulted in the final invention of the "problematic" research question:

Can I dance a perception?

The dance "solo" 'How would I know if I haven't seen?' was made in collaboration with the musician Victor Lange. Despite the fact that the relation of music and dance was the frame of this task it is not interesting in the context of this research. Instead, what will take this research further is the way in which the concepts unfolded in the previous chapters was investigated in several different active explorations. As a continuation of the research that went into 'No title', this creation too revolved around the theme of gravity. But as opposed to the first creation the research now entailed a real problem, which forced my thinking beyond recognition, beyond knowledge. As a consequence to this approach the research developed into an improvised practice, since it destroyed any image of thought that might attempt to meet this problem in a representation.

The format of this written work has so far been suitable for explaining the method, theory and how the problem was encountered. But, as this work now enters a field of differential "solutions", with the creation of 'How would I know if I haven't seen?', the academic approach does not suffice to portray, explain and account for the way it was taken into active experimentation. Instead, an alternative to this direction will take this paper further.

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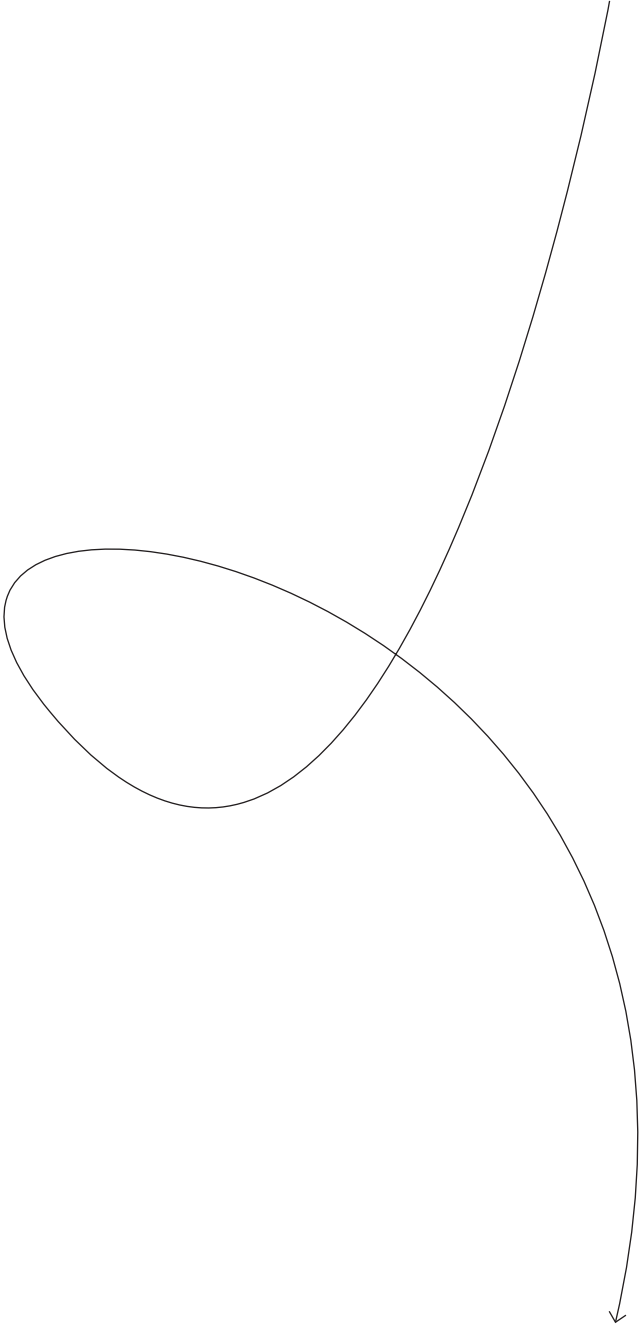
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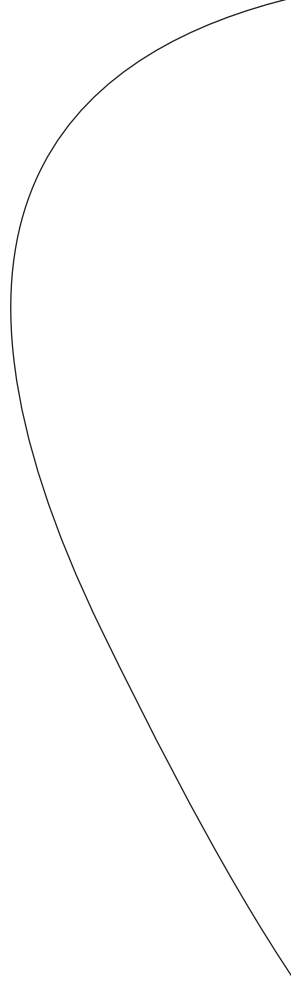
The aim of <u>coming pages</u> is to visually portray the differential nature of the problem and the active experimentation that went into the solo 'How would I know if I haven't seen?'. This is done alongside general inspirations, questions and findings that relate to the research. The aim is not to describe the solo itself but to layout the problem that served as a generator of ideas in the making of it. It is, so to speak, an attempt to construct an idea of the research, in the Deleuzian sense, through "difference in itself" (Stanford).

"MY WORK STARTS WHERE I STOP TO UNDERSTAND IT".
- ALICJA KWADE

self interview on practice
Chrysa Parkinson

Ideas change actions.
Actions change ideas.

FIRST RULE: *Apply the test of true and false to problems themselves. Condemn false problems and reconcile truth and creation at the level of problems.*

SECOND RULE: *Struggle against illusion, rediscover the true differences in kind or articulations of the real.*[14]

THIRD RULE: *State problems and solve them in terms of time rather than of space.*[30]

Bergsonism, Gilles Deleuze

I fundamentally problematize the relation of sensation and movement since I attempt to choose movements from their synthesis; a perception. But, can I choose the movement that I am already doing?
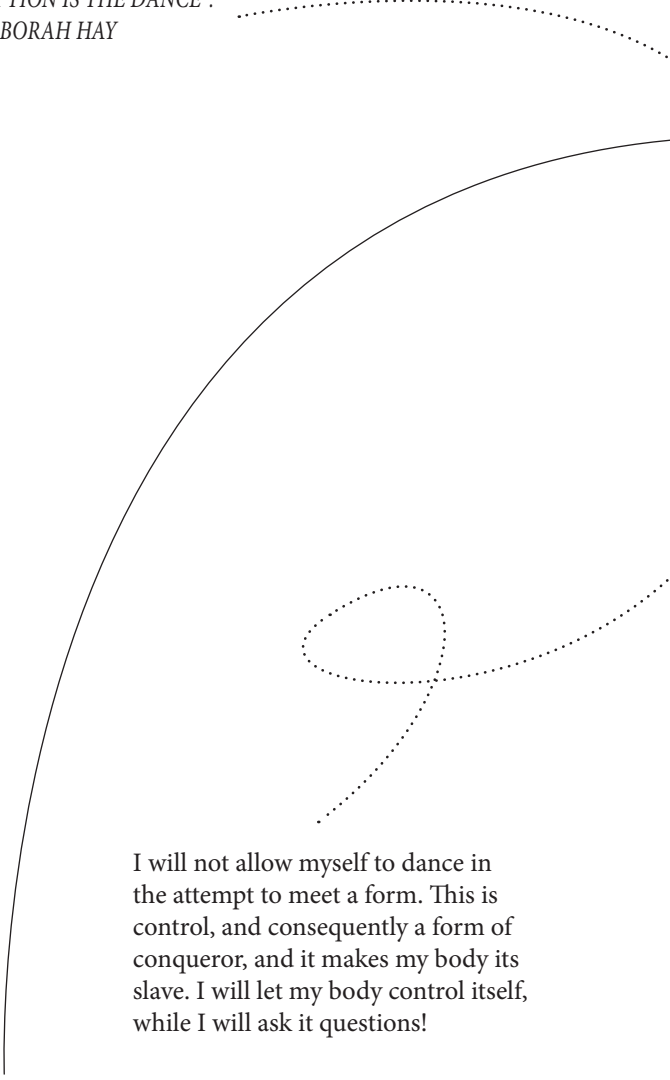
*"THE POET PRODUCES THE BEAUTIFUL BY FIXING HIS
ATTENTION ON SOMETHING REAL".
- SIMONE WEIL*

"YOUR PERCEPTION IS THE DANCE".
- DEBORAH HAY

I will not allow myself to dance in the attempt to meet a form. This is control, and consequently a form of conqueror, and it makes my body its slave. I will let my body control itself, while I will ask it questions!

A perception that finds a way to act itself out.

self interview on practice, Chrysa Parkinson

BY ATTENTIVELY RECOGNIZE THE
CHANGES OF SENSATIONS, AND
BY PLACING THEM IN RELATION
TO THE MOVEMENTS I PERFORM, I
EXPERIENCE THE MECHANISM OF
PERCEPTION ITSELF. I EXPERIENCE THE
NEGOTIATION.

How would I know if I haven't seen?, Mathias Skole

Photo, Boris Bruegel

*Could mapping be a dance
practice? A way to visually
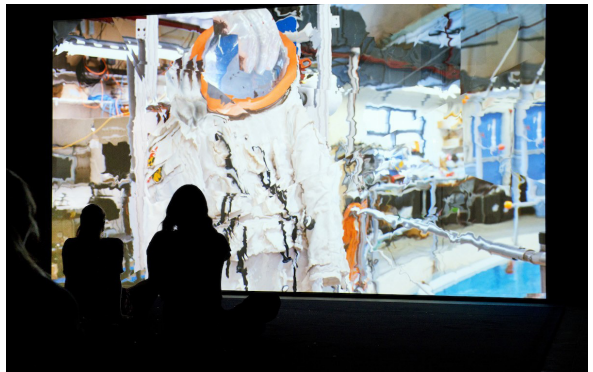organize information, a way to
place things in relation.*

*"BY EXECUTING DETAILS TO AN EXTREME DEGREE THE EXPERIENCE
BECOMES AUTHENTIC. IT'S NOT PLAY, IT'S MUCH MORE FUN, IT'S
SERIOUS, IT'S A REAL JOB".
- TOM SACHS*

We could argue that a perception is prolonged
in time as it manifests itself in a movement
since a perception suggests possible actions.
But, will it transform or change? And if so, can
I keep my attention on that perception as it
changes with the moving body?

Intensity cannot be divided as extensity can. I can split up the length of an object in half and get two equal halves, but the temperature of an object cannot be divided in this way (Bergsonism 18-19, Stanford). The same is true about a perception. You cannot increase the intensity of a perception without fundamentally change it.

CAN WE REMOVE THE SCREEN OF THE WILL THAT COMES IN FRONT OF OUR PERCEPTION? CAN WE REMOVE OUR NEED OF USEFUL EFFECTS, OUR HABIT OF REDUCING A PERCEPTION INTO IDENTITY? CAN WE PERCEIVE WITHIN DIFFERENCES, ALSO WHEN THERE IS A GAP BETWEEN SENSATION AND THOUGHT?
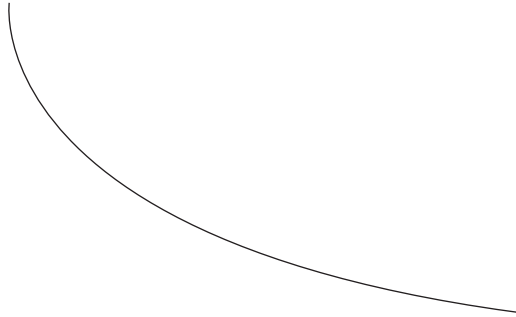

Everything and More, Rachel Rose

The frame of morphing of one "solution" into the next in 'How would I know if I haven't seen?' does not quite suffice in the attempt to be a dance of differences. I think I need to surrender to the unknown, to the unintelligible, and instead attempt to propose a yet unimaginable knowledge.

Can a dance depend on differences
that together do not manifest a
singularity, but rather disperse several
possibilities of understanding?

By removing the search for useful
effects in an object I perceive more
attentively. I become the perceiver of
my own body. I am no longer only the
executer of movements.

My attention to gravity is most
intense and kept for longer when
I move slowly and something is
hanging in the air.

THE DANCE AS A QUESTION DOES
NOT ATTEMPT TO EXPRESS OR
COMMUNICATE A SINGULAR MESSAGE.
IT IS THERE TO BE COMPLETED BY
THE MULTIPLICITY OF EXPERIENCES,
PERSPECTIVES AND INTERPRETATIONS.

THE DANCE IS A RESULT OF OUR THINKING

Credo In Artem Imaginandi (Post-Dance)

"Against the fear of dance's defiance of historicization, we might use the weakness of dance, its lack of a strong definition that has made it into a prey of poetic and philosophical metaphors, for another, more oblique aesthetic reality. I will call it the numinous: a reality whose source is not in the subject, yet it invades and abandons the subject as an apparition, with a phantom-like power. Don't get me wrong, I am not advocating for occult dreams, it is a perfectly rational thing I invoke here prefiguratively. My credo of the future of post-dance is dance that preserves a certain opacity: stubborn inefficiency of appearance with a certain degree of will and intensity that renders it a strangely underperformed being amidst a well-organized world of persuasive self-performances."

- Bojana Cvejić

INSIDE, Bruno Latour

In the process of making 'No title' I used the concept of attention to increase the intensity of my perception of gravity.

As a result I encountered the idea that a perception itself might be able to produce movements.

By understanding Deleuze's concept of encounters, and the way it was used by Bojana Cvejic to account for the practices stemming from problems in *Choreographing Problems*, I constrained my ability to create dance purely from a perception itself, thereby inventing the problem 'Can I dance a perception?'.

By inventing a problem I forced myself to think beyond representation, beyond knowledge. I had to attempt to understand how it might work, and not how it might look.

In an attempt to synthesize these "solutions" I made an improvised dance practice based on Henri Bergson's theory of movement's and memory's partaking in the mechanism of perception from *Matter and Memory*, together with his concept of attentive recognition.

It resulted in the dance solo 'How would I know if I haven't seen?'

However, the problem stated continues to transform and reveal new problematic perspectives. I would need a lot more research in order to expand my knowledge enough to come even close to proposing a possible strategy for dancing a perception. Having said that, what can be concluded is that a problem, in my experience, forces my thinking beyond representation, recognition and knowledge thereby producing ideas for making dance performances.

Yet, if I am to apply Deleuze's concept of anti-representational thinking not only to my research process but also in future performances, I must force myself to think beyond my current ideas of what my dance performances should look like. Maybe I should pose the question, or more correctly, state the problem:

Can I also encourage my audience's thinking beyond recognition and knowledge?

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