

Tuuli Vahtola

# **BEYOND THE HANDS-TOUCH**

Queering intimacy through touch in contemporary dance

Faculty of Social Sciences

Master's Thesis

January 2024

# ABSTRACT

Tuuli Vahtola: Beyond the hands-touch: Queering intimacy through touch in contemporary dance  
Master's Thesis  
Tampere University  
Master's Degree Programme in Social Science Research, Gender Studies  
January 2024

---

The aim of this thesis is to gain knowledge on what is particular to dancer-performers' experiences of working with touch and intimacy in performative settings, and how the performers' experiences of bodily boundaries become articulated in and through dance and movement practices that have to do with touch. Central to this research is how touch and the materiality of the body are understood in performative work with touch, as well as the power dynamics that become relevant within working groups and between performers and audiences, from the performers' point of view. Further, the study examines the potentials of queering the logics of touch and intimacy through performative strategies. The performer's embodied experience of working with choreographed touch is linked with feminist and queer theories of materiality and embodiment, drawing from new materialist, poststructuralist and phenomenological thinking. Additionally, touch and hapticity are approached through the lens of performance and media studies focusing on touch.

The research data consists of six semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted in January-March 2023 with professional dancer-performers who live and work in Europe as freelance performers and choreographers. The study was realized from the position of an insider researcher. Methods of reflexive thematic analysis, complemented with narrative analysis, were utilized to analyze what kinds of approaches and experiences the participants have related to work with touch in performative settings, what kinds of understandings of the body and touch they have and how vulnerability, trust and consent are present in intimate work.

Through the analysis the study proposes that work with touch in performative settings opens space for exploring intimacy in ways that contest normative social conduct. By focusing on *relationality* and the interconnectedness of the different senses, these spaces might generate senses of transformation, unknownness and merging together with someone or something, thus possibly widening the spectrum of everyday sensations. The participants used embodied and verbal rearticulations and imaginations of the concepts of the body and touch. Through these queered understandings sociality, responsibility and relationality could be practiced differently from the everyday normativity. However, the presence of gendered assumptions, heterosexist readings or lack of trust worked as limiting factors in the exploration.

Keywords: Touch, intimacy, materiality, embodiment, affect, dance, consent

The originality of this thesis has been checked using the Turnitin Originality Check service.

## Table of contents

1	INTRODUCTION .....	1
2	INTIMACY AND THE QUEERING POTENTIALS OF PERFORMANCE.....	5
3	TOUCHING FROM THE DISTANCE.....	10
3.1	Touch and <i>haptic visibility</i> .....	10
3.2	Materiality and embodiment .....	14
4	CONDUCTING THE RESEARCH .....	18
4.1	Finding participants .....	18
4.2	Conducting semi-structured interviews .....	21
4.3	Thematic and narrative analysis .....	23
4.4	Ethical considerations.....	26
5	WORKING WITH TOUCH AND INTIMACY IN PERFORMATIVE SETTINGS.....	28
5.1	Touch and other senses.....	28
5.2	Relationality and the space in between .....	36
5.3	The layered body .....	42
5.4	In/stability of the material body.....	47
5.5	Vulnerability, trust and consent .....	55
6	DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS .....	64
	REFERENCES.....	70
	APPENDIX .....	76

# 1 Introduction

The starting point of this master's thesis is an interest towards what kinds of experiences dancer-performers have related to working with touch and intimacy in choreographic performance practices. My aim is to gain knowledge on what is particular to the performers' experiences of touch and intimacy in performative settings, and how their experiences of bodily boundaries articulate through performative processes that have to do with touch. Further, I approach work with touch and intimacy in performative settings with an interest to look at the potentials of choreographic intimate spaces as queering the normative. Additionally, my thesis works to bring to discussion the questions of consent and trust that are present when working with touch and intimacy. To look at what kinds of logics of touch and proximity are used and experienced through choreography will shed light on what kinds of intimate spaces are created in performance practices and what it requires, on subjective level, to build intimate spaces. In the frame of this thesis, I understand performance as not separate from, or mimicking "the reality" but as reality, lived and sensed through, through different performative principles. Thus, the research focuses on the lived experiences of performers.

Touch in dance and performance practices is often present (Mitra 2021, 9; Brandstetter, Egert & Zubarik 2013, 3) yet there is little research on performers' experiences of choreographed touch (Mitra 2021, 9). Additionally, it has been argued that touch has over all remained an underexamined topic in feminist research (Kolehmainen & Kinnunen 2019, 30). I see an interesting, easily fluctuating connection between dance and performance practices and gender studies: they share an interest in materialities of bodies and movement, relationality, performativity and thinking alternative realities, to name some. In this thesis I aim to link performative practices and feminist and queer studies.

I understand touch in this thesis as the sensing of relations between people and people or people and other nonhuman bodies: the sensing that is directly connected to one's subjective experience of their embodied reality and emotions and guided by choreographic principles and relations. Thus, touch in this thesis is not limited to direct skin-to-skin contact. Rather, I look at touch as something that can be sensed from a distance. I will look at touch through

feminist physicist Karen Barad's agential realism and intra-activity (2007) and their account on touching as "[...] what matter does, or rather, what matter is [...]" (2012a, 215). I will apply art and new media scholar Laura U. Marks' concept of haptic visuality (2000) as I discuss the sense of touch in relation to other senses. Further, thinkers of touch who work with performance and movement studies, Gerko Egert (2019) and Erin Manning (2006), influence a great deal of the thesis work. As I take interest in touch, I will – next to Barad's agential realism – engage with feminist and queer discussions of materiality and embodiment through Sara Ahmed's cultural politics of emotions (2004) and Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity and materialization (1988; 2011).

I have interviewed six performer-choreographers who live and work around Europe and who have worked in the field of contemporary/experimental dance and choreography for different amounts of years. My research has its focus on contemporary dance performance and choreography in the Global North. All the participants have worked and/or currently work, more or less explicitly, with touch as one part of their artistic practice and have thus expertise, knowledge and elaborated thoughts on the topic of touch in dance, performance and choreography. They all have received education in dance and/or choreography from different European universities, which must be pointed out as it undoubtedly has an effect in the ways of approaching dance, performance and choreographic practices; as most of the European universities' educations of contemporary dance and choreography are grounded in Western traditions of dance and philosophy, these traditions are likely to be known by the participants, too, and grounded in their work. Taking the educational backgrounds of the participants into consideration, the scope of this research is narrowed down to artists with a university degree in contemporary dance performance and/or choreographic practices.

My own background is similar to those of the interviewees which gives me the position of an insider researcher. I have studied contemporary dance and performance in Finland and Sweden, have a bachelor's degree in dance performance and have worked for about six years professionally within the field of dance, performance and choreography in Finland and other Nordic countries.

As I think of my own history with dance practices, as a professional or as a student, I recognize different ways of discussing touch and intimacy; sometimes there is clear communication about how to express consent, sometimes quite the opposite. Sometimes there is a tendency to leave undone conversations about what the intimate experiences of touch generate and sometimes to do so is central to the work or methods of working. The question of discussing touch and intimacy links to the working methods, hierarchies in the working groups – such as choreographer-dancer, director-performer or teacher-student – and the trust that can be formed within the working group.

In dance and choreographic performance intimate and sensual situations between performers can be aroused and explored in proximity and active attentiveness between bodies through work that deals with touch, sensing, affect and relationality. Experimental performance and movement practices might seek for altering ways of being intimate through researching spatio-temporal and kinesthetic relations, and/or laying awareness on the affective and sensorial, and thus directly or indirectly experiment on the notion of intimacy. In formulating the research questions for the thesis, my interest lies in the interrelations of performing, sensing and meaning making. This entails the ways of approaching the very situation of working with touch; how one understands touch and the body, and what sensations and experiences are induced in work with touch in performative settings. Additionally, in work with touch and proximity, as intimacy comes into question, the individual bodily and mental boundaries might become relevant to think about. Thus, considering questions of consent and power dynamics within performative work with touch must be included. My research questions are:

- 1) Through what kinds of understandings of touch and the body do performers enter the work with touch in performative settings?
- 2) What kinds of experiences and sensations of the materiality of touch and the body are generated in and through the work with touch in performative settings?
- 3) What kinds of implications does work with touch and intimacy in performative settings have in terms of consent and power dynamics?

The thesis proceeds as follows: I will first contextualize the ground from which the thesis departs by defining those *performative settings* that I aim to study and consider related research. I will discuss intimacy in performance as well as consider the possibility of performance as queering the normalized ways of experiencing touch and intimacy. I will then move on to present the theoretical framework in two subsections where I first present chosen theories of touch, then of materiality and embodiment. The fourth chapter consists of explaining in detail how the research was conducted, and the data collected and analyzed, as well as the ethical considerations. In the fifth chapter I move on to analyze the data through the research questions, applying the methods presented in the fourth chapter. In the sixth and last chapter I apply a further discussion and consideration of the research process and outcomes, and possible continuations for the research.

## 2 Intimacy and the queering potentials of performance

In this chapter I provide background for how I approach intimacy in performance, as well as the possibility of queering the understanding of what intimacy and touch could be, through dance and choreographic performance. When referring to *performative settings* I am referring not just to the moment of performing but also to situations of rehearsing.

As I approach touch and intimacy in this thesis, an important aspect of how intimate situations are created in performative settings becomes central. In theatre, television and cinema a recent move towards acknowledging the actors' experience and securing their well-being in intimate/sex scenes has been developed through *intimacy coordinators*. This can partly be seen as a repercussion of the #MeToo movement that begun in 2017, followed by discussions about past and present sexual harassment and abuse against women in the entertainment industry. (Sørensen 2020, 1397.) Intimacy coordinating, through which individual boundaries and consent are aimed at being established, can be a way of legitimating the traditionally instrumentalized lived experience of the performer in theatre and film as affected by the acting; a way of acknowledging prevailing power imbalances in scenes that reflect, strengthen and reproduce predominant sexist cultural imagery and might be uncomfortable and harmful for the actors.

As we move away from traditional theatre, television and film towards another section of performing arts, namely to live, contemporary experimental and/or conceptual dance and performance – in which my thesis will focus on – the performative practices dealing with intimacy, touch, sex, pleasure or desire can be framed in very different manners as performers do not necessarily take on a character's narrative, nor does the performance necessarily follow a recognizable dramatization of social relations. Drawing from my own experience of taking part in or facilitating performance processes, what becomes central is not a linear narrative or plot but, for example, the sensory experience, intuitive choice-making and awareness of spatial situatedness. Of course, different things are relevant to different people, and it should be acknowledged that the former are just my wordings at the time of writing. However, through compositional (how bodies/things organize and move in the space, in relation to each other and dramaturgically) and choreographic (tools for how movement/s



and encounters are generated) principles and tasks touch, proximity and contact are often present in dance practices, which brings intimacy into question. Further, the sensations induced in the moment of these explorations can often be under scrutiny. I think, given that the space for this kind of exploration be facilitated in a considerate way, meaning that the cultural meanings of bodies and acts are not dismissed or taken for granted, and taking into account the needs of the working group, *choreographic and performative tools might offer space for exploring what intimacies could mean, look like, and feel like; what logics they could have and what possibilities there are of deviating from, or queering the normalized ways of experiencing touch, or witnessing it.*

Intimacy, physical or emotional, is often understood as belonging to private familial or sexual relationships; it has to do with physical or mental closeness and is closely associated with psychological processes. Intimacy coordinators Èmil Haarhoff and Kate Lush (2023, 120) define intimacy through vulnerability, within the context of intimacy coordination, as relating to physical or figurative actions that have the potential to wound the performer, pointing out that work with touch, whether sexual or platonic, entails these qualities of wounding. They suggest that through embodied and verbally negotiated, active consent, performers engaging in touch may create a so-called *consent-bubble*. The ones within the consent-bubble are protected of the potential of being wounded as consent is continuously reestablished, and there is freedom to experiment with the fluctuating subjective boundaries. (ibid.131.) Furthermore, the sensing of touch for Haarhoff and Lush is not limited to the moment of direct contact and “the intimate nature of touch might already be present before skin-to-skin contact, when touch, or the intention to touch, enters the performer’s privileged protective peripersonal space” (ibid. 132).

From a feminist and social constructivist point of view, intimacy, traditionally locating to the private sphere, is political. Pratt and Rosner (2012, 8) point out that a feminist approach to private, intimate matters and personal attachments has for a long time acknowledged that political, social and economic realities are built around private and personal worlds; intimate relations cannot be seen as separate from those. In performance/art research, intimacy can be understood e.g. as availability and openness to a situation, as will be pointed out later on in this thesis through the findings. Anthropologist Brenda Farnell and choreographer Robert

N. Wood (2017) speak of *kinaesthetic intimacy* in choreographic practices (or here, in the choreographic practice of Wood), defining it rather as the dancer's kinesthetic awareness. Kinaesthetic intimacy is visceral and spatio-temporal. Kinaesthetic intimacy is pertaining to various forms of *sensing*, connected to movement, imagination and ideas as well as sensations and sensorial states, and Farnell and Wood remind that physical intimacy is not exclusively sexual as the popular understanding of intimacy suggests. (ibid. 78–79.) I will approach intimacy in this thesis with an interest towards the explorative ways of being intimate that might arise in work with touch in performative settings.

Queer and feminist readings of performances often suggest deviations from the normative and see the potential of performances to create alternative, queer spaces (e.g. Davies 2012; Dolan 2005). Rather than focusing on the processes of the performer's lived experience, queer and feminist dance and performance theory mainly focuses on the analysis of an art object, the performance; what it suggests and does from the point of view of the critic, theoretician or the viewer in general, and rarely discusses the performers' experience in depth. Ann Cooper Albright, dancer and cultural and feminist studies scholar acknowledges, however, that at the same time as the performer is creating representations on stage, they are in a process of lived experience, a process of "actually forming that body" (1997, 3). I am interested in this very process of *actually forming that body* in relation to performative work with touch, and the possibilities of actually forming that body differently from the everyday – yet in this thesis I see it as not only happening on stage at the moment of performing but also in how performers make sense and verbalize what they are working with and how.

As I am interested in the experiences of the performers, a visit to previous research is needed. The experience of the dancer has been of interest to some scholars, yet not specifically the experience of working with touch and intimacy. Choreographer, dancer and educator Linda Gold (2013) has researched differentiated state emerging through dance improvisation, having named it as *altered experience*. The research investigates Gold's students' experiences during a course where Gold facilitated exercises grounded in dance and somatic practices, that "seemed to promote altered experience" (Gold 2013, 18). Gold (ibid. 11) describes the state of altered experience as expanded awareness and altered perception of time and space. Next to finding that the perception of time and space, self and surroundings were changed

and expanded in altered experience, Gold found that reaching the expanded state of awareness was supported by e.g. building trust and having time, whereas distress, e.g. feelings of competition and frustration, challenged it (ibid. 171–175). While my methodological and theoretical interests differ from those of Gold's, the research on experiences related to performative practices connects us.

Kornilia Chatzimasoura (2013) brings up the dancer's experience and especially the subjective, emotional and sensory worlds that get entangled with the other dancers' worlds, and the interpretations of a specific situation. Through her research conducted with Argentine Tango practitioners, Chatzimasoura (ibid. 293) points out that emotions and sensations arising in the moment of dancing and spectating are closely linked to various contexts of social and personal realities and cannot be considered outside of those. The moment of dancing, of being in relation to the dance partner is a mesh of complex social and personal mechanisms interlinked; emotions, sensations and representations that might conflict with each other, depend on each other, the situation, and the involvement of the dancer (ibid. 306). As this might seem obvious, it is challenging the traditional idea of the dancer's body as an instrument, separated from affect, emotions and feelings that the very social encounters and performing evoke.

To return to the idea of performance and its potential in queering intimacies, I find it interesting to consider the space of choreographic performance as a structure that, from the very beginning, suggests something deviant from the everyday – especially in terms of sociality and relationality. When using the term *queering*, my aim is not to say that any and every performance is queer – it surely is not the case. What I mean by queering is the challenging of heteronormativity, or even further, challenging what is at the verge of becoming stabilized in one's experience, at the verge of becoming naturalized. Cristyn Davies (2012, 27; 29) argues that performance art disrupts heteronormative logics through intervening normative constructions of time and space and does so with both the audiences and the performers. Davies (ibid. 29) aims to imagine performance as *queer time and space*, following Jack Halberstam and his rethinking of Foucault's (1986) *heterotopia*. Rather than the "non-real" utopia, heterotopia takes place within the society, and is a place of deviant socializing and behavior from normative conduct (Foucault 1986, 24). Davies looks at

performance art as a heterotopia, queering time and space, formulating new modes of perception and enabling new forms of sociality to be rehearsed (2012, 29).

Through the results in this thesis, I want to highlight the potential of alternative logics and queered intimacies that can be generated through choreographic practices and in performative settings dealing with touch and tactility: not only in the artwork that is shared with the audience but also in the artist's work, in their material embodied thinking. This calls for the recognition of the performers' different embodied realities, as well as the ways in which the performers approach the materiality of touch and the body in the first place. Next, I will discuss the theoretical approaches to touch, embodiment and materiality that I will utilize in this thesis.

### 3 Touching from the distance

The theoretical framework of the thesis draws from new materialist, poststructuralist and phenomenological thinking. I will first discuss my theoretical approach to touch. In the second subchapter I discuss the approach to materiality and embodiment.

#### 3.1 Touch and *haptic visibility*

In the Global North, touch and the sense of touch have historically been seen as inferior to, for example, the sense of vision (Classen 2005, 2; 2012, xii; Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, 95–97; Paterson 2007, 1–2). This goes along with the Cartesian mind-body dualism: thinking is placed solely in the mind, for which the sensing body is a mere extension. In this logic, touch is the sense of the body, the feminine, whereas vision is that of the mind, which is masculine. Further, the division is connected to Western colonialism and racist theories that link vision and thought to the “civilized” white European and touch and the body to “uncivilized” Indigenous peoples (Classen 2012, xii). From a decolonial feminist perspective, as María Lugones argues, the idea of dualism, of this kind of dichotomous thinking and more precisely the dimorphism of gender, is rooted in the European colonialism (Lugones 2010, 743). Consequentially of touch’s assumed inferiority to vision perhaps, some scholars note that academic research lacks exploration of touch – or that touch has rather been taken for granted and neglected in the Western philosophical tradition (Kinnunen & Kolehmainen 2019; Classen 2005, 2; Hermans 2021, 211).

The sense of touch is a deeply complex and manifold phenomena that is related to other senses (Classen 2012, xiv) and to the ways in which culture “foregrounds affective relations where we experience touch in embodied and physical ways” (Kinnunen & Kolehmainen 2019, 34). In this thesis I will approach touch through an understanding of the different senses as interrelated. I will now present the theoretical approaches to touch that I will focus on: the work with touch done by scholars engaging with performance and dance, Gerko Egert (2019) and Erin Manning (2006). I will discuss Karen Barad’s (2012) quantum physical approach to touch, which influences my work greatly. Finally, I will present the concept of *haptic visibility* by art and new media scholar Laura U. Marks (2000), that I also apply in this thesis.

Performance studies scholar Gerko Egert (2019) theorizes touch in and through analysis of contemporary dance performances. Egert's work situates close to my thesis research, yet it does not analyze the performers' experiences in work with touch but rather looks at touch on the stage from the perspective of the viewer. Egert develops an understanding of touch as relational movement and affective relation, where distance is inherently there; touch is not merely immediate contact between bodies (ibid. 11; 15). Egert argues that contemporary dance delves into touch intensifying, modulating and dramatizing the "manifold touches of everyday life" (ibid. 3). Here, the dramatizing does not refer to building linear representations, predetermined structures of relations, or arc of suspension. Rather, Egert suggests, referring to Deleuze, that dramatizing is concerned with the questions *who*, *how*, *how much* and *where* and *when*. (ibid. 3.) By considering the possibility of breaking linearity, Egert's approach complements the interest of performance as deviating from the normative, possibly enabling new formulations of perception, embodied sensations and sociality (Davies 2012, 29).

As theories of touch and performance analysis are brought together, touch in performance settings can be considered as assemblages; the spectators' and performers' sensations are *complexly interwoven* – and the relation between touching and seeing is central to that interweavement (Egert 2019, 120). Egert's account works to challenge the hierarchy of the senses and categorial differentiation of vision and touch, drawing from Alois Riegel, Deleuze and Guattari and Brian Massumi (ibid.). Similarly, Erin Manning (2006, xii) seeks to "...explore the ways in which research on the senses can extend beyond commonsense approaches to the senses and to the body". This exploration means to not presuppose a body as separate from another in situation that "contains an active giver and a passive receptor" (ibid. xiii) but to understand the sensing, touching body as relational and processual, becoming with other bodies. Touching and movement create time and space, and, in that articulation and relational becoming lies the politics and potential of touch. Manning understands touching as a reaching toward, as movement that articulates an understanding of space-time. (ibid. xiv.) Manning looks at touch through Tango and argues that rather than predetermined choreography, Tango is improvised movement of becoming together (ibid. 2). As the roles of leader and follower are not simple, as in "active" and "passive", the movement is done together in the moment of dancing; the politics of touch lie in the mutual engagement of contact: "I cannot touch you without being responsive" (ibid. 9). When touching, it is

impossible to touch “you”: “You are untouchable (inasmuch as there is a single ‘you’). What I touch is that untouchability. I negotiate that untouchability, that surface that cannot be penetrated, the unknown and (in)finite distance which separates me and you” (ibid. 11). Both Manning’s and Egert’s approaches, in their overlappings and differences are of interest to me in this thesis, as well as the notion of touch as something that is not reduced to direct physical contact but works through relational movement, other senses and distance.

Besides the approaches to touch of Egert and Manning, the account on touch given by feminist theoretical physicist Karen Barad (2012a) is a central point of departure in this thesis. Barad (2012a, 209) theorizes touch through quantum field theory, starting with the classical physics’ explanation of touch: in touch there is in fact no touch – the touch becomes sensed through the repulsion of electrons of each other, which becomes intensified in close proximity. What is felt is the force of the electromagnetic field. Barad shifts from the classical explanation and brings theorizing touch to a “radically different” and “radically queer” (ibid. 209) direction through quantum field theory. For Barad, touching is what matter does:

In an important sense, in a breathtakingly intimate sense, touching, sensing, is what matter does, or rather, what matter is: matter is condensations of response-ability. Touching is a matter of response. Each of “us” is constituted in response-ability. Each of “us” is constituted as responsible for the other, as the other.

(ibid. 215)

The ontological difference of the quantum physical approach to the classical physicist view lies in how the classical view places particles in the void as separate, whereas in quantum theory they are entangled; the void is not vacuous, particles and the void are constitutively entangled and intra-active (ibid. 210). Thus, unlike in classical physics, in quantum field theory the void, the vacuum “can’t be determinately nothing because the indeterminacy principle allows for fluctuations of the quantum vacuum” (Barad 2012b, 9). This indeterminacy and fluctuation allow for the understanding of virtual particles: virtuality being the infinite possibilities of being/nonbeing, “a ghostly non/existence” (ibid. 12) with which particles and the void are entangled and intra-acting at all times. To put it in other words, as the vacuum in

classical physics is empty, and virtual particles are not *real*, non-existing, in quantum theory the void is not empty and not of anything either. The infinity of im/possibilities is creating the fluctuation, virtual particles are “the quanta of the vacuum fluctuations”. (ibid. 11.)

Further, and back to the question of touching and intra-activity, while the classical physics’ view suggests an electron that resists other electrons as separate elements, in quantum physics the electron’s mass forms through intra-actions with itself, other particles and virtual particles; there is an infinite set of indeterminate possibilities within and through those (virtual) intra-actions of non/being. Here lies the queering of existence – in the un/doing of identity that indeterminacy brings, the multitude of im/possibilities. The tiniest micro bits of matter entail an infinite multitude of virtual and physical intra-activity. (Barad 2012a, 212–213.) In Barad’s (ibid. 215) account, touching (and sensing) is what matter does, or what matter is, for electrons, or any particles, touch through the response(-ability) in intra-activity: “In addition to all the various iteratively reconfiguring ways that electrons, indeed all material ‘entities,’ are entangled relations of becoming, there is also the fact that materiality ‘itself’ is always already touched by and touching infinite configurations of possible others, other beings and times”.

Finally, next to Egert’s, Manning’s and Barad’s approaches to touch, I will consider touch and especially the sensations of hapticity and sensory memories of touch through media scholar Laura U. Marks’ (2000) concept of *haptic visuality*. Haptic visuality refers to a corporeal mode of spectating that engages the spectator to experience haptic sensations through looking. Haptic visuality steps apart from optical visuality, in which the object of vision is understood as separate; “[...] in other words: how we usually conceive of vision” (Marks 2000, 162). Haptic visuality rather opens a co-constitution of the image and the spectator and works through triggering former sensory experiences one has; Marks’ work focuses on *intercultural cinema* and the culturally and situationally specific sensorial landscapes that might not be accessible when living in diaspora, as the sensorial environment changes through different locations and cultures. Marks works to point out how intercultural cinema engages the viewer to sense and trigger memories of touch, smell and taste. Even though Marks’ work focuses on intercultural cinema, which my work does not, I find the concept of haptic visuality applicable as it has to do with the interrelation of the senses and the active use of the gaze. I will apply Marks’



concept of haptic visuality in the analysis when discussing touch and other senses. Bringing to proximity Marks' and Egert's views on spectatorship, seeing and touching, I find haptic visuality to be central in live performance, not only in the audience's but also the performer's ways of engaging in a performance.

### 3.2 Materiality and embodiment

The ways of approaching touch theoretically, that I presented in the previous subchapter, work as entries to questions of materiality and embodiment. I see touch and tactile experiences as something that matter on the material of the body through distance, proximity and movement. In this section I discuss the theories of Ahmed, Butler and Barad, framing the approach to materiality and embodiment in this thesis.

Following Marks' (2000) account on embodied sensorial memories, I pay attention to the memory, the emotional and affective responses that formulate the body in time. Feminist scholar and writer Sara Ahmed (2004) suggests a performativity of emotions that reveals the repetition of past histories present in perceptions of emotion: past associations shape how bodies interpret and move in the present. Ahmed sees emotions as something that materialize to create a feeling of inside and outside, us and them, through the ways individuals align with other bodies, forming collectives, and collective feelings. While Ahmed does not make a clear distinction between emotion and affect, what is central to Ahmed's argument about emotions is that the impressions that people leave on each other's skins through different encounters, remain as memories in their flesh and surfaces. Through these impressions, intensifications of feelings, people move toward and/or away, marking the distinctness of the bodies. (Ahmed 2004, 29–30; 2014, 10–11.) In my analysis, I want to look at the different understandings of the material body the interviewees have, for which I find Ahmed's approach intriguing. Surfaces, layers, membranes and skin were central in the interview discussions which opens a flowing connection to Ahmed. On one hand, I will consider the skin as having a porosity that points at a dissolving of the understanding of in- and outsides – and on the other hand I will look at how the surface of the skin works to draw boundaries: "It is the fetishising of the skin as boundary-object that allows the contours of the body to appear as a given" (Ahmed & Stacey 2001, 3). In other words, I will look at ways

and patterns in which the boundaries of bodies become experienced through the skin (or forgetting about it).

In further respect of materialization and embodiment, and the movement of bodies, I will apply philosopher and gender studies scholar Judith Butler's theory of gender constitution and performative acts (1988; 1999; 2011). Butler (1988, 527; 2011, xii) places the materialization of bodies in the reiteration of stylized acts governed by the regulatory ideal. Sex for Butler is as much a social construct as gender, and the foremost order through which bodies organize (2011, xiv–xv). Here, the social heteronormative regulation *moves* the bodies of people in certain ways and thus the material body cannot be separated from the social; as materialization of the sexed body is discursive and constituted through reiteration of normative performative acts, materiality is "... power's most productive effect" (ibid. xii). Thus, sex and gender in the regulatory order constitute the bodies of people, and those bodies following the normative practices of the *heterosexual matrix* are indeed the bodies that matter. Since sex and gender are produced in and through frequently repeated acts, they become naturalized in the ways bodies move (1988, 519–531). This aspect of Butler's theory connects to what is of interest to me in performative (dance and movement) practices, as the very movements of body/ies, habitual and naturalized are put under exploration. As the heteronormative matrix has the power of defining which bodies become culturally intelligible, which bodies matter, it forms a domain for those bodies not illegible, an *exclusionary matrix* (Butler 2011, xiii). Thus, in the naturalized "stability" of sex/gender constitution lies the heterosexual imperative to enable certain sexed identifications and exclude other possible identifications; these excluded identifications place in the exclusionary matrix, as "abject beings, those who are not yet 'subjects,' but who form the constitutive outside to the domain of the subject" (ibid. xiii). This instability of materialization, the exclusionary matrix, opens in Butler's account the possibility for a rearticulation of, a disruption of the hegemonic heterosexual matrix (ibid. xiii). As the very materialization and processes of perceiving the body's materiality become central in dance and movement practices, I find it interesting to consider how work with touch in performative settings works with ideas of stabilizing and/or destabilizing the body's (naturalized) materiality in the data of this thesis research.

To extend and add upon Butler's understanding of materialization, Karen Barad's work guides us to look at the agency of all material, human and non-human. Barad (2007, 145) works further from Butler's performativity, critiquing Butler's theorization of materiality in that it is solely focusing on the materiality and agency of human bodies, that it is "parasitic of Foucault's notions of regulatory power and discursive practices, which are limited to the domain of human social practices". Therefore, Barad (ibid. 146) argues, Butler falls back to the nature-culture dichotomy they set out to contest. For a further articulation of matter's dynamism, in Barad's agential realism, which I will be applying in this thesis, "'matter' refers to phenomena in their ongoing materialization" (ibid. 151); matter does not refer to something fixed, but something that is in constant *becoming*, an ongoing intra-activity – something that is agential (ibid. 137). It is the concept of intra-activity that will guide my analysis when looking at the interviewees' experiences of working with touch in performative settings, and the ways in which boundaries of bodies become drawn. In my reading, Barad suggests that the boundaries that allow an understanding of separate bodies, are produced through different entangled networks of intra-active agencies, where human and nonhuman matter, discursive practices and material phenomena are not preexisting one another (ibid. 148). Thus, discursive practices and material phenomena are not separate from each other, and neither of them has a superior position to determine the other.

Matter and meaning, discursive practices and material phenomena are entangled together. (Barad 2007, 152.) Barad argues that language has been granted too much power to overtake matter (2003, 801; 2007, 132). When it comes to performativity, in the most often referred to theories of speech act theory and "performative utterances" from J.L. Austin (1962), things are done with words; taken further in Butler's "performative acts" (Butler 1988), where gender is *done*, performed, constituted through repeated and culturally stylized acts, Barad (2003; 2007) calls for the agency of matter. Performativity, rather than a semantic matter pertaining to words and then imposed to and manifested in embodied acts, is for Barad always already material. There is no passive, "natural" matter that would be waiting for the cultural signification, but all matter's agency formulates through intra-action rather than preceding it. (Barad 2012, 828.) For me, there is an interest to work with the notions of performativity and materiality through both Butler and Barad as I do want to grant language a specific power when looking at the work of performers. That has to do with how, more often

than not within dance and choreographic practices, the principles of working are first verbalized, then brought into more or less non-verbal practice. I am interested in considering the translation of words and meanings into actions and the embodied sensations that entails. Furthermore, Barad's intra-activity and agential realism are of interest to me, in order to allow a perspective that is not human centered – a view which I recognize often applied to choreographic and dance practices.

## 4 Conducting the research

Next, I will present the chosen methods and processes of data gathering and analysis and go through ethical considerations.

### 4.1 Finding participants

The six participants I interviewed for this research are professional dancers, performers and choreographers working as freelancers in the field of dance, choreography and performance. The six interviewees live in central Europe in Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands and Austria, and come from southern, eastern and central Europe. They have all studied dance and/or choreography around Europe at BA or MA level, or both, and worked internationally. Some of them have also other professions or educational backgrounds. Some of the interviewees had worked for more than fifteen years as performers and/or choreographers and some less than five. The participants are (called after the pseudonyms): Kim (they/them), Leah (she/her), Anette (she/her), Anna (she/her), Mazin (they/them) and Aleksandra (she/her).

Finding interviewees proved to be a stage of its own in the research and I got immersed in the process of collecting data (Lareau 2021, 196) – not just the stage of finding participants but also when doing the interviews. I saw this as an important phase of being closely in touch and grounded with the processing of data. I spent time searching online for artists that I could ask to join the interviews. This happened through googling, visiting different venues' webpages and archives, institutions' webpages and looking through such working groups that worked with choreographers I know use touch in their works. Through that I found artists' own webpages. Obviously, by choosing to contact individuals rather than to make an open invitation, I could approach people who had their email addresses publicly online, and not those who did not. This is important to point out as a limiting factor since it fixed the profile of possible participants. More than often than not, the artists who do maintain their own website are also artists that work as choreographers, meaning that I rarely bumped into a webpage of an artist who solely works as a performer. As it is with the artists who participated in this research, they all work as both choreographers and performers, and some in additional roles, like curators, teachers and/or artistic directors.

Even though touch and touching are central to dance practices, I could not assume anyone who works with dance to also work with touch, or to be interested in considering touch or intimacy in an interview discussion with me. Both of these factors were central to me; I wanted the interview session to be interesting for the participants. As said before, in looking for artists for the interviews, I chose to focus on looking for artists who had performed in works I knew contained proximity or touching, or artists whose biographies described their interests and work in a way I thought could come close to an interest of talking about touch and performing. Such ways were, more generally, interest in work with the senses and perception, for instance. Sometimes artists explicitly defined touch as a central interest in their work. Eventually, in the interviews, it turned out that the participants had extensive and elaborated knowledge on touch and intimacy through their artistic works and practices. Furthermore, some of the interviewees combined other fields of study with their movement and choreographic practices, like somatic approaches, or new materialist and cultural theory, for example. These specific interests and approaches of the interviewees have influenced the data a lot and it should be kept in mind that the participants carry with them years of experience and expertise on touch.

After finding the artists' contact information on their webpages, I gathered a group of approximately 20 artists and randomly drew first six, and then two more artists to contact. All in all, I sent an invitation by e-mail to eight artists of whom six were willing to participate. I did not know any of the interviewed artists personally from before, which was a clear choice I made to decrease the chances that someone who I knew would feel obliged to take part (Juvonen 2017, 397) or answer in a specific way in the interview. I also had not seen any of the artist's work.

My decision of inviting solely freelancers, who do not have a stable workplace or employer, is based on the manifoldness of the freelancer position; at the same time as the working conditions can be unpredictable, there is a sense of being able to *choose* work commitments according to one's artistic or other interests. On the other hand, of course, this *choosing* must be situated in the precariousness of art as a profession. As for my own experience, rather than being able to *choose*, the conditions of working are often framed by *chance* as the funding system works with far less resources than needed. However, freelancer position is very

different to the stable work position of a company dancer, whose artistic choices and content can be conditioned a lot by those of the company. Freelancer position, as is the case with the artists interviewed in this research, allows for more fluid positions as well: often artists work in many positions and roles as performers, choreographers, teachers, curators, directors.

When looking at the participants' experiences of working with touch in this research, I acknowledge that they are intertwined with experiences of gender, race, age, ability and disability. None of the participants mentioned any physical disabilities, some of them pointed out being able-bodied. Four of the participants took up gender in relation to their experiences of working with touch in performance: for example, challenging stereotypical representations of the female body, experiences of being sexualized by the audience and being read as male and thus being touched more roughly by colleagues were taken up. I will come back to the questions of gender in further detail in the analysis.

Race was not taken up in relation to experiences of working with touch in performative settings. Five of the six interviewees were white. Thus, the results of the research are also shaped by the privileges of whiteness; through the majority of the interviewees being white, as well as my, the researcher's, interpretation and analysis as a white person grown up in Finland. Looking at work with choreographed touch within Contact Improvisation (CI) through the lenses of race, caste and gender politics, dance scholar Royona Mitra (2021, 10) points out that "... not everyone can improvise freely without the fear of *how* power might enact on and harm our bodies in and through our CI partner's relational social positionings". White bodies, as they are not subjects of racial discrimination similarly to black and brown bodies, are in privileged position as the normative bodies of the dominantly white European/Global North dance field (Mitra 2021; Debonneville 2021).

Furthermore, the educational background of taking part in programs of different European universities undoubtedly shapes the formulation, interests and experiences of the participants. Most of the dance and choreography programs follow the European and North American lineage of dance, mostly from the early 1900's onward, where especially the turns of modern and postmodern dance are studied and critically examined. The training consists of e.g. movement exploration, various forms of improvisation, different dance techniques of

modern dance, ballet, jazz, somatic practices, among others, and depending on the program. In many of the programs, theoretical studies of art history, social theory and philosophy are also included (see study guide e.g. P.A.R.T.S. BA program).

## 4.2 Conducting semi-structured interviews

In this research I chose to use semi-structured interviews to collect data. In semi-structured interview the themes of the interview are defined beforehand by the researcher, but the order and formulations of questions are not fixed and can vary from interview to interview (Ruusuvuori & Tiittula 2005, 11). New questions can also arise during semi-structured interview which allows for non-predetermined topics to come up. Choosing semi-structured interviews as the method for data collection, I aimed at giving space to that which I cannot expect; to understand other's experiences; to challenge my preexisting assumptions (Josselson 2013, 2). I see this being central in studying the experiences of performers, as I do have my own experiences of the issue at hand, and do not wish to let my assumptions determine all of the interview questions. As an insider researcher, making assumptions should be challenged as there might be missed information in case of taking shared experiences for granted (Juvonen 2017, 398–399).

In its flexibility, the chosen method of gathering data supports the aims of my research to understand the experiences of performers in their work: as interviews, the ones conducted in this research can be seen as *narrative*, meaning that the focus in the interviews is indeed on the interviewees' stories about their experiences (Hyvärinen & Löyttyniemi 2005, 12). As I see the interviews as narrative, I see the experiences of each participant consisting of several stories that work as a net of embodied and narrated memories; they comprise of different lengths and intensities. By utilizing the methods of semi-structured interview and narrative research, I am enabling an in-depth research material and an analysis that highlights personal lived experiences, their differences and similarities, contradictions and unexpected discussions. In so doing I am also stressing the understanding of the performer as a sensing, living, and changing being with agency; affecting and being affected by the work they do – emphasizing on the performer's experience rather than what the performers mediate to the



audience. This is crucial in understanding how live performance can be analyzed not only from the spectator's but also from the performer's point of view.

Before the interviews I conducted one pilot interview with a friend and colleague of mine who works in the field of dance and performance art as a performer and choreographer. I used as structure the themes and questions that I had prepared. The interview questions (see Appendix) were formulated through four main themes: *touch*, *intimacy*, *materiality* and *verbalizations*. Already during the pilot interview, I gathered that the different themes were hardly separable and would certainly appear within one another, making it perhaps trickier to hold on to a structure, even on a thematic level. As a first-time interviewer, the pilot interview was very beneficial to me, and I could get a sense that how I would open the interview was rather crucial. As an opening question to the interview, I planned to ask the interviewees to tell about their professional background, and what was currently central to their artistic practice. This was to make the interviewee's work the starting point of the definition of how they think of touch.

I conducted the interviews during late January to early March 2023. They were of one hours to one hour twenty minutes long and were held online in zoom meetings in English. In the interviews I invited the participants to talk from the performer's point of view but without closing out the choreographer's viewpoints.

The semi-structured interviews allowed for quite streaming discussions with the participants, which was full and fruitful. Asking about the interviewees' professional background as an opening question turned out to be a rewarding opener, as I could adjust the planned questions to match what the interviewees had told me. I aimed at using a lot of the interviewee's own words in building questions during an interview to express that I am listening carefully (Lareau 2021, 95–96) but also to understand their experience in greater depth. As I had learned in the pilot, quite often the themes of *touch*, *intimacy*, *materiality* and *verbalizations* got intertwined in the rich reflections of the participants, and I adjusted the questions to the different approaches and experiences of each interviewee.

All the participants were expert on the topic and in their fields, which made the interviews engaged and rich. To allow for the interviewees' stories to float, as in many cases they did, I often chose to not interrupt and move to the next question, and rather ended up waiting until they had finished talking (Josselson 2013, 69). In some interviews this meant that I asked notably less direct questions; in one of the interviews there were only seven questions I presented directly, compared to the average of approximately thirteen questions. In this way, I aimed at giving space for the interviewees to talk from their experiences, rather than, through having a strict set of questions of my own interest, getting reports on the thoughts of the interviewees. In some of the interviews I did not ask questions from all of the themes, in case the interviewee had already covered the theme in their answer to something else. Considering this afterwards, I do wish I had presented more clearly questions concerning all of the themes, as the answers may have been different. After all, it was my own interpretation that a theme had been covered without asking a clear question. However, I do not think this ended up being a major mistake and I managed to gather comprehensive data.

All the interviewees were aware of my position as both master's student in gender studies as well as a dance and performance artist. As doing interviews from an insider position brings the benefits of shared understanding and experiences between the researcher and the participant (Juvonen 2017, 397), I believe that sharing the same profession brought to the interviews a lot of shared knowledge on e.g. the wider context and history of European dance and choreography, structuring work as a freelancer and working in artistic processes in general.

### 4.3 Thematic and narrative analysis

In this study I used methods of reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke 2021) and narrative analysis. I will next discuss the methods and then move on to describe the process of analysis.

Narrative analysis often relays on thematic analysis (Josselson 2011, 226), or the other way around. I have chosen to use thematic analysis, complemented with narrative analysis. I find reflexive thematic analysis particularly appealing as it stresses on the reflexivity of the researcher throughout the process of analysis: reflexive thematic analysis acknowledges the situatedness and subjectiveness of the researcher and stresses on the awareness and

questioning of the researcher's position (Braun & Clarke 2021). This kind of self-reflexivity seems central in doing research within gender studies and especially when doing research from an insider position. The combination of narrative and thematic analysis has worked for me as a tool to look at the stories of different lengths through the question of what kinds of patterns reoccur in the data.

In thematic analysis the researcher looks for, analyzes and interprets patterns and meanings within the data (Braun & Clarke 2006, 79). Thematic analysis is widely used within social sciences and beyond, and it is often seen as a complementary method with other qualitative research methods that offer clearer step-by-step guidelines for analysis. However, Braun and Clarke (ibid. 78) argue that "thematic analysis should be seen a foundational method for qualitative research".

In narrative research people's experiences are understood to form through stories: that people tend to explain and live their life through stories with a beginning, middle and end, and thus the stories represent their meaning making (Josselson 2011, 224). The stories take different lengths and shapes, and, according to Josselson, the stories show "how [people] connect and integrate the chaos of internal and momentary experience and how they select what to tell and how they link bits of their experience are all aspects of how they structure the flow of experience and understand their lives" (ibid. 224).

Narrative research is grounded in hermeneutics, literary analysis, phenomenology and ethnography (Josselson 2011, 225) and it is seen suitable in research of experience (Tökkäri 2018). This research focuses on artists' experiences related to working with touch in performative settings, and the focus holds inside different understandings of the timespan of how *experience* is understood. First, experience is understood as the sensations, emotions and affects that arise in one moment; how one's perception moves through touch. Next to that, experience is understood as knowledge that is gathered throughout time from being part of a context, working environment(s) – it refers to knowledge that consists of events, reoccurring or singular. Narrative analysis does not build on specific stages in the analysis, and thematic analysis can be seen as a form of/for narrative analysis (Tökkäri 2018, 78). It is suggested that narrative analysis is interested indeed in the narration of the experience and

the researcher does not necessarily expect the narratives to reflect reality (Tökkäri 2018, 65; Hyvärinen 2017, 174). My interpretations of the patterns and articulations found in the data are guided by the understanding that the descriptions and lived experiences of the interviewees' narratives are not separate from each other, but rather co-constitute the lived reality of the interviewees.

The data consists of 95 pages of transcribed interviews. After transcribing all the data, I first read through each interview one by one and took notes quite intuitively of the things I thought became important in the interviewees' reflections. Having done the first read-through, I collected all the interviews in one table where I could continue with coding and writing notes on reoccurring themes, topics and patterns. I also paid attention to the differences that became visible in the participants' choices of wordings, for example, or narratives of their respective experiences.

I came to 15 topics that I have further collected under the five themes of 1) ways of understanding touch, which I discuss in the first two subchapters of the analysis; 2) understanding the body and materiality, which I discuss in the third and fourth subchapters; 3) aspects on cultural codes, e.g. how gendered norms, assumptions and expectations were present when working with touch, which I mainly discuss along in the fourth subchapter; 4) experiences of practicing the ways of understanding the body and touch, which concerns all of the subchapters in the analysis; and finally 5) questions of consent and power relations, which I discuss in the last subchapter of the analysis. The themes are, as noted before, in relation to the themes in the interview protocol, often interrelated and overlapping – yet grouping the findings like this helped in conducting the analysis in a structured manner. To differentiate between the individual overlappings and connections specific to each interviewee, I wrote descriptions of the narratives of each interviewee under the risen themes.

In the analysis I have looked into the different kinds of narratives described by the interviewees of both shorter moments of experiencing touch as well as the longer, possibly undefined timespans of their experiences in working as artists in the field of dance, performance and choreography. I have then recognized and looked for patterns in the

narratives of the interviewees. The ways of conceptualizing touch and the body, and the ways in which the conceptualizations and stories are describing the experiences of the interviewees have been central in the analysis. Throughout the process of analysis, I have deepened and refined the theoretical approach to the findings.

#### 4.4 Ethical considerations

All the participants received from me prior to the interview a privacy notice, according to Tampere University's requirements in master's thesis research, as well as a consent form as pdf files. I provided the participants with information about the aims of the research, the interview and their position as participants in the research. All of the interviewees gave consent to participation verbally in the zoom interview. Taking into consideration possible technical failures or other inconveniences, I wanted to run two recorders simultaneously (Lareau 2021, 69). I recorded the interviews through zoom directly and with my phone's voice recorder, and I always made my intentions clear to the participants and asked for their consent to record before turning on the recorders. After making sure I have successful recordings from each interview recorded on zoom, and having transcribed all of them, I deleted permanently the recordings on my phone. Both the zoom recordings and transcribed interviews are stored on my personal computer behind a password and will be destroyed after finishing the thesis.

To secure the participants' anonymity, I left out all names of people, places and titles of artistic works when transcribing the interviews. I recontacted all the participants to ask whether they had a preferred pseudonym they would like to be called by, and which pronouns they wished to be used of them in this thesis. Using pseudonyms is a central point when considering anonymity, and the process of choosing the pseudonym might be meaningful to the participant (Allen and Wiles 2016, 149). I wanted to invite the participants to come up with pseudonyms for themselves to respect the possible wishes of the participants and remain a dialogue in the research and analysis that is affected a lot by my, the researcher's, subjective experiences, biases and situatedness (Ramazanoglu & Holland 2002). In the end, only one of the interviewees in the group wanted to choose their pseudonym their self, whereas others either preferred that I come up with a pseudonym for them or did not reply.

In case I did not get a reply, I used the pronoun used on the interviewee's website and came up with a pseudonym. One of the interviewees pointed out that using pseudonyms seemed unnecessary, taking into account the content of our interview – as the topic was not too personal or intimate, but just about work, why should pseudonyms be used? However, I decided to stick with the initial plan and use pseudonyms with all the interviewees. After all, to take part anonymously in the research was what the interviewees had given consent to in the first place. Additionally, to be fulfilled, the aims of this research did not require the usage of anyone's personal data. Lastly, I found it sensible to follow the initial plan and use pseudonyms as the thesis document will be available online and it will not be possible to edit it afterwards, in case it would be the wish of the participant at some point in the future.

To further reflect upon my position as an insider researcher, my educational and professional background, as well as my ongoing practice in dance and choreography have shaped my interest towards the topic of the research; I have been interested in questions of touch and intimacy in and through dance since more than the past six to seven years. Furthermore, my initial interest in queer and feminist theory has indeed risen through the contexts of my previous studies in dance as well as from the professional field where the combination of theory and practice have been explored in movement. My own previous knowledge of the topic thus guides processes in this research, to which I will remain attentive and critical.

## 5 Working with touch and intimacy in performative settings

In this chapter I will present the findings and analyze them through chosen theories. I will consider the findings in relation to the research questions and look at what kinds of understandings of touch and the body the interviewees had, what kinds of sensations and experiences of the materiality of touch and the body were generated through these understandings, and finally, how questions of consent and power dynamics were present.

The analysis proceeds as follows: in the first subchapter, applying Karen Barad's (2007) agential realism and Laura U. Marks' (2000) concept of *haptic visibility*, I will discuss how the interviewees understood touch through, and sometimes as other senses. In the second subchapter I will look at the interviewee's narratives in which touch was not limited to direct physical touch but present in the relational movement and attention between human, and non-human, bodies. I will further apply Barad's (2007) *intra-activity* as well as discuss the findings in relation to Gerko Egert's (2019) and Erin Manning's (2006) theorizings of touch. In the center of the third subchapter are the ways in which the interviewees viewed the body, often referring to *surfaces* and *layers* of the body. Here, I will consider Sara Ahmed's (2004; 2014) views of how bodies shape and orientate through emotions. In the fourth subchapter I will further discuss the interviewee's experiences of the social and cultural aspects of the materiality of the body through Judith Butler's (2011) gender constitution and their concept of *heteronormative matrix*. In the fifth and final subchapter I look at the interviewee's experiences of vulnerability, trust and consent in work with touch in performative settings and consider those in relation to intimacy coordinating. Thus, in the last subchapter the approach is a little more practical than in the other subchapters of the analysis.

### 5.1 Touch and other senses

One of the most commonly shared approach to touch in performative work among the interviewees was that other senses were actively present when, or connected to, working with touch. For example, Leah connected touching and listening.

Leah: *And for me listening has to do with touch. Because we always have this idea that listening or being touched is a passive thing, it just happens. And it's not true, like it's actually active, you can only hear. So, I really work with these processes that make listening active.*

Leah connected passivity, touch and listening. In her narrative there was a frustration that touching and listening are generally seen as passive, which Leah did not think holds true. She saw listening and being touched as active and explored and played with the roles of active and passive in her work. In the point of view of Barad (2007), as all matter is intra-active, entangled relations of becoming, *passivity* is also produced actively, through material-discursive practices; matter is "... an active participant in the world's becoming, in its ongoing intra-activity" (ibid. 136). That is, a materiality of passivity is not a matter of passive matter without agency. Passivity, as well as listening and being touched can be seen as traditionally connected to femininity. To contest the gendered characteristics of femininity was one approach in Leah's work as well. Leah questioned the idea of the (feminine) body as passive, static and merely receiving; similarly, for Barad (ibid.), matter is not static but in constant intra-action. Leah contested the understanding of listening, as well as being touched, as passive through *making* it active. The *making* can be understood to happen on a more conceptual level by defining listening as active since, as Leah noted, she actually did not believe that it is not already active. In practice, the *making* happened then, indeed, through practicing listening or being touched, where the material of the body is active at all times by merely existing. In Leah's formulation the bodily, material processes of listening and being touched were in the focus; she understood touch not through the separation of the different senses but as active sensing of the body that brings together the different senses.

Anna pointed out that for her the sensations of working with non-direct touch (leaving space between touching surfaces) and direct touch (bringing surfaces together) with a working group in a performance project were not notably different. This had to do with the experience of the co-operation of the senses of touching and seeing. She had experienced that the sensation did not change a lot when direct skin-to-skin touch appeared between herself and her colleagues, when having first worked with being aware of spatial positioning in relation to others, distances, creating connection with others without direct physical contact.



*Anna: Like, this touch comes a bit later, yet... like the connection is already created when we're apart. So, when the touch itself comes, it doesn't really change so much, for me at least, because the connection is already so charged... yeah, that the physical touch is just the... almost like the visual.*

For Anna, a connection to other performers' bodies, a sense of contact was already established before direct touch appeared. She described the connection that was created through the non-direct sense of touch, through the visual, as charged. As the connection was established through the visual, the space in between her and others was acknowledged on a sensory level, and when direct touch appeared, it did not change the sensation so much, at least for Anna. She told that the practice she was referring to in the quote above was "really concentrated in listening to yourself and others" and "reaching out for the contact and constant touch". Not experiencing such a difference in non-direct and direct touch suggests a conceptualization of touch that is, like in Anna's narrative, "almost like the visual"; seeing and touching, or sensing touch are closely linked, they work together.

*Haptic visuality* refers to a connection between the tactile, or haptic, and the visual: as where "the eyes themselves function like organs of touch" (Marks 2000, 162). While Marks (ibid.) formulates haptic visuality as a way through which cinema can arouse multisensory experience, I find it sensible to apply here in relation to live performance as *haptic visuality* as a term highlights the perception of viewing images, the tendency of hapticity in the perception (ibid. 162). In other words, haptic visuality refers to the perceiving of visual images as sensory, haptic information, which I find applicable in relation to live performance as the main observing tool is most often vision. In Anna's description above, however, instead of the audience, the performer is the spectator, viewing the other performers and the space around, while making a conscious choice in focusing on work with perception and paying attention to the connections in the space. To perceive with haptic visuality is to connect with ones' memory and/or imagination of touch. As Marks defines it, haptic visuality suggests that the viewer works to engage with the image: "Haptic visuality requires the viewer to work to constitute the image, to bring it forth from latency. It resembles what Sobchack (1992, 93), using the terms of existential phenomenology, calls *volitional, deliberate* vision: the act of viewing is one in which both I and the object of my vision constitute each other" (ibid. 183).

From this point of view, as Anna engaged in perceiving the bodies of co-performers from distance or proximate distance, it happened through sensing on her skin which again shapes, constitutes how she moves, and what and how she perceives.

Anette, too, linked touching and seeing together. She had worked with touch “as a sort of strategy”. As one of the strategies, she brought up bringing together senses of touching and seeing. Anette talked about *gazing* rather than seeing, which in my understanding refers to the particular focus that is put on the activity of *looking at* something or someone; gazing is intentional, directed and more explorative of the different ways, or here, performative principles, of seeing. In one sense, gazing can be understood as feeling with the eyes: eyes as organs of touch (Marks 2000, 162). Similarly, Anette and her working group worked with *touching through the gaze*.

*Anette: You could see two things, there was, like, the touch that could kind of reoccur, in a way, interest with touch, and then the second was gaze, as well, and that also, that you could touch through the gaze, and how you can share the touch through the gaze, as well. So, there was a very direct link between these two things. -- We talked a lot about the triangle. So, if, like... it could be also more than three but, like, if you have two performers, and then there is the spectator, that if you touch your colleague, your co-performer, you look not at the one you touch but you look at the audience so you kind of think that you're touching the person you're looking at and not the person... So, by this triangle, we practiced that a lot, also amongst each other. And, also, even when you would, in the group touch one person, you would not... you would hardly ever look there where you touch. So, you... it was also about a split attention and to ci-... to let it circulate, this sensation, in a way. Because the moment you look at what you touch, this circulation happens just between the one that is being touched and the one that is touching. So, we constantly split it, open it up, this sensation, with the gaze.*

The way of working with touch and gaze is specific to the performance Anette was talking about, yet it exemplifies how performative work can be used to expand the notions of touch and gaze and blur the line between the categories of these senses through making them quite

explicit. In this work of Anette and her colleagues, touch was *shared* through eye *contact* with the members of audience while direct touch was happening between the performers. For Anette, this offered a way of touching through the gaze, and she saw that there was a very direct link between touch in its direct physical form and touch that happened through the gaze. This was also a way of being in touch with the audience – something that was less present over all in the interviews when defining touch, although also Anna brought up the audience's gaze as a form of touch. In Anette's example, in one sense, the audience was invited to take part in the exploration of what touch is through direct eye contact, through using gaze as touch or as means of sharing touch.

In a way, Anette and the co-performers made haptic images live. Marks (2000, 163) defines *haptic image* as follows: "The haptic image forces the viewer to contemplate the image itself instead of being pulled into narrative. Thus, it has a place in Deleuze's time-image cinema. Optical visibility, by contrast, assumes that all the resources the viewer requires are available in the image". Haptic image thus calls the viewer to co-constitute the image by recalling former sensory experiences while the image does not offer a ready-made explanation of how to perceive; haptic image invites the viewer to sense the image rather than interpret a storyline from the outside. In Anette's example the invitation to engage in the live haptic image of one performer touching another performer was produced through direct eye contact with audience, through gazing. The connection through eyes between the performer and an audience member worked as an arouser for tactility, an evoker of sensations in the viewer, as an invitation to sense the touch happening between the performers, through the viewer's own history of perception – at the same time as Anette and the co-performers were sensing each other's touches on their skins. In Anette's narrative, the placing of the gaze also affected her experience of the touch; shifting the gaze away from what/who one was touching allowed a *circulation* of the sensation to be shared.

For Anna, gaze could sometimes be more direct than physical skin-to-skin touch and this was connected to the sensing of the audience's gaze.

*Anna: Also, the gaze can touch and sometimes even more directly than the bodily contact. And it's less controlled, somehow. -- I think as a performer then, whether*

*we work in contact with other performer or not, you are in contact with the audience, or... I think that most of the performer wants that, be looked at, I mean, like, to get in contact. Mm... Yes, so. I think it directs connection.*

Anna connected being in touch and gazing: being looked at by the audience connected to understanding gaze as touching, as Anna's narrative suggests. Anna understood being looked at by the audience as getting into *contact*. The audience's gaze is in one sense touching the performer, which is sensed by Anna as the performer. In relation to haptic visuality, as the context of my application of the concept here is in live performance, both the viewer and the viewed are actively sensuous, touching and touched, an image and imagining, gazing and being gazed. This opens the understanding of haptic visuality going both ways, eventually blurring the line between the object and subject of gazing. In Anna's case, at the same time as she is exploring touch through vision, Anna is also being perceived by viewers through haptic visuality, which she again can feel on and through her skin, at times even "more directly than the bodily contact".

As I noted above, the perspective of audience's gaze as touch did not occur in any other interviews. This is an interesting point of view, however, as it expands the idea of gaze as touch to be present in other roles than just the performer's. Additionally, it opens up questions of power relations present between audience members and performers – that can link to gendering and othering ways of gazing – which I will come back to in chapter 5.5. when I discuss vulnerability, trust and consent in work with touch.

Next to the link between seeing and sensing touch, Anna added later in the interview that also other senses, like smell seems to work in cooperation with the tactile sense. After a short contemplation, Anna defined smell as a form of touch, concluding: "I don't know if we can say that smell can touch you, but it does especially if you're so close". When considering the sense of smell in relation to the sense of vision, more proximity is required for the smell to become sensed. Vision and smell as possible forms touch might work differently as the question of distance and proximity play different roles in each of them – as Anna added, "especially if you're so close". Depending on the distance, smell reaches different intensities, and from afar maybe none at all, whereas vision might work to arouse the tactile sense from

further distance. Then again, when looking at smell as *haptic* information, memory plays a part in the formulation of sensory experience; through visual images (which I here will take the freedom to expand to *live* visual images) different sensory modalities can be triggered (Marks 2000, 163–164). A body's sensory experiences are based on past physical experiences, affective and cultural, that work in haptic visuality in the way of touch – as haptic sensuous experiences. Marks' (ibid. 2; 162) discussion of haptic visuality brings along the arousal of sense of smell through film and points out how cinema can provoke multisensory experiences. However, Anna approached smell as the act of smelling something rather than as when an image evokes a memory of a particular smell – although one can learn to remember the particular odors of co-performers and those memories can be triggered from great distance, when looking at them, too.

Until now, I have presented different approaches to touch in performative work that link to seeing, smelling and listening. Another way of understanding the link between touch and other senses in performative work was Aleksandra's approach in which tactility was the primary sense that takes in all the information, be it visual, sound or smell.

*Aleksandra: I started somehow to work with the touch, with the tactility seriously, referring to not only to the body, the skin and, like, touch itself but also to other senses... as, at the end everything what we perceive are the elements that, that hit the memb-... like, it's all based on the tactile sense.*

In the quote it is notable that there was a change in how Aleksandra approaches touch; she started to work with touch more *seriously* than before, going further with thinking of the body and the skin, and towards the whole sensory system. *Seriously* here means that the tactile sense was placed in the center of meaning-making: understanding the tactile sense as the base for processing all information, yet not separate from other senses as the other senses work through tactility. For Aleksandra, working with imagination was connected to the work with touch. She told me that in her work with touch she imagines all the information that reaches her as touch. This information that is received through the sensory system, so all of the senses, hits the membrane of the skin, the tactile sensory organ and, so, touches her, or even *is* touch.

Aleksandra: *It's work with imagination. To allow myself to receive the information that is coming from... that, like, for me it's... I imagine it as touch.*

Taking this into consideration, touch in Aleksandra's narrative was not limited to direct physical touch but happened through the activity of the sensing skin, the tactile organ. Aleksandra's narrative suggests that for her, imagination informed the very experience of receiving touch. This allowing of perceiving all information was *active* and intentional. Aleksandra imagined touch as the *information*, and in this case the information could be any kind of stimulus – or considered as the activity of matter in the Baradian sense: Barad (2012, 215) formulates touch as what matter does or, further, *what matter is*. Thus, in Aleksandra's approach, sensing touch was not limited to the encounters of human bodies. Rather, her approach could be understood as an active understanding of touch as something that matters; as something that is the material becoming of the body, or even the situation as a whole, where something that is perceived as *immaterial* in the everyday understanding becomes to be perceived as mattering through imagination and active sensing.

Posing the question of what kinds of intra-actions became present in the interviewees' narratives of touch, the question of what kinds of boundaries were produced through these narratives – it is noticeable that sensing and touching, perceiving and touching were understood through blurred lines, touching was not just the act of being in physical skin-to-skin contact; the sense of touch was not only intertwined with other senses but also imagination. Intra-actions of senses of smelling, seeing and listening were entangled in the haptic experiences of the interviewees, used as tools for working with touch as well as viewed as touch. Further, the presence of audience members and their act of watching was entangled in the interviewee's sensing of touch when performing. Through touch and tactility, the materiality of the skin, the body as the main locus for sensing was generally understood as active at all times among the interviewees. As touch was understood as something that does not necessarily require direct skin-to-skin, or surface-to-surface contact, active sensing of distances, spatial connections and orientations became central to touch. In the next chapter I will go on to discuss how touch was also seen, through this active sensing, as a focusing on relationalities and the spaces in between two, or more, surfaces.

## 5.2 Relationality and the space in between

Leah: *I think it's very important to think in touch that the touch is beyond the hands-touch in our body, that is more expanded, and that is not passive from... and that is also always a multi-... a multi-place and material and creates worlds and... and force! I think that's the interesting thing, no? Has a power. Mm, it moves!*

For Leah, touch had multiple meanings and wordings. As I read it in the quote above, Leah looked at touch as “beyond the hands-touch” and connected to being active; actively creating meanings and movement. Leah’s understanding of touch was not limited to direct physical contact, which was “very important” to understand. This importance, as I understand it, can be seen as connected to touch’s transformative potential, creative power and relational movement: Leah described touch as “something relational and transformatory”. In this sense, she viewed touch as being in touch, being in relation, and further, being in relation as something undefined, as it bears transformative potential.

Touch can be thought of as *relationality of movements*, as “complex formation of movements and relations” (Egert 2019, 14). Touch, that “cannot be reduced to a momentary immediate proximity” (ibid. 12) – something that I have called *direct physical* or *skin-to-skin contact* – bears potentiality in its abundance of possibilities of what becomes actualized in the relationality (ibid. 17). The potentiality lies in the distance that is inherent to touch, but also, that bodies in relation are not going to reach a finishing, closing or conclusive state (ibid. 33). For Leah, touch not only moves but it “creates worlds”, too, which suggests a non-predetermined outcome of bodies in relationality; in touch, in *entangled relations of becoming* different material entities are intra-acting, and in constant touch with “infinite configurations of possible others, other beings and times” (Barad 2012a, 215). Touch is what matter does or is; matter is in constant intra-action with particles, virtual and actual; intra-action is being in touch, and through it, reconfigurings of the world become realized (ibid.).

For Leah, touch connected to an idea of resonance, which can be seen in the interview excerpt below. Resonance connected to the process of transforming. Transforming, then, referred to the material reconfigurings of the body.

Leah: *But mostly when I work, my idea of touch is, like the idea of projecting something into a surface, or taking a surface or a texture in and letting it resonate into the entire body and shape [the body] from the inside. And then... So, I see it very spatial and about a plural process of streams.*

As can be seen in the quote above, the transformative potential of touch for Leah lay in the ability to shape the body “from the inside”. Resonance was located on the surfaces of bodies, and reached from there all of the body, and so worked to shape the body throughout. Even though “something”, which could be interpreted as touch, was said to be “put” on the surface and then “letting it resonate”, the surface, the body was not passive but taking part in the resonance. The touch and resonance were in between the one touched and the one touching, as for Manning (2006, 29), too: “[b]odies in touch resonate, caressing the fullnesses in-between, creating not distance or closeness but movement toward, always toward”. Resonance for Leah was an active, transformative exchange between bodies, and more; “very spatial” and “a plural process of streams”. Furthermore, this was for her also a process of challenging the distinctive individuality of a body.

Leah: [Touch] *makes you have a little bit of what you touch inside of your body and, and it ste-... so, the subject steps out. It's like in and out and you can vibrate with, in high resonance...*

The “subject steps out” when coming into contact with another, and the space that the touch creates contests the division of separate entities, as the touch shapes the ones touching: in a sense, it is *vibrant matter*, following Jane Bennett (2010, 23–24), in distributive agency: bodies, human and nonhuman, act together, forming assemblages; they are vibrant in the vibrant becoming together. Leah’s account and experience on touch built around the narrative that touch has transformative power. Touch was not limited to direct physical touch, yet it operated in the material body by shaping it through movement. The touching of bodies, even from the distance, worked as a materializing, or crystalizing the bodies through relational movement (Egert 2019, 33). In other words, in Leah’s narrative, the moving bodies formulated themselves together without a predetermined conclusion. Following Manning and Nancy, Egert (ibid.) suggests that the coming together of movements, that is the touch,



creates the bodies, and further “[...] it is the virtual dimension of movement in particular, in which it exceeds itself and is thus more than one body”. Looking through Barad, here the intra-acting agents are touch and (or, which also is) the material of the bodies, as well as what constitutes the identity of the subject.

Kim also looked at the vibrancy of materials; not just the human material but everything surrounding. They had explored touch with objects through practices that often happen between human bodies in the dance studio, different ways of touching for warm-up – for example massage. This was connected to relating to all im/material things as agents, and meant going away from an objectifying, manipulating touch; or what Kim described as “executing power over something”. They were interested in being in constant dialogue with the different (human and non-human) agents in the space.

*Kim: But I’ve done a kind of a lot of research and exploration also on touch with objects. And textures and air, also, so not just the material things but also the immaterial things betw-... like just the, yeah, the space in between the visible things also to acknowledge how the skin is touching the air all the time.*

Kim’s practice and working with touch held inside also touch with “immaterial things” such as air. As Kim worked with touch, they worked with “fine-tuned perception” that included the quantum physical approach, in which all matter has agency, and attention is put on the relations between different agents. Kim referred to new materialist thinking and their approach had a lot in common with Karen Barad’s agential realism, entanglement and intra-action. As Kim told, in their combination of theoretical thinking and the embodied practice of fine-tuned perception, the different agents were intra-acting, “unfolding a dialogue”. Unfolding a dialogue meant for Kim creating relations, letting those unravel through committing, giving and receiving attention.

*Kim: I looked a lot into quantum physics and how, like, different layers, like the vibrancy of materiality is and what’s actually happening underneath these layers that we can’t see and how that also shifts how we think about other things, like, for example pens and, like, just looking at different layers kind of, of reality but*

*that's of course things that you don't, you don't really see when you look with kind of like the normative trained eyes but it requires a different way of looking or sensing things. -- The second one I call intra- action, so where I stay present as a subject, kind of, and just acknowledge different relationships that are forming to other things in the environment and then unfolding a dialogue, kind of, between... between different entities in the space. -- Unfolding a dialogue means kind of... yeah, entering a process together so not just having one moment but like it requires already a commitment with each other for a certain amount of time, let's say. So yeah. And then it's kind of weaving, giving and receiving that is, I think, one of the basic principles for me of like unfolding a dialogue, it means to give input but also be able to listen and to receive.*

Different objects, textures, the skin as well as the air had agency in Kim's approach, like in Barad's (2007) agential realism that is not centering or privileging the agency of the human. In this approach, as touch was not something that was looked at through contact between just humans, Kim had been training "non-hierarchical perception of space", which in this case connected to a more non-categorized perception of touch in terms of what could be thought of as an active, touching agent; human as well as the more-than-human (Barad 2007; Bennett 2010). In Kim's approach to touch, as they noted, a different way of looking or sensing things was applied; one that challenged "the normative trained eye". I understand this as challenging a human-centered perception of relationality: not only the human agent is affected by and in an intra-action but so is the air, the pen, or the particles when zooming into the microscale. As Kim at one point of the interview put it, touch for them is also "particles dancing with each other". Kim's application of theoretical thought in movement practices and working with touch called for decentering the human everyday understanding of scale and zooms into the plane of vibrating particles. While bringing along commitment, listening, giving and receiving, this approach was not decentering human responsibility but rather pointing at it, and the relationality with the more-than-human.

In Mazin's approach to touch in performative work *the space in between* was also present. They were particularly interested in exploring the touch that was not necessarily direct physical contact. They told me they had worked with the "focus on the energetic-and-

somatic-and-physical-exchange-that-is-happening -sort of touch". One example Mazin told me about was touch that worked through "removing the intention" of touching. Referring to the Michelangelo painting from the 1500's, *Creation of Adam*, that is part of the fresco paintings in Sistine Chapel in Rome, Mazin described a "third space of unknownness" emerging through the reaching fingers that do not touch. For them, the space in between the pointed fingers of God and Adam held the power of the image, as it did in researching touch through artistic practice.

*Mazin: So, like, removing the intention upon the touch so that a third space of unknownness, of unintentionality can exist between the body listening and the body being touched. And I think there is something very... at least for me there is something very fundamental about this in-between-space which is the kind of touch that I primarily want to explore, I would say.*

This space in between for Mazin was something unknown, similarly to Erin Manning's (2006, 53–55) account of the fresco in question, and Manning's writing on the space in between self and other. Touch becomes manifested in an untouchability (ibid.); for Egert (2019, 12; 15) distance is inherent to touch. In the quote above, Mazin was referring to touch that was based on practices of craniosacral therapy, in which the "intention upon the touch" was removed. It remained unclear to me, in the end, whether the removal of intention happened on the level of thought while remaining in contact or realizing physical space in between two bodies. However, this did not seem like an important question; what was considered here was that what is between two, or more, bodies. Furthermore, in Mazin's narrative, by removing the intention of touch, the ones touching could realize another dimension of touch – one that was yet unknown. Connected to Mazin's approach, in Manning's (2006, 11) account, touch is always creating a rearticulation of space and time for the ones perceiving it, and this can be looked at as the unknown.

Similarly for Leah, as a rearticulation of space and time, the resonance and movement that touch entailed "creates volume and space" where the transformative potential connected to the idea of unknownness in touch. Even though Leah did not explicitly talk about unknownness, she described touch as follows: "the touch is porous, at the same time it's

many things, it transcends, you cannot protect yourself...". In this sense, there was unknownness in the transcendence and exposure to the other from which one cannot be separate; one cannot touch without being touched (Manning 2006, 11).

Through the attention given to the space in between, the transformative and the unknown, the experience of losing the sense of one's own body's boundaries was common in many of the interviews. Anna experienced that she "can forget [her] body as well at that time" when working with touch in the broadened sense, whereas Kim told that they could sense "almost as if there was no boundary between the floor and [them]" as I asked what became central to their perception when working with fine-tuned perception. Leah described the sensations produced by the work in which she, merging bodies with two co-performers, "really tried to cross the boundaries of each other" through touch, as airy, as well as having "softness and viscosity". Leah and her colleagues were focusing on remaining physical skin-to-skin contact, and in this sense actually trying to exhaust the space in between their bodies. In Leah's narrative this practice of merging of her and the co-performers' bodies led to the sensation of a pleasurable alienation; of losing the sense of "being your body" and consequentially to the sensation of shifting the state she was in.

*Leah: And sometimes I also... it creates a lot of energy so what you get, it's a bit a sensation sometimes of "hey, your body stops being your body" and sometimes you land into places you've never been before, it's very strange, it really alienates the body but in a very pleasurable way.*

As it can be seen in the excerpt above, for Leah work with touch allowed her to "land into places you've never been before", which was connected to a feeling of what Leah called alienation of the body. Leah's experience, as well as the other interviewees' experiences of dissolving boundaries connect to Manning's (2006) politics of touch: through being in touch, time and space are created together and what is being created is not something predetermined. *Alienation* in Leah's quote referred to a pleasurable feeling of being in touch through the idea of merging together, which differs from the usual meaning of the concept as rather disconnecting; for Leah, the disconnecting, having a different detached sensation in and of her body happened "in a very pleasurable way". For Manning, an other's skin, an

other's body is impenetrable in the sense that as we are in touch, *I* do not become *you* (ibid. 11). One's body does not simply stop being one's body; as time and space are created in touch, one is being in relation, changing (ibid. 47). For Leah, the sensations of forgetting oneself and merging with other bodies on the contrary became present through paying attention and listening to the relations with other bodies; even though she did not necessarily *become* the other, her sense of self loosened.

As I have shown in this chapter, touch in performative work was often understood through the space in between the ones touching. Relationality was something that the interviewees mentioned a lot, and what was meant by it was practicing being attentive to the space in between the touching parties, and sometimes the immaterial things. Resonance and vibration were also words used when describing touch in performative work. For some, it meant also the possibility of transforming, of shaping the material of the body and often led to losing or transforming the sense of one's own body's boundaries.

### 5.3 The layered body

The ways of understanding the body became a central topic in the interviews both through the questions I had prepared as well as through the interviewees' own initiation. Ways of understanding the materiality of the body was one of the predetermined themes in the interview protocol. However, I ended up asking a direct question about the interviewees' approaches to the materiality of the body in just two of the interviews. In the other four interviews answers for that theme were covered through other questions. This indicates that it is rather common in the contexts of dance and movement practices the interviewees were involved in, to rethink the construction of the body through verbal framings and visualization. Next to the experiences of the body as transforming through touch and losing the sense of bodily boundaries, a reoccurring pattern in the interviewee's narratives was that the body was looked at from a very non-Cartesian viewpoint, understood as energetic, emotional, culture-bound, layered and active. Aspects of the gendered body came up in relation to work with touch.

The interviewees talked about the energetic body, the multiple layers of the body, the skin, membrane and surface of the body. As many of the interviewees talked about *surfaces* of the

body, I paid attention to what the different meanings of surface were. Mostly, surface referred to skin. The interviewees had different kinds of wordings when it came to how they were describing the skin. Kim described skin as “just a permeable surface” whereas Leah claimed “but it’s... no, it’s a space” rather than *just* a surface. What I see in common to these ways of looking at the skin is that they both suggest a skin that opens up to possibilities; it is not static, and it is not passive: the skin, and the whole body is in constant intra-action with what one comes to be in touch with. The impressions of different encounters with others are *felt* on the surface of the skin (Ahmed 2004, 33), even from a distance.

Kim and Aleksandra talked about the multiple layers of the skin. Through the quantum physical approach, Kim’s understanding of the body in performative work with touch formed through the vibrancy of materiality. Kim talked about the physical body, the energetic body and the layers of the body, that were for them “more subtle” layers, not visible to the eye.

*Kim: I started to work more with, like, the perception and really fine-tuned perception. So, not just the physical body but also the energetic body and kind of all much more like subtle... subtle layers you can perceive. Within and around this physical form. So that is very central for me now when it comes to body practice, also arising from questions of how we are... yeah, connecting or relating with each other and not just... but not just with each other but also with everything, each other also meaning our environment or the things of our rooms, of our spaces, that we kind of share spaces with. Yeah, you could say like, yeah, with the environment but also you could say, like, with all these other entities that are in the space and how we interact and relate to and with them and also there I feel my understanding, or my perception has sensitized to this interrelation, to these interrelations.*

Kim referred to the body as “not just the physical body” but also as “energetic” and “layered”. In Kim’s approach, there were more “subtle layers” in the body that could be sensed through fine-tuned perception. These layers do not only comprehend the human body but can be understood to extend to the surrounding environment and other human and non-human beings. For Kim, as they talked about understanding the body in work with touch and fine-

tuned perception, they saw relating with other bodies – other entities – as crucial. The relating required sensitizing and attention, as well as care. In Kim’s account, the interrelations and dialogue with the other entities constituted movement, and thus could be understood to shape materiality in the *subtle layers* of the body. In this sense, too, in what Kim described, as the materiality of the body is shaping in relation to others, “distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-action” (Barad 2007, 33).

Aleksandra understood the body to form through layers that were physical as well as non-physical; they were within, outside and beyond the body.

*Aleksandra: I look at the body as multilayered. So, I look... I put attention to the surfaces of my body that are... there are many, many different surfaces inside of my body and there is also the surface outside of my body and then there are also surfaces that are beyond my body that are more, like, going to the cultural sphere... like, cultural, social spheres or, like, meaning emotionality. So, I refer to all of this as... or, like, I perceive all of this as the surfaces that can be touched.*

For Aleksandra, there were multiple layers in the body, and all those layers could be touched. In the quote above, Aleksandra understands the surfaces inside the body as the material surfaces, like the fascia, or different organs. Aleksandra refers to the surface “outside” the body in singular form, which I interpret to refer to the outside layer of the skin. Finally, those layers that go “beyond” the body are explained as the cultural and social spheres, that she specifies to emotionality. Thus, for Aleksandra the body is not limited to its physical boundaries; like touch is not limited to its direct physical form.

As the interviewees talked about surfaces, it is interesting to look at how those layers beyond the physical body can be understood to materialize in the shape of movement of the body. For Ahmed (2004), emotions work as to materialize in the ways individuals align with and move in relation to other bodies, spaces and objects. Ahmed (ibid. 25; 30) refers to this as *surfacing*. Emotions are not something that an individual has and that they express from the inside out but emotions in fact create the very idea of inside and outside as distinct. The surface of the body is where emotions are felt (ibid. 29), and further, feelings manifest in

movements toward or away from another. (ibid. 25.) While Ahmed's theory originally explains how surfacing moves and differentiates social groups, I also find it applicable when looking at the interviewee's movement and choreographic practices. Especially when it comes to working with perception, sensing and touch, I see some of the interviewees' examples of working as intensive awareness towards formulating orientations and relations, and at the same time, exploring the boundaries of the body's contours, of the different layers and surfaces; of the in- and outside of the body. For example, Aleksandra talked about how an exercise of attention could mold a space of public institution into a more intimate space. Through focusing on different surfaces, human and non-human, with the rest of the working group, Aleksandra's perception and sensations would allow for her to find intimacy within an architecture that initially would propose another kind of orientation.

*Aleksandra: We were there on the concrete floor, moving and, like, really attending to each other's surfaces, or, like, the surfaces of the building. And, like, thinking about the attraction... and then I felt that although we... that there was no touch implied, like in the literal way, that it was very charged and intimate between two bodies but also between this, like, official kind of space and this, like, architecture of, like, public institutions. And I think this is what is super interesting for me. -- Like, thinking of the potentials of working with touch, or, like, taking touch seriously. -- So, it's about intimacy but this intimacy, it doesn't necessarily... it's about havi-... like, having a good conditions to, like... how we usually think about what intima-... like, in common sense, let's say, what intimacy is.*

For Aleksandra, the exercise done in a public space of a museum could challenge the way she understood intimacy in "the common sense", through experiencing being intimate not just between bodies but also with the building itself and doing this through attending to the different surfaces in the space. Here, Aleksandra and her colleagues were in one sense attending to the sensations of how they moved *towards or away* from each other and the building, of different objects, how they attended to the different surfaces. Without having touch implied in the "literal way", so from the distance, Aleksandra became to feel intimate with other bodies and the grand building; moving intimacy away from a common sense understanding and towards a space that is generally not thought of as intimate. Thus,



Aleksandra and her colleagues in a way challenged the normative ways of conduct in the museum by reorientating their focuses. In a sense, the attention given to different surfaces enabled an intimate feeling in a space that isn't necessarily thought of as an intimate space, and thus worked as a way of being aware of a process of surfacing.

For Kim, sensitizing to the unfolding dialogue also meant being conscious of one's own acts and responses. Here, emotions and thoughts were also considered. They talked about noticing own automatic patterns.

*Kim: Also noticing, this goes like to a deeper level but can be part of it, like understanding which things are trigger points for me, like, am I, like, triggered in an interaction, and that makes me do, like, an automatic response.*

In one sense, Kim's practice of unfolding a dialogue was also a practice of self-reflection. As Kim talked about trigger points and the process of noticing those, their view of the body noted that past experiences materialize in the body, manifesting in the way one acts. Similarly, in Ahmed's (2004, 26) account, past associations work to shape how one interprets, moves and emotes. The *automatic responses* Kim talked about – what one learns to embody through time – could be interpreted as the sensations that seem immediate but are in fact mediated, tied to past experiences: "Not only do we read such feelings, but how the feelings feel in the first place may be tied to a past history of readings, in the sense that the process of recognition (of this feeling, or that feeling) is bound up with what we already know" (ibid. 30). In this way, working with the fine-tuned perception really worked for Kim as a way of always rearticulating the way of being in relation with others, rearticulating own affective movement responses and intra-actions with others, and so rearticulating the organization and orientation of the body. Thus, it can be seen as conscious processing of the materiality of the body. Kim noted that in an intra-action they will always have the subjectivity of themselves, whereas for Leah, as learned in the previous chapter, it was possible that in work with touch "the subject steps out".

In this subchapter I have discussed the ways in which the interviewees understood the different aspects of the body through *layers* and *surfaces*: the body was seen as multilayered,

and skin was often referred to as surface. Furthermore, surface was used to describe non-human agents as well. Next, I will discuss further the interviewees' approaches to the body and specifically the gendered and heterosexist norms that were present when talking about the body in relation to work with touch with the interviewees. I will further discuss the different ways in which the interviewees, through their artistic practices and approaches criticized, challenged and worked beyond heteronormativity – not only in relation to touch but also in relation to the body. I find it crucial to look at the complex and *layered* ways in which the interviewees looked at the body as it opens an understanding of who and what is touching and being touched.

#### 5.4 In/stability of the material body

Leah: [The perception of the body is] *also very, very, very influenced by the times we live in, you know, and a lot of hegemony's on the body. -- Also, to understand that the body is not a body that you own, and it is a body that it's limitless and that we can share and integrate. And I think it has to do a lot with attention, like for me... and things that are there sometimes on a... one hand has to do with how I perceive. That the normalized hegemonic eyes look into a body and also to the... an emotional body with this subscribed, usually as feminine or... feminine, which is not true. Like you're not... women are always... like in the history of body, in literature and in art and in dance they are fairies, they don't have flesh. They don't have flesh!*

Leah reflected on the hegemonic ways of perceiving the body, especially focusing on the stereotypical gendering of the female body. "The normalized hegemonic eyes" in Leah's quote refer to the possible ways of the audience members' views. For Leah, the body was not something that one owns: it forms in relation to what kinds of characteristics, culture, history and hegemonies of the time are imposed on the body, as well as always in relation to how the body is viewed (by oneself, by others, through medicine, in art, throughout modern Western history, etc.). Following Foucault, Butler (2011) calls the kind of heteronormative shaping of the body's materiality as the *regulatory ideal*. For Butler, materiality is power's "most productive effect" (ibid. xii) as it constitutes the sense of a fixed body with certain

contours and movements. Sex (as well as gender) materializes forcibly through time, in the ways bodies act; sex is materialized in and through repeated embodied acts (ibid. xii). The repetition includes both the process of heteronormativity's materialization as well as the possibility of rearticulating that very materialization:

That this reiteration is necessary is a sign that materialization is never quite complete, that bodies never quite comply with the norms by which their materialization is impelled. Indeed, it is the instabilities, the possibilities for rematerialization, opened up by this process that mark one domain in which the force of the regulatory law can be turned against itself to spawn rearticulations that call into question the hegemonic force of that very regulatory law.

(Butler 2011, xii)

The materiality of sex is not simply a matter of projecting culture on a body, but it is an active process of producing that materiality (ibid.). Similarly, as I brought up earlier, Leah saw the body as active and not merely as a blank surface upon which histories, cultures and hegemonies are placed. Further, in the opening quote of this subchapter Leah describes the body as "limitless", as it is not one thing, but it has multiple dimensions; it is not merely regulated by what the normative, gendered hegemonic ideas of the body suggest. Perhaps the agency lies here, in the materiality of the body, in its ability of being transformative, resonant and queer. The irritation in Leah's quote towards the absence of flesh – "[...] they don't have flesh. They don't have flesh!" – points to a frustration of removing and overlooking the materiality of the female body, and so removing agency from women. Here, contesting the naturalized idea of passivity of the female body, framed as absence of the flesh, and highlighted by psychological emotionality, Leah's account points out the script of gender performativity (Butler 1988, 526) and the possibility of the rearticulation of that rehearsed naturalization.

In a performance project Leah talked about in the interview, she worked with the idea of "merging" bodies together with the bodies of two co-performers. Leah and her two colleagues worked through touch and contact that was really being exposed to skin contact

with each other. Leah described this so that she imagined the skin to be “an organ of eating almost” that could take in the materiality of another body. As I see it, Leah’s approach here shows an example of how, through working with images, concepts and embodying principles that rethink the formation of the materiality of the body, she worked with challenging the individuality, gendering and heteronormative ways of understanding the body. Furthermore, Leah’s work with touch was a means for her to study different forms of intimacy and find ways of twisting how intimate encounter is seen. In her narrative of working with touch the exposure and listening “to the extent that you feel everything” which I interpret to be an aspect of intimacy as well.

*Leah: I think my work, my work studies different forms of intimacies and the things that intimacy reveal and can teach us. -- Or sometimes, how is intimate encounter usually seen, how can you twist it...*

Through bringing bodies into constant and direct physical contact, imagining them sharing materiality, becoming merged – through practicing organization of bodies that twists the normative way of conduct, Leah’s work also attempts to twist how intimacy is looked at.

Like Leah’s work with merging the bodies, other interviewees also had worked with principles that could be seen as or attempted challenging (hetero)normative ways of understanding the body, and through that, touch. Anna had worked with “changing the hierarchy of the body” which meant to challenge, or forget about the everyday, common perception and reading of different body parts, as well as challenging the idea of the brain as the main thinking and leading organ. In the performative task of “changing the hierarchy of the body” the intellectualizing through the logic of cultural associations of different parts of the body was attempted to be gotten “rid of”, which was connected to “letting the body to speak for itself”.

*Anna: Yeah, I think it’s just coming from like the very cultural way of... silhouette, silhouette, right, there’s heads, there’s like... we can... the most common things that are touched are hands in a very, in a public, let’s say. Then there is hug, there’s one bigger step, no? But if you try to... actually question those, those standard ways of relating to each other then you get into the, yeah, the totally different*

*connection and then... I think what it individually also mean is to don't put the primary role to the head as a thinking organ, but also allow the rest of the body to speak for itself. -- It does feel different but if you don't wanna intellectualize it and make it very rational but actually treat your whole body as a... yeah. as a whole, not as a individual parts where something is allowed and this is not allowed, as it's a little bit like getting rid of this cultural associations of, of body parts, actually in this sense, I thought, so, changing the hierarchy.*

In the task that Anna described, on the one hand, as the head is abandoned as the primary locus of thinking, the understanding of thinking merges more with movement and the barrier between moving and thinking is challenged. Consequentially, a logic of dichotomies becomes blurred. On the other hand, as Anna explained in “changing the hierarchy of the body”, the body is in a way viewed as separate from the cultural meanings, or at least there is a chance to detach from the meanings as the body is called to “speak for itself”. In Annas approach there was an attempt of “getting rid of” cultural associations of body parts which suggests a possibility of a precultural body, a separation of culture and nature. Similarly, Mazin talked about the desire to find a way of “unpacking” the “cultural layers” with colleagues. To them, this was connected to finding a feeling of vulnerability together – something that would then allow the cultural layers to dissolve.

*Mazin: I'm the one who's always trying to, like, go, or at least... as an intention I always try to like to... to be as vulnerable as possible. Or as open as possible, in order to, like, see if we unpack all these cultural layers of civilization, of education, of protection. Like, what's left? Who, who are we to each other?*

The questions of “what's left?” and “who are we to each other?” after unpacking cultural layers might suggest an idea that the culturally embodied patterns are a layer of the body that can be taken off; a prediscursive material of the body. In Butler's (2011) account of sex/gender constitution, there is no precultural, prediscursive material determining what sex a body is. Rather, the process of producing a natural sense of sex, the idea of a natural sex is produced in the process of gender constitution (Butler 2011 xviii; 1988, 524). Applied to the case of unpacking or getting rid of cultural layers of the body, from a Butlerian perspective,

again, no material of the body is “a politically neutral surface on which culture acts” (Butler 1990, 6). Thus, there are no layers of culture that could be stripped off, revealing an authentic materiality that is separate of culture, history, politics. Even though neither Mazin nor Anna suggested there lies a “natural sex” after getting rid of cultural associations, in fact I would rather guess they would suggest the very unpacking of an idea of a natural sex, there does live a separation of culture and the material body in their narratives; culture as something that is added upon the body. However, as I see it, in Mazin’s and Anna’s examples, the materiality of the body was being the realm of exploration: they questioned the everyday interpretation of the body’s boundaries as they approached the body’s emotional boundaries through vulnerability, and the boundaries of meanings and body parts through verbal images. Thus, as I see it, they sought to sense rather than define the materiality of the body; rather than the culturally charged acts, materiality, and imagining it differently from the everyday was in the center. What was not considered in their approach, however, was that matter itself could be seen as a culturally charged act, or a material-discursive practice, as Barad (2007) formulates, where all matter is always already in entangled with discursive practices; they are not separate from each other.

In Anette’s experience, the kind of unpacking of cultural meanings was present as well in working with touch, although her conclusion was that, rather than the vulnerable, a more scientific and pragmatic approach allowed the exploration to be “independent” of the cultural norms. She had worked with different “scales” of touch, i.e. with a range of qualities of touch, that were not specified further.

*Anette: And because we almost do it in a scientific way, we’re, like, doing different scales... you start to explore touch in a much broader range that you don’t live in your daily life. And therefore, I think it’s... actually, the practice that we’re doing is very independent of culture... because I think touch in our society is... whether it’s in a place where you touch less often than others, is... is very, it’s very codified. It’s very culture and social connected but just touch for the sake of touch and the different kinds of sensations, scales of different sensations that’s... I guess... it’s not so often experienced.*

The "scientific" approach allowed in Anette's experience for a broader exploration of touch from the everyday. She thought that, as the exploration broadened the approach to touch, it also broadened the scale of sensations, widening from an everyday, normative social encounters of bodies. In this sense, this way of exploring different scales of touch worked at the same time as an exploration of what kinds of sensations might arise. Also, Aleksandra talked about how she found that working with touch and materiality, connected with culturally charged gestures was a way "to actually influence or hijack these cultural patterns". She described that through playfulness that is brought to the culturally charged gesture of a handshake, for example, could work as a way of reworking or reshaping the habitual:

*Aleksandra: So, we were working with the handshakes, for example, like, and all these official, kind of cultural gestures that are used to greet. To like... and then if I think of rel-... like if I relate to it as something that is tangible or, like, that I approach it from this label of ok, it's the work with the touch and materiality, then I can change it, then it's not something, or like I can play, it brings playfulness into this... the cultural and habitual kind of layers. Because then it's, like, then I can rely on the premise that... that it can be shaped, it can be reshaped or reformed, reworked... through working with touch or through working through this, like, material approach.*

In both Anette's and Aleksandra's approaches, I understand the work to generate a way of looking at *what else* there is in the culturally charged acts of touch and the sensations it produced than the habitual and learned understandings; those embodied acts repeated through time and thus stabilized to form a sense of the body's material constitution as natural (Butler 1990; 2011). For Butler (2011, xix), in the in/stability of sex/gender constitution there lies the possibility of deconstituting the stabilized sense of sex. As I interpret it, considered in relation to Anette's experience of using the "scientific" approach with practicing the scales of touching, and Aleksandra's approach of experimenting with the materiality of the greeting, using previously known and stabilized ways of touching opened broadened understandings of specific qualities of touch as well as possibly the sensations they generated. In a sense, the scale of sensations of/in the body was instabilized and deconstructed through those artistic practices of working with touch.

Of course, Anette's and Aleksandra's practices situate in the willingness to explore touch, which might work to produce an openness towards a more non-judgmental and thus broadened scale of sensations, and a sense of challenging the norms of viewing the body, of touching and the related sensations. It might work differently in the case that something restricts such openness. Anna told she started to work with kissing as a form of touch with a co-performer and understood the work as "almost like the physical research that just happen to be a kiss", differentiating between the "physical" and the "cultural", or making the kissing a tool of researching its materiality. In this sense, the attempt was, like in Anette's case with the scale of touch, to challenge the stabilized, normative way of understanding what kissing is and through that to broaden the range of related sensations. However, Anna told that the perspective of the kissing would change drastically as there were viewers present in rehearsals. As the viewers were present, she became aware of the possible readings of the viewers being just "two hot girls kissing" instead of the focus being on the actual research of the kiss as a form of touch.

*Anna: But it again then brought this perspective of, like, cultural codes of "oh now you just actually see two hot girls kissing each other". You know what I mean? And then we were not able to escape those cultural codes of touch while we were longing to, through this... tool, I don't know, to research something else than just be seen as... yeah... hot girls kissing.*

Here, the possibility of destabilizing, of deconstructing the materiality of the kiss was interrupted by the governance of a heteronormative gaze. Through the presence of other people, Anna got more aware of the cultural, social and gendered aspects of the moment, and the situation drew back to the hegemonic *heterosexual matrix* (Butler 2011, xiii). Kissing, which was meant to produce "something else", ended up, in Anna's experience, to reproduce gendered affirmations of the performing bodies. As there were witnesses present, the possibility of the *male gaze* (see Mulvey, 1975) came to be present, which guided Anna's attention more towards questions of how her and the co-performer's bodies were sexualized, looked at through gendered assumptions and, further, read through the kiss as a sexual act. Further, it also affected on Anna's own interpretation and experience of the situation, the act of kissing and the way of viewing the body.



While there was a general trend of wishing to challenge cultural and social norms of understanding the body in the interviewee's performative work with touch, the question of heteronormative and gendering gaze might, like in Anna's case, challenge the exploration with the materiality of the body. Gendering through touch also came to be a question as Mazin told they experienced patterns in touch in performative work: they had noticed that, being male-read, they were more often approached with stronger touch than female-read bodies. Additionally, they had the experience that people tend to deny this kind of gendered touch is happening.

*Mazin: I do realise, although people tend to deny it, that male-read bodies are more likely to be touched in a strong way, like hit or... you know, something like that and femme-read bodies... it's my experience, I've not, I've not... because I've been looking at this quite significantly, I've not noticing that these things that's happens to me is also... happening to... women-read or female-read bodies and... sometimes I bring it forward and it's kind of denied. But it's true, I think it's true.*

As came up earlier, Mazin's wish to "unpack" the layers of cultural meanings was not met in these kinds of encounters where they experienced being approached through gendered assumptions. Within a heteropatriarchal system of values where stiff and binary gender roles and stereotypes present the cis-hetero male as strong, superior to the female and unwavering, Mazin's observation seems relatable. As Mazin also added: "I guess it's... it's also part of a heteronormative culture in which, you know, the guys slap each other and then hit each other". Thus, in Mazin's example a stereotypical gendered quality of touching could be detected in work with touch in performative settings in the ways in which strength, slapping or hitting was used more towards male-read bodies.

In the interviewees' approaches to working with touch there was a tendency to challenge heteronormative, gendered and individualistic views of the body and through that rethink the materiality of the body. Some of the interviewees wanted to *get rid of* normative social conduct and gendered representations while there was pressure from the outside, from other people (viewers and possibly colleagues) to draw back to the heteronormative matrix. There were indications that performative work with touch possibly widened the sensations and

lived experiences of intimacy and touch of the interviewees, as the interviewees very explicitly worked with the intention of challenging habitual social conduct through different kinds of tasks. At the same time there were unwished, binary and heteronormative interpretations and assumptions restraining the widening of sensations and experiences. Next, I will discuss vulnerability, trust and consent in the final subchapter of the analysis, also in relation to the aforementioned issues.

## 5.5 Vulnerability, trust and consent

In this chapter, as I discuss vulnerability, trust and consent in work with touch in performative settings, the subchapter is slightly different in style. Here, I take a more practical than theoretical approach to questions of power relations and consent.

Bringing attention to active sensing and awareness, many of the interviewees described that making themselves “open” or “available” was part of the work with touch. This was understood by the interviewees as being able to receive information, as listening and responding, as “feeling everything”, or as having the sense of possibilities or readiness; or even getting lost in the structure of a performance. As I have pointed out through the previous chapters, the boundaries and sometimes the structure of one’s own body were continuously challenged in performative work with touch, which can be understood to be linked with the intentions of “opening up” or “being available”. Furthermore, Mazin pointed out at one point of the interview that a certain expectation of availability is linked to a dancer’s body. This can be understood to reflect the history of the dancer’s profession being connected to prostitution and thus being objectified and disapproved of (see eg. Coons 2016, 50). Consequentially, the hierarchical positioning of the dancer in relation to the choreographer might live on, where the choreographer holds the power to set the frames of when and where the dancer is moving; “a dancer having to surrender her or his body and skills to the goals of the choreographer” (Rouhiainen 2003, 238; 266). As many of the interviewees spoke from the perspectives of both performer and choreographer, both aspects were included. For example, from a choreographer’s perspective, Mazin talked about the importance of making sure that the performers they work with know beforehand that the work might be “heavy on the nervous system”, whereas Leah talked about the importance of constant dialogue about the

sensations that the work generates, and the importance of creating a space where consent can be expressed. In this sense, instead of simply expecting the dancer to surrender to the goals of the choreographer, in the narratives of Mazin and Leah, there was dialogue about the work and its possible effects with the collaborators.

In most of the interviews, openness and availability were connected to the feeling of being exposed or vulnerable, and thus to a state of intimacy; work with touch, or more broadly, the kind of work with perception that allows an expanding of the notion of touch, as the tactile sense is active, was connected to the sense of intimacy. Through intimacy, be it physical or emotional, the question of trust became central in the interviews. Many of the interviewees pointed out that the work they did, work with touch, perception and different *states* might be heavy or emotionally challenging. Thus, the need for building trust amongst the working group is important, in order to establish working environments where accessing these vulnerable states feels safe. Choreographer and teacher Linda Gold (2014) builds their doctoral dissertation around the notion of *altered experience* - a notion to describe the state of experiencing time and space in an altered, expanded way through dance practices. Gold's research findings suggest that building trust and using time were crucial to accessing the state of "altered experience". Gold's research does not center around touch, yet it speaks of the perception of the dancer, pointing out the personal mental and embodied states present through moving together and in relation to other bodies, and being open and thus vulnerable with them.

Kim talked about preparatory work being crucial in working with touch, to create trust and get familiar with different bodies. If there was no preparatory work of getting to know other bodies and their boundaries, they would see it as "a big chunk of knowledge already missing". As Kim described, to enter rehearsals without preparatory work was possible but for them it meant a kind of numbing of the senses, as not having as much awareness in the touch as there would be, having done a proper preparation.

*Kim: And I also feel with myself that I can, I can push it, I can kind of do it to just go for it and... but it doesn't feel right anymore and I felt especially coming out of the pandemic for the first time going to classes again where we worked with*

*touch, and it was not introduced sensitively or carefully, that I almost felt like anxious to just, like, you know, just like throw yourself together with, like, twenty other bodies that I don't know yet.... -- It's possible for me to do it when I kind of numb myself a bit, you know, that I just be like "ok whatever, let's go, let's play, let's do it" but then I... I actually have less awareness in the touch than what I could possibly have. But when I allow for this world that opens also through touch, to really unfold, then it needs to be somehow contained or leveled or regulated.*

For Kim, preparatory work worked as building trust and getting to know the other bodies' boundaries. As Gold's research findings suggest, factors restricting receptivity in dance exercises were, amongst others, feelings of frustration and confusion, not feeling present in one's own body or feeling detached ("not feeling integrated") and not feeling properly warmed up (Gold 2014, 196). As for Kim, the feeling of anxiousness, of pushing themselves to do something that did not feel right, produced the same kind of restricted perception, as they described having less awareness in the touch in those moments.

Pointing out the complexity of consent, Haarhoff and Lush (2023, 126) present an aspect of *bodyminded consent*: verbally given consent does not necessarily mean embodied openness to engage in specific encounters. *Embodied non-consent* might occur even though consent be given verbally, and manifest as different bodily responses such as activation of the sympathetic nervous system (the so-called flight-or-fight-mode) or induce a behavioral shutdown (flip-or-freeze-mode as in the activation of parasympathetic nervous system). Embodied non-consent may occur as feeling of dissociation, numbness, despair. (Haarhoff & Lush 2023, 126–127.) In one sense, Kim's description is relatable to that of an activated embodied non-consent as they name the feelings of anxiousness and numbing – yet it would be too much of an arbitrary conclusion to state it is directly relatable, as Kim also expresses their own agency in the "numbing"; it is an active choice to rather not take in so much sensory information as they perhaps would in case the situation was introduced differently, more carefully. In my interpretation, Kim's articulation indicates that they have thought of questions concerning consent and drawn conscious boundaries for how to cope when touch is not introduced sensitively. However, *pushing it* did not feel right, it led to a distancing and possible anxiousness. According to Haarhoff and Lush (ibid. 128), dismissing the boundaries

drawn through embodied non-consent may cause self-preservation, fear, stress reactions and anxiety, and restrict performance. Rouhiainen and Hämäläinen (2013, 6) point out the importance of emotions in collaborative artistic processes and judgement, and that “creativity is understood to require psychological safety, freedom, high internal motivation, lack of external evaluation, surveillance, reward, competition and time pressure”.

For Kim, means for building trust were both physical exercises that included touch and contact, as well as verbal exchange about how things feel, and giving or not giving consent; they talked about a range of different kinds of warm-up exercises that included giving and receiving attention and touch, and pointed out that there should be space to say no.

*Kim: And also saying no when it's not ok. And this can also vary from day to day that sometimes, some days something might be alright and some other days maybe not. Also never taking for granted that somebody else might be fine because you did this thing before together, so... yeah. Yeah, I think the verbally talking about it is very crucial part of it as well.*

As Kim pointed out, consent is not to be taken for granted. Not every day is the same, there are also personal reasons that possibly restrict entering some kinds of deep states or “opening up”, or just simply the day-to-day orientation towards sharing touch might alter. Re-establishing consent continuously is also one of the aspects of realizing Haarhoff and Lush’s (2023) *consent-bubble* in praxis. The consent-bubble, a practical concept created within the context of intimacy coordination, is created through verbal and non-verbal communication between performers in work with touch. “Touch from one person, in one context and in one day, is not transferable to a new context. Owing to the notion that the bodymind is a dynamic and multimodal expression of self, it is important to note that, as environments, contexts, moods and lived experiences change, consent changes”. (Haarhoff & Lush 2023, 130–131.) Anna put it as follows: “there are different days of different mindsets and feelings and hormonal times and stuff when there are moments where I start the day like ‘I don’t wanna be touched’”. Of course, these kinds of sensations of starting the day might also be temporal and shift along a warm-up session, for example. What is obvious, anyhow, is that consent is not static and should not be perceived as self-evident.

Furthermore, different viewpoints to vulnerability, consent and trust came up in the interviews; how trust develops within a working group in rehearsals, during performing as well as in private, outside working hours. Anna pointed out that consent is bound to specific situations; those boundaries that are established within an exercise, or on stage, cannot be expected to be consensual in private.

*Anna: I don't know... it was different, it was... like this is part of the work and it brings you into different almost state and while you're there you're almost... doing something else and as a private person you... that the case that you were agreeing for that touch on the floor while working, something doesn't give the permission to do that in private.*

When discussing touch in performative work, the differences between a situation of rehearsing and of performing in front of an audience are obvious; most of the time, during rehearsals the communication about individual boundaries amongst the working group can happen in a much more direct way than during a performance. Most of the interviewees told they have conversations where experiences of the work are shared among the working groups, but the conversations rarely focus solely on touch. Anna was suspicious, but understanding at the same time, of possible rules set for how one should touch others; as there is no one general rule that could serve everyone, rules felt for her rather limiting than allowing. Considering direct physical touch, Leah, Mazin and Kim brought up that in terms of consent, mistakes happen and that it is constant learning with practicing consent and being in relation to others through touch.

*Mazin: And I do realise that I was practicing consent culture also in my artistic work. Obviously like consent is a practice so... mistakes happen. I've done mistakes about consent, and I have, umm, I have encountered, also vul-... situation in which consent became an issue.*

No one in the group of interviewees told me of any situations of power misuse within artistic processes they had been a part of. However, questions of power dynamics between performers and audience came up as another point of view to look at vulnerability and

consent; how different reactions of audience members might affect the work and the feeling of safety, and so influence how the performer approaches their own work as a performer.

*Leah: The audience gave... of course, their gaze is also, it takes also a resonant space with them so the intensity was higher, we could go further. But also, the vulnerability was higher.*

Audience's presence and attention in work with touch and intimacy on the other hand allowed enhanced experience and sensations for some of the interviewees, and on the other hand it was experienced as something that, through heightened intensity, made oneself all the more exposed and vulnerable, like in Leah's quote above. Problems with unpredictability of how audience members might act came up in two of the interviews where the interviewees experienced unpleasant situations with audience. As working with touch and intimacy ideally considers questions of consent and trust amongst working groups – questions that can be complex to begin with – with audiences these questions could be even more complex as the power dynamics and the situation of the performance are merely temporal.

Leah described a situation where a drunk audience member was making comments during a performance. The drunken comments hurt and made her angry; she described the state she was in, produced by the work, as "going through the skin" and creating a sense of "being super exposed". She pointed out that for her co-performer the situation did not feel as hurtful but rather they saw the drunk commenting as something that "the work does" to some of the spectators. Leah's case brings up how the differences of personal boundaries, possibly varying from day to day, influence the state of vulnerability and exposure in a performance.

When I asked Anna how she relates to the audience while working with touch, she shared another experience of performing. She shared, how certain audience member's reoccurrence and way of gazing made her feel uncomfortable and thus led to regulate her performing differently.

*Anna: This is a bit tricky also because we are quite vulnerable... while the performance starts... and I have to think of one example where... I mean in both*

*we end up naked, in those situations we're... and touching each other and being naked. So, we realise so deeply that people were gonna come, they're coming to experience something more than just looking at naked body touching each other. And I think it's very precious thought to really rely on that that you know you gonna get to your audience because in the end that's all why we're doing it, right? But there were some situations where there would be some already recognized creeps coming, like, recognize people from the environment that they would always come and see when there is nudity and it's a female... and mainly that was... so far it was only men, like, older men coming to watch you, and you know that they're coming to watch your naked body being touched by others. And that changes the perspective of how... how much allowance you also give to the eroticism, that maybe if you would know that there's nobody longing for it, you would give more space to that. So, in this sense, it also change the way we would perform, somehow.*

The performance that Anna talked about wasn't explicitly dealing with eroticism nor exploring sexuality. Rather, as Anna had explained earlier in the interview, sexually charged sensations were not neglected in the process, in case those were to come up; it was "just the responsibility of how to handle it". This meant that no one was supposed to please themselves on others sexually, that wasn't the interest of the performance. In Anna's experience the intention of some of the audience members was to be pleased through seeing nudity and touching, through a sexualized and gendered view on the body, looking for erotic content – quite the opposite to what Anna as a performer wanted to transmit. For Anna, this restricted the possibilities of moving within the spectrum of the possibilities of the performance, as she became aware of the possible sexist and sexualizing readings of her and her co-performers' bodies.

Both Anna's and Leah's examples point out situations where the power dynamics were partly defined or underlined through a gendering gaze that brings with it the heteronormative, sexualizing and sexist view. In the *consent-bubble* only the ones touching are included in the negotiation of consent (Haarhoff & Lush 2023, 128). In the cases of Anna and Leah, the audience was excluded from the bubble which built another level of vulnerability and



consent, especially when considering the audience's gaze as touch, as Anna at times thought of it. Even if a performance would aim at challenging conventional representational narratives that work to reinforce e.g. sexist, racist and/or ableist stereotypes, the performance or the performers cannot actually regulate how audience members read the performance and the bodies of performers. Indeed, this was the case with Anna's, as her experience and conclusion was that certain audience members would return to see the performance for the sake of seeing nude bodies touching each other, possibly for the sake of sexual pleasure.

When it comes to interpersonal dynamics within working groups, the question of trust might expand outside the rehearsal room or the stage to the more personal relationships present and formed during artistic processes. In some of the interviews there were indications that friendship between performers loosened the boundaries and made it more flexible to navigate without constantly giving verbal consent to touch. However, there might lie the possibility of taking consent for given when it is not discussed, although in this group of interviewees no one shared experiences of that kind. It was common in the group of the six interviewees to work with friends, or to build close relations with co-performers, at least for the period of an ongoing project; Anna described that during a performance process they lived together with a group of seven co-performers, Anette told that they had invited three friends to form a group of four performers where none of the invited artists knew each other beforehand but became friends through that project. They also met outside the work combining a little bit of work and spending time as friends.

*Anette: And there was this round where we asked: "where are you in your life?" and "where are you in your career?", in a way. And it was also about the struggle as a performer and as a maker, in a way, in this neoliberal system, of having to prove yourself and having to sell yourself constantly, and even you're just performing you're selling yourself. -- And it was for the first time that I felt really, like, sort of a, kind of family as well on stage.*

Anette's point of view suggests that working groups, possibly unfolding into friendships can have the potential of being a support structure to freelance artists in otherwise lonesome and challenging and competitive working conditions. Intimacy, vulnerability and trust are not only

shared in rehearsals and on stage but can reach outside the working situations as well; and those situations feed into each other. Building trust within a working group can happen during working hours, or outside of them. The shapes of intimacy and trust are manifold, they work on several levels. For Anette, intimacy also meant “sharing your deepest fears, in a way, so it’s not all just beautiful”; to be honest about being afraid as well as having the courage to show failure in oneself. This implies that the intimacy, trust and vulnerability between colleagues are not only developed through or limited to work with touch in performative settings, but it possibly comprehends emotional intimacy, too. In this sense, the boundaries of friendships and personal relationships intertwine with collegial relationships.

## 6 Discussion and conclusions

The starting point of this research has been to map out dancer-performer's experiences and understandings related to work with touch in performative settings. I have conducted interviews with six freelance artists who work in the field of dance and choreography around Europe as performers and choreographers. The aim of this research has been to understand performers' embodied experiences of working with touch in performative settings to see what kinds of intimate spaces are created in choreographic work with touch. Further, to make research on the topic of touch and intimacy brings up questions of consent and power dynamics within working groups and between performers and audience. Thus, I have been guided by the following research questions presented in the introduction of the thesis:

- 1) Through what kinds of understandings of touch and the body do performers enter the work with touch in performative settings?
- 2) What kinds of experiences and sensations of the materiality of touch and the body are generated in and through the work with touch in performative settings?
- 3) What kinds of implications does work with touch and intimacy in performative settings have in terms of consent and power dynamics?

In my analysis I have utilized Karen Barad's (2007) new materialist theory of agential realism, Laura U. Marks' (2000) haptic visuality, Judith Butler's (2011) heteronormative and exclusionary matrix as well as Sara Ahmed's (2004) approach to emotions as creating the sense of in- and outsides. These theories, even though different in their respective fields of influence, have enabled me an approach to embodiment and materiality that take into consideration the constant movement, shapeshifting and non-determinedness in and of the body. Additionally, I have analyzed the findings in relation to Erin Manning's (2006) and Gerko Egert's (2019) writings on touch and dance which has encouraged a non-linearity of touch and relationality. Finally, I analyzed questions of consent and vulnerability through the lens of intimacy coordination.

Based on my analysis, I propose that work with touch in performative settings opened space for exploring intimacy in ways that contest normative social conduct. By focusing on *relationality* and the interconnectedness of the different senses, these spaces generated senses of transformation, unknownness and merging together with someone or something, thus possibly widening the spectrum of everyday sensations. As I presented in the beginning of the thesis, one of my interests has been to consider the queering potentials of performance. I have wanted to look at how the artistic practices of working with touch in performative settings might queer the performers' understandings and experiences of intimacies – to look at the possibilities of deviating from the normalized, fixed ways of experiencing and witnessing touch. It should be acknowledged that the interviewees' entering points to work with touch were based on complex understandings of, and expertise in the body, relationality and touch itself. Thus, from the very outset, the interviewees' logics and definitions of the body, relationality and touch were open to changes, possibly unfixed, queered. It is not only that performance can be looked at as heterotopia, queering time and space, like Davies (2012) does – but also, performance as a space where sociality is practiced differently, deviating from normative conduct (ibid. 29) is first and foremost building upon the artists' active use of queering strategies that are, here in my research, embodied and verbal rearticulations and imaginations of the concepts of the body and touch. Through these queered understandings sociality, responsibility and relationality can be practiced differently from the everyday normativity.

I will now revisit the findings, connect them to previous studies, examine the limitations of my research and propose possible continuation of this research.

To rearticulate the main findings, I suggest that the participants worked with touch in performative settings in ways that challenged both a separation of the senses as independent as well as the idea of touch as bound to direct physical contact. Thus, work with touch in performative settings was understood and experienced as a multisensory situation. Shared amongst the six interviewees was that sense of touch was often seen as intertwined with other senses and in most of the cases, touch was seen as something that could happen through a certain mode of attentive perception where the tactile sense was active. In one sense, touch was seen as being in relation with others and the space (Manning 2006), as intra-

active (Barad 2007). Many of the interviewees spoke about the perception of touch in relational work; awareness put to surfaces of human and non-human bodies, spaces and distances. Touch was understood as something that does not just happen on the physical surface of the body, on the skin; it does not necessarily require physical contact or proximity to understand something as touch/ing. Dealing with active sensing, touch and relationality produced sensations of being connected with human and non-human others and sometimes losing the sense of own bodily boundaries, or the sense of self. Many of the interviewees discussed touch in relation to *the space in between* and touch as generating *transformation* and *unknownness* (Manning 2006; Egert 2019). Similarly, dance scholar Carolien Hermans (2021) concludes that touch is processual, always in a state of becoming, and can be understood as the *third party* between two bodies touching, i.e. located in the space in between.

The body was understood through surfaces and layers, as energetic, and as culture-bound. Choreographic tools were actively used to explore the materiality of the body and culturally charged gestures or views of the body. In a way, the body was also understood through the relationality that the interviewees were dealing with in work with touch. Transformation, unknownness and the space in between have taken a central role in this research as qualities that frame relationality; relationality is not a fixed situation. Through the findings, I have come to a definition of relationality as awareness of spatial organizing of self and others; distances and proximity; openness to sense, shape and imagine one's movement, and thus the materiality of the body, in intra-active relation to others – here, the senses work together and are no longer separated from one another. Thus, relationality, in which the materiality of the body becomes reformulated, can be explored as an open-ended, non-predetermined process in dance and movement practices that deal with touch.

Through my analysis, I suggest that the performer's work with touch explored non-normative encounters and it could operate in what Butler (2011) calls exclusionary matrix. In this sense, the interviewees worked with challenging the materiality of the body regulated by heteronormativity, that again could open the senses of transformation and unknownness. However, in some cases, binary, heteronormative and sexist assumptions brought the interviewee back to reflections about how they and their actions were perceived and read

and limited going on further with explorations and giving in to the work. Further, *openness* and *availability* rose as central factors in the possibility of enabling the sense of transformation or unknownness. At the same time as being open and available possibly enabled a sense of transformation, it also increased the sense of vulnerability. In work with touch in performative settings, vulnerability can be experienced in relation to audiences as well as colleagues, and in some cases the presence of audience could intensify both the sensations generated within the interviewees' work, as well as the sense of vulnerability. As I see it, in mapping out the possibilities of queered intimacies in work with touch, in order to access places of transformation and unknownness, senses of openness and availability are central. Openness and availability again, could either be decreased through interpretation that leant on heteronormative assumptions or sexist gaze – interpretation determined by heteronormativity, operating within the heteronormative matrix – or increased through non-determined interpretation. Additionally, feelings of frustration, disintegration and not being warmed-up enough restrict the receptivity of the dancer (Gold 2014). Receptivity, as I see it, can be connected to the states of openness and availability.

At the same time as the data and findings of this research generate wordings for embodied experiences and underlines the possibilities of performative work in generating alternative realities, they also speak of power dynamics and questions of consent in work with touch in performative settings. This is not, of course, limited solely to work with touch but can be applied to any kind of working situations, especially to those where vulnerability is present. My analysis points out the importance of acknowledging how personal differences are present when discussing consent, specifically in work with touch in performative settings. The data in this research indicates that consent was discussed within working groups during rehearsals and there was willingness to create space for it – however means for discussing consent during a performance were not mentioned. Many of the interviewees understood consent as a process to be learned through conversation, and as a process where mistakes happen. Some of the interviewees also mentioned that there are day-to-day differences in how they wanted to touch or be touched. Similarly, Haarhoff and Lush (2023, 130–131) remind of the necessity of constant re-establishing of consent.

My thesis manages to point out the possibilities of using touch in explorative ways as a means of challenging fixed and stabilized notions of intimacy. The research poses that through experimenting with different approaches to touch and the body, queered understandings and experiences of touch and the body might be generated. As research on touch, this study situates in the intersection of gender studies and dance and performance studies. Touch, as a subject of research within gender studies, has remained fairly little while the relation between affect and touch has been seen as too obvious (Kinnunen & Kolehmainen 2019, 30). In scholarly dance and performance studies, touch has mainly been considered through the point of view of the viewer, and not the performer. Thus, my thesis contributes as a remark on these gaps within both fields and proposes a perspective in which processes of the material and affective body can be studied in a creative, interdisciplinary way.

The data of my research worked to point out problematics connected to gendering and sexism, but it is worth acknowledging that aspects of racism and ableism remained out from the scope of the thesis. The different intersections of identity, as they are through learned patterns embedded in the movements and perceptions of the body, are intertwined with touch in how we reach towards and away from other bodies and how we respond to others' reaches on sensory level and in movement (Ahmed, 2004). Further, as Mitra (2021, 21) has argued, dance studies in the Global North do not currently reconsider choreographic touch in intersectional ways and thus continue to overlook power asymmetries that are present in work with touch. Thus, to address questions of different intersections of identity, such as race, ability and gender, would be an important task for possible future research on touch in performative settings.

My methodological choices in this research have proven to enable a proper analysis on the topic at the same time as I consider my methodological choices as the limitations of this study. The use of reflexive thematic analysis and support of narrative analysis has made it easy to bring together central themes without generalizing the individual viewpoints; working with narrative analysis has highlighted the personal experiences of the interviewees. Possibilities with this kind of research, however, could be expanded with ethnographic or affective methods. As the focus is on work with touch and intimacy in performative settings, the very moment of working, touching and sensing, is at hand. Through combining the semi-structured

interviews with either autoethnographic methods, where I could have further utilized my professional and insider knowledge, or ethnographic fieldwork where participants share their work in the dance studio in form of a workshop, for example, the research could have offered results that are even more attached to the very moment of doing performative work with touch. Furthermore, combining qualitative methods of social sciences to more experimental and affective methods of artistic research, in which the topic of this study is rooted, could possibly enable new ways of understanding the processes of being in touch, embodiment and materiality. As some of the interviewees of this study worked with applying queer, feminist and new materialist thinking as principles of movement practices, to further research the explorations of thinking with and embodying those principles could be a truly fruitful combination at the intersection of the arts and social science research and generate new knowledge on affective and embodied relationalities.



## References

Ahmed, Sara (2004) Collective Feelings: Or, the Impressions Left by Others. *Theory, Culture & Society* 21:2, 25–42.

Ahmed, Sara (2014) *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Ahmed, Sara & Stacey, Jackie (eds.) (2001) *Thinking Through the Skin*. Abingdon: Taylor & Francis Group.

Albright, Ann Cooper (1997) *Choreographing Difference. The Body and Identity in Contemporary Dance*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.

Allen, Ruth E.S. & Wiles, Janine L. (2016) A rose by any other name: participants choosing research pseudonyms. *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 13:2, 149–165.

Austin, John L. (1962) *How to do things with words*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Barad, Karen (2003) Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter. *Signs* 28:3, 801–31.

Barad, Karen (2007) *Meeting the Universe Halfway. Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. Durham; London: Duke University Press.

Barad, Karen (2012a) On touching – The Inhuman Therefore I Am. *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 23:3, 206–223.

Barad, Karen (2012b) What Is the Measure of Nothingness: Infinity, Virtuality, Justice. *100 Notes, 100 Thoughts: Documenta Series* 099, 4–17.

Bennett, Jane (2010) *Vibrant Matter. A Political Ecology of Things*. Durham; London: Duke University Press.

Brandstetter, Gabriele & Gerko, Egert & Sabine Zubarik (eds.) (2013) *Touching and Being Touched. Kinesthesia and Empathy in Dance and Movement*. Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter.

Braun, Virginia & Clarke, Victoria (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3:2, 77–101.

Braun, Virginia & Clarke, Victoria (2021) *Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide*. Los Angeles; London; New Delhi: SAGE Publications.

Butler, Judith (1988) Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory. *Theatre Journal* 40:4, 519–531.

Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.

Butler, Judith (2011) *Bodies That Matter. On the Discursive Limits of Sex*. Abingdon: Taylor & Francis Group. First published 1993 by Routledge.

Chatzimasoura, Kornilia (2013) Lost and Found in Interpretation: Senses and Emotions in Contexts of Argentine Tango. In Brandstetter, Gabriele & Gerko, Egert & Sabine Zubarik (eds.). *Touching and Being Touched. Kinesthesia and Empathy in Dance and Movement*. Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter, 293–308.

Classen, Constance (2005) Fingerprints. Writing about Touch. In Classen Constance (ed.) *The Book of Touch*. Oxford; New York: Berg, 1–9.

Classen, Constance (2012) *The Deepest Sense. A Cultural History of Touch*. Urbana; Chicago; Springfield: University of Illinois Press.

Coons, Lorraine (2016) The Making of a “Fallen Angel”: The Press and the Image of the Danseuse of the Paris Opéra Ballet (1840–1890). *The International Journal of Social, Political, and Community Agendas in the Arts* 11:4, 49–60.

Davies, Cristyn (2012) *Imagining otherwise: Performance as Queer Time and Space*. In Robinson, Kerry H. & Davies, Cristyn (eds.) *Queer and Subjugated Knowledges: Subversive Imaginaries*. Bentham Science Publishers, 23–55.

Debonneville, Julien (2021) "In the name of harmony". The imaginary of whiteness in the field of contemporary dance, *Biens Symboliques / Symbolic Goods. A Social Science Journal on Arts, Culture and Ideas* 9(2021). <https://journals.openedition.org/bssg/750>. Referred at 18.01.2024.

Dolan, Jill (2005) *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theater*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Egert, Gerko (2019) *Moving Relation: Touch in Contemporary Dance*. London: Routledge.

Farnell, Brenda & Wood, Robert N. (2017) Kinaesthetic Intimacy in a Choreographic Practice. In Chrysagis, Evangelos & Karampampas, Panas (eds.) *Collaborative Intimacies in Music and Dance: Anthropologies of Sound and Movement*. New York; Oxford: Berghahn Books, 65–95.

Foucault, Michel (1986) Of Other Spaces. Translated to English by Jay Miskowiec. *Diacritics* 16:1, 22–27.

Glod, Linda (2013) *Altered Experience in Dance/Dancing. Investigation into the Nature of Altered Experience in Dancing and Pedagogical Support*. Helsinki: Theatre Academy Helsinki, Performing Arts Research Center.

Haarhoff, Èmil & Lush, Kate (2023) Maintaining the consent-bubble: an intimacy coordinator's perspective on touch in performance training. *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training* 14:2, 119–134.

Hermans, Carolien (2022) To Touch and to Be Touched: Interconnectedness and Participatory Sense-making in Play and Dance Improvisation. *Journal of Dance Education* 22:4, 211–222.

Hyvärinen, Matti & Löyttyniemi, Varpu (2005) Kerronnallinen Haastattelu. In Ruusuvuori, Johanna and Tiittula, Liisa (eds.). *Haastattelu. Tutkimus, Tilanne ja Vuorovaikutus*. Tampere: Vastapaino, 189–222.

Hyvärinen, Matti (2017) Kertomushaastattelu. In Hyvärinen, Matti & Nikander, Pirjo & Ruusuvuori, Johanna (eds.) *Tutkimushaastattelun Käsikirja*. Tampere: Vastapaino, 174–192.

Josselson, Ruthellen (2011) Narrative Research. Constructing, Deconstructing, and Reconstructing Story. In Wertz, Frederick J. & Charmaz, Kathy & McMullen, Linda M. & Josselson, Ruthellen & Anderson, Rosemarie & McSpadden, Emalinda. *Five Ways of Doing Qualitative Research. Phenomenological Psychology, Grounded Theory, Discourse Analysis, Narrative Research, and Intuitive Inquiry*. New York: Guilford Publications.

Josselson, Ruthellen (2013) *Interviewing for Qualitative Inquiry. A Relational Approach*. New York: Guilford Publications.

Juvonen, Tuula (2017) Sisäpiirihaastattelu. In Hyvärinen, Matti & Nikander, Pirjo & Ruusuvuori, Johanna (eds.) *Tutkimushaastattelun Käsikirja*. Tampere: Vastapaino, 396–408.

Kinnunen, Tanja & Kolehmainen, Marjo (2019) Touch and Affect: Analysing the Archive of Touch Biographies. *Body & Society* 25:1, 29–56.

Lareau, Annette (2021) *Listening to People. A Practical Guide to Interviewing, Participant Observation, Data Analysis, and Writing It All Up*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Lugones, María (2010) Toward a Decolonial Feminism. *Hypatia* 25:4, 742–759.

Manning, Erin (2006) *Politics of Touch. Sense, Movement, Sovereignty*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Marks, Laura U (2000) *The Skin of the Film. Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, And the Senses*. Durham; London: Duke University Press.

Mitra, Royona (2021) Unmaking Contact: Choreographic Touch at the Intersections of Race, Caste, and Gender. *Dance Research Journal* 53:3, 6–24.

Mulvey, Laura (1975) Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema. *Screen* 16:3, 6–18.

P.A.R.T.S. (2022) Study Guide. BA training cycle 2022-2025. <http://default.parts.web-001.breadcrumbs.prvw.eu/pdf/STUDY-GUIDE-BA-TRAINING-CYCLE-2022-2025.pdf> Referred at 30.1.2024.

Paterson, Mark (2007) *The Senses of Touch. Haptics, Affects and Technologies*. Oxford: Berg.

Puig, de la Bellacasa, María (2007) *Matters of Care. Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Ramazanoglu, Caroline & Janet Holland (2002) *Feminist Methodology. Challenges and Choices*. London; Thousand Oaks; New Delhi: SAGE Publications.

Rouhiainen, Leena (2003) *Living Transformative Lives: Finnish Freelance Dance Artists Brought into Dialogue with Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology*. Helsinki: Theatre Academy, Department of Dance and Theatre Pedagogy.

Rouhiainen, Leena & Hämäläinen, Soili (2013) Emotions and Feelings in a Collaborative Dance-Making Process. *International Journal of Education & the Arts*, 14:6. <http://www.ijea.org/v14n6/v14n6.pdf> Referred at 18.1.2024.

Ruusuvuori, Johanna and Tiittula, Liisa (2005) Tutkimushaastattelu ja Vuorovaikutus. In Ruusuvuori, Johanna and Tiittula, Liisa (eds.). *Haastattelu. Tutkimus, Tilanne ja Vuorovaikutus*. Tampere: Vastapaino, 57–77.

Sørensen, Inge Ejbye (2021) Sex and safety on set: Intimacy Coordinators in television drama and film in the VOD and post-Weinstein era. *Feminist Media Studies* 22:6, 1395–1410.

Tökkäri, Virpi (2018) Fenomenologisen, Hermeneuttis-fenomenologisen ja Narratiivisen Kokemuksen Tutkimuksen Käytäntöjä. In Toikkanen, Jarkko & Virtanen, Ira A. (eds.) *Kokemuksen Tutkimus VI: Kokemuksen Käsite ja Käyttö*. Rovaniemi: Lapland University Press: 64–84.

## Appendix

### Interview questions

#### **Background**

-Would you want to tell about your professional background?

-What is central to your artistic work at the moment?

#### **Touch**

-How has touch been a part of your work?

-How would you describe different principles of touch you work with?

-Imagine you are in that/a situation, performing and dealing with touch – what would you say becomes central in your experience?

What becomes central in your perception?

What thoughts, emotions, sensations arise?

How would you describe perceiving your own body?

How would you describe your perceiving of other bodies/the space/time?

-How, if at all, does the presence of audience influence your experience?

How do you relate to audience when sense of touch is active?

Does performing/being looked at do something to the quality of giving/receiving/sensing touch for you?

### **Intimacy**

-How do you relate to intimacy when working with touch?

-How do you relate to intimacy when performing?

### **Materiality**

-How do you look at/understand the body in your work?

-How do you approach any cultural signifiers/codes/gestures related to touch and the body when working with touch?

### **Verbalisations & consent**

-Do you recognize any tendencies of how touch/contact is talked about?

-Do you share personal feelings, thoughts, sensations in discussion?

-When working with touch, do you discuss it with your colleagues/within the working group? How?

-Is consent discussed/expressed? How? (in conversation and when rehearsing/performing)

### **Closing**

-Any final thoughts to add?