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Spiritual corporeality: towards embodied gnosis through a dancing language

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CHAPTER 3

Dancing Language between Mind and Matter: methodology of a dialogue between corporeal theory and discursive practice

In this chapter I will outline the methodological framework of this research.

To recapitulate the main research questions:

Is it possible to gain new perspectives on the relationship between the physically sensible and the intuitively intelligible through a dancing language that weaves together corporeal and verbal discourse?

How can the dancing body be attuned to act as an interface between the physical and the metaphysical through which I can investigate and communicate a sense of intimate proximity with a creative source?

I respond to these questions with dance and words.

On the one hand, with the [dance language*](#) that I develop through the dance and music performance SEI. On the other hand, with the [dancing language*](#) of this written text. By intertwining complementary modes of non-verbal and verbal [languaging*](#), new perspectives on the ontological, epistemological and communicative potentials of a [dancing body*](#) come to the fore.

Dancing language between mind and matter

In dance, I explore relations between mind and matter, between the physically sensible and the intuitively intelligible through a wordless search for movement origination and at intersections between conscious and unconscious (or supra- and subconscious - see below) states of being. This exploration happens from within the [psychophysical resonating space*](#) of my dancing body, which is in a constant state of becoming.

The *dance language* and the [corporeal theory*](#) that builds on it (see below) navigates psychophysically on an intuitive, arational¹⁴⁸ edge between conscious and unconscious performative states of being. Its mode of *language* is based on non-verbal dance experience. The theoretical contextualization of this *dance language* – the [discursive practice*](#) (see below) - articulates movement of thought through verbalized speculation, poetically inclined language and argumentation. Both ways of doing research (or of extending inner creative processes into the world) might at first sight seem incompatible with each other.

With the theoretical contextualization of the *dance language (discursive practice)* I explore mind-matter relations at intersections between metaphysics and revelation (i.e., esoteric forms of thought and related body-based practices) and between physics and psychology (i.e. the Jung-Pauli conjecture).

¹⁴⁸ I adopted the term “arational” from pioneer of transpersonal psychology Charles Tart who proposed it as an alternative term for “irrational”. It suggests another ground for reasoning instead of a mere negation of rationality. Tart has investigated the possibilities of understanding phenomena related to Altered States of Consciousness in scientific terms. In “States of Consciousness and State-Specific Sciences” he argues that “reason is a tool (...) wielded in service of assumptions, beliefs, and needs which are not themselves subject to reason. The irrational, or, better yet, the arational, will not disappear from the human situation. Our immense success in the development of the physical sciences has not been particularly successful in (...) increasing our real knowledge of ourselves.” In Tart, “States of Consciousness and State-Specific Sciences,” 1972, 1209.

Complementarity

Two complementary research trajectories frame this journey into [*spiritual corporeality**](#), [*altered states of knowing**](#) and [*embodied qnosis**](#): the creation of a *dance language* and a theoretical contextualization that accompanies its becoming. The theoretical embrace of the *dance language* navigates movements of thought through diverging fields of knowledge and different modes of *linguaging*: artistic, esoteric and scientific/philosophical. Relations between mind and matter play a key role in both trajectories, with different degrees of emphasis and embedded in different ways of perceiving and interpreting the world (from artistically experiential to esoterically inclined, to scholarly academic and back again). Both trajectories taken together become a *dancing language* that builds up its lines of thought through dialogical relations between the artistically empirical and the scientifically empirical¹⁴⁹. By stretching imagination to its inner and outer edges the *dancing language* narrates alternative perspectives on human corporeal existence and its possible planetary and cosmic embeddedness.

Drawing together the domains of physics and psychology, Pauli and Jung looked at the mind-matter relation through the philosophical worldview of dual-aspect monism. Here, mind and matter are seen as complementary aspects of a larger unifying whole, which both aspects share, and which at the same time transcends both.¹⁵⁰ In this context “two descriptions of a situation are complementary if they are both necessary for a complete description of that situation and at the same time incompatible with each other.”¹⁵¹

In analogy with this definition of [*complementarity**](#), I frame the relation between the *corporeal theory* (non-verbal corporeal and verbal reflections on dance experience articulated from the first-person perspective) and the *discursive practice* (verbalized thought engaged in

¹⁴⁹ I warmly thank Sher Doruff for introducing the idea of the artistic empirical in contrast to the scientific empirical. The artistic empirical as I understand it, is based on subjective and intersubjective experience and can include arational and suprasensory observations. The scientific empirical strives for objectivity, although the idea of objective knowledge is not anymore taken for granted since the invention of modern physics.

¹⁵⁰ Atmanspacher and Fuchs, “Introduction: The Pauli-Jung Conjecture,” 2014, 1-6.

¹⁵¹ Atmanspacher and Primas, *Recasting Reality: Wolfgang Pauli’s Philosophical Ideas and Contemporary Science*, 2008, 4.

dialogue with written discourses) as complementary to each other. I choose this framing because I have found that both approaches to doing research need to be considered yet they are difficult to reconcile with each other. Each of them speaks through different types of logic and language. In my view, the complementary perspectives of *corporeal theory* and *discursive practice* are needed to approximate a complete description of the *dancing body* experienced as a mediating interface between the metaphysical and the physical. Both approaches are also needed to be able to identify the potential significance of the states of being a dancer may traverse in a movement towards *embodied gnosis*.

I choose *complementarity* to theoretically frame how non-verbal and verbal language move in relation to each other towards sense making. Yet I eventually aim to overcome their apparent incompatibility. The notions of *spiritual corporeality*, *altered states of knowing* and *embodied gnosis* are intended to allow both modes of *linguaging* and of doing research, to blend and to communicate with each other. With the resulting *dancing language* in body and words something like a mind-matter continuum comes into being that embodies different degrees of [matter-consciousness*](#).¹⁵² This mind-matter continuum can eventually be seen as something that both aspects share, that blurs their strict distinction and that includes both in a larger frame of reference.¹⁵³

¹⁵² "Matter-consciousness" is a term developed by Jay Johnston to describe esoteric subtle body subjectivities as onto-ethical desire in a process metaphysical context. Johnston, *Angels of Desire. Esoteric Bodies, Aesthetics and Ethics*, 2008, 2. See also chapter four: the Subtle Body.

¹⁵³ Atmanspacher and Fuchs, "Introduction: The Pauli-Jung Conjecture," 2014, 1-6.

Corporeal Theory + Discursive Practice = Dancing Language

Corporeal Theory

The *dance language* diffracts on the one hand into the non-verbal, corporeal language that speaks through movement about its search for a sense of proximity with an unspeakable creative source. On the other hand, the *dance language* diffracts into verbal language derived from the danced experience and articulated from the first-person perspective. This verbal output diffracts again into two different rays of expression: poetically inclined transcriptions from my inner experience of the dance through the documentation method of [retrospective dance writing](#)¹⁵⁴, and more abstract language that describes intentional orientations [/attunement*](#) for corporeal consciousness¹⁵⁵. These intentional orientations are the foundation for the *dance language* to direct its movements towards an experience of *embodied gnosis*. Both types of verbal expression are derived from the non-verbal *dance language* that unfolds with SEI, the dance and music performance which accompanies this written dissertation. The non-verbal and verbal modes of *linguaging* rooted in danced experience are taken together and referred to as *corporeal theory* (See Diagram 1 below).

¹⁵⁴ See “Spiritual Corporeality: Through a Dance Language towards Embodied Gnosis”, <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/520371/520372>.

¹⁵⁵ See chapter five: Attuning.

CORPOREAL THEORY

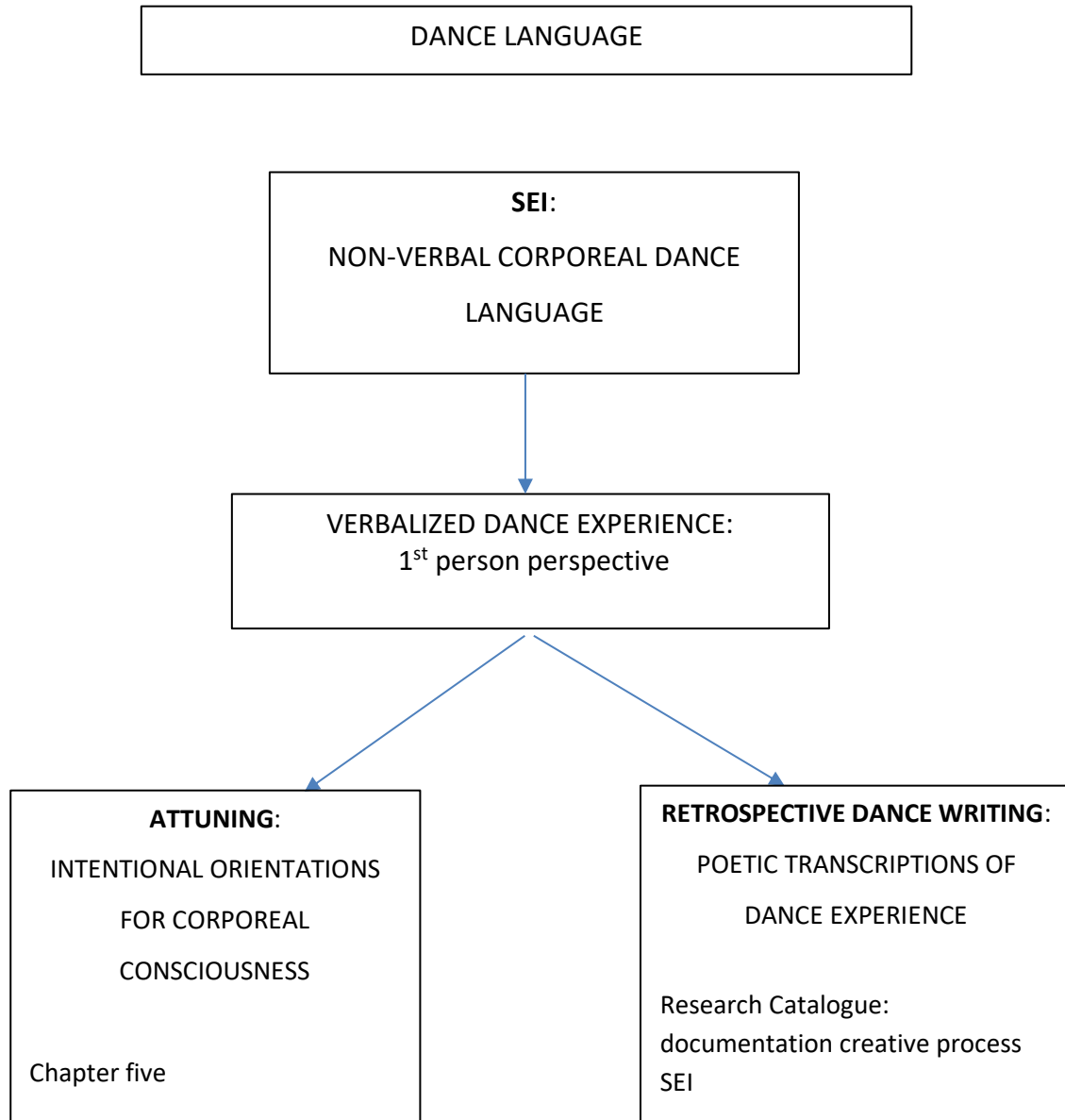


Diagram 1

Discursive Practice

The theoretical context of the *dance language* is on the one hand informed by esoteric forms of thought and related body-based practices and on the other hand by esoterically inclined scientific/philosophical speculations concerned with the relation between mind and matter. An example of the latter are Pauli and Jung who jointly investigated the psychophysical problem, i.e. the question of how mental phenomena relate to physical phenomena and vice versa. The Pauli-Jung conjecture (unproven proposition)¹⁵⁶ – developed mainly between 1946 and 1954 – is a highly speculative philosophical and metaphysical proposition about mind-matter relations. They questioned how to understand the interface between the mental and the physical and on which ideas about reality it could be grounded¹⁵⁷ Pauli and Jung suggested an underlying background domain that would both lie beyond the categories of mind and matter as well as mediate between them (*unus mundus*).¹⁵⁸ (See Diagram 2 below).

¹⁵⁶ Harald Atmanspacher and Christopher A. Fuchs coined the term “Pauli-Jung Conjecture” based on their conviction that Pauli and Jung’s proposition deserves a more substantial status in the history of ideas than “wild speculation”. Atmanspacher and Fuchs, “Introduction: The Pauli-Jung Conjecture,” 2014, 2-3.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, 1.

¹⁵⁸ Atmanspacher, “Notes on Psychophysical Phenomena,” 2014, 184. See also chapter five: attuning.

DISCURSIVE PRACTICE

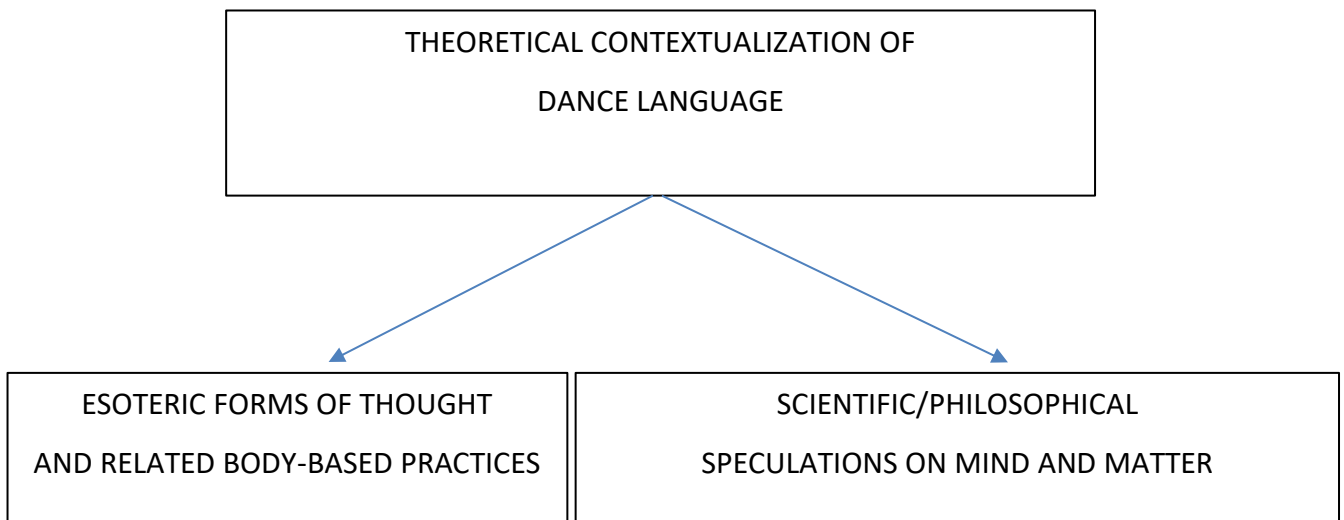


Diagram 2

Dancing Language

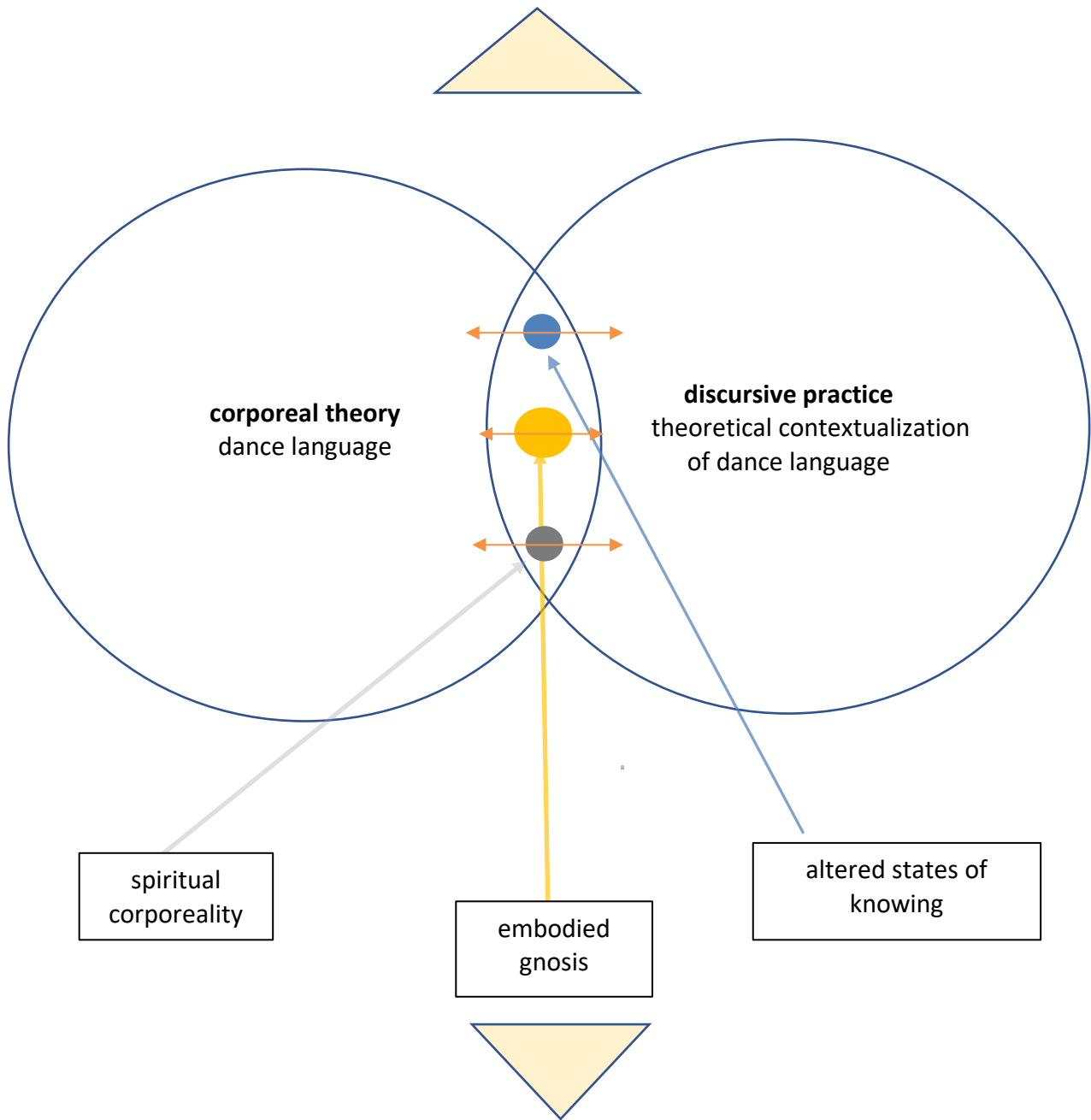
Corporeal theory and *discursive practice* dialogue with each other through [*intermezzi*](#)¹⁵⁹. In these *intermezzi*, sections of the main body text are commented on and complemented by perspectives derived from another kind of logic/epistemic background and language. In these *intermezzi* historical, highly abstract and at times visionary ways of thinking are counterbalanced by a concrete and pragmatic logic of a contemporary dancing body. (See chapter four “The Subtle Body” where esoteric forms of thought and body-based practices are contrasted with a contemporary dance perspective). In chapter five (“Attuning the Dancing Body towards Embodied Gnosis”) terminologies from the dance practice are theoretically unpacked through the lens of other fields of academic discourse.

¹⁵⁹ See chapter four and five.

The textual movements of the dance between *corporeal theory* and *discursive practice* are connected through mutually reinforcing or contradicting ideas. The key concepts *spiritual corporeality*, *altered states of knowing* and *embodied gnosis* create spaces where diverging fields of logic and language, of discourse and practice can intersect and communicate with each other. Different worldviews meet and mingle at places of suspended momentum between gravity (towards the physical) and levity (towards the metaphysical). Here, a strict distinction between *corporeal theory* and *discursive practice* dissolves. In these zones of encounter intuitive dimensions of knowing-being emerge that are suspended between the physically sensible and the intuitively intelligible. In these in between zones the text approximates making sense of the notion of *embodied gnosis* (See Diagram 3 below).

DANCING LANGUAGE

LEVITY – INTUITIVELY INTELLIGIBLE – TOWARDS THE METAPHYSICAL



GRAVITY – PHYSICALLY SENSIBLE – TOWARDS THE PHYSICAL

Diagram 3

Below I will explain my approach to *corporeal theory* more in depth. I will further explain how the *dancing language* that weaves it together with the *discursive practice* functions as an artistically informed methodology for this research.

Corporeal theory

I approach dance as a non-verbal corporeal language that is in a constant state of becoming and that perpetually moves towards the unknown. In its perpetual movement towards an unknown future of the body, it is infused with many layers of supra- and subconscious states of being. Speaking from the perspective of my dance experience, a supraconscious¹⁶⁰ state implies being simultaneously aware of multiple layers of states of being in danced motion. They are a field of experience that allows conscious choice making in the articulation of movement ¹⁶¹.

I associate subconscious (or unconscious) layers of states of being that take part in dance with a reverse mirror image of the *supraconscious* performative layers mentioned above.¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ Merriam Webster Online Dictionary defines “supraconscious” as “existing or functioning above the level of the conscious, rational or logical”. Transposed to dance practice I am referring to the “supraconscious” in terms of an intensified state of conscious awareness that is more complex and layered and, in this sense, “above” the level of everyday conscious awareness. “Supraconscious,” *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*, accessed 3.6.23, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/supraconscious>.

¹⁶¹ Examples of supraconscious states in dance are being hyper aware of the relation between the movements and the surrounding space; activated full body articulation; charging, dis-charging and re-charging the affective fuels that poeticize motion; projecting and receiving mutually aware sentient awareness between me, other dancers on stage and the audience; communicatively projecting performative energy towards the audience; awareness of rhythm, timing and of the quality of the psychophysical texture of movement; becoming progressively aware of the entire psychophysical resonating space of the dancing body that experiences itself in motion through space.

¹⁶² Examples of subconscious layers of states of being are the relations between the movements of my body and the space of which I am not aware; the spaces and places in my body that withdraw from conscious access and thus from the ability to articulate them through motion; unspeakable and affectively neutral voids of non-articulation; invisible, non-palpable but dimly intuitable threads of other kinds of mutually aware sentient awareness; uncontrolled and unexpected withdrawing of performative energy from projecting it towards the audience towards deep interiority; the arrhythmic, timeless and qualitatively indefinable; the dissolution of boundaries between the psychophysical entity of the dancing body and the space within which it moves.

Subconscious states of being imply for me a field of experience where choice making in the articulation of movement comes from yet unknown, not consciously accessible but intuitable areas of movement origination.

It is the state of being at the cutting edge between *supraconscious* and *subconscious* performative states that I am interested in. From within this in between state or space qualities and textures of movement can emerge which are yet unknown to me and that I transform into communicative movement as artistic practice. How to learn to speak and read these movements that come from unknown depths of my dancing body is one of the main targets of this research.

I explore the communicative and epistemological potential of navigating this cutting edge through the non-verbal dance language as it unfolds with the dance and music performance SEI. I also investigate it through writing about my dance experience after the fact (*retrospective dance writing*) and through the proposals for how to be in the body during the dance (intentional orientations for corporeal consciousness, chapter five). Together, they constitute what I call here *corporeal theory*.

Retrospective dance writing as documentation and research method

With the practice of *retrospective dance writing*, I explore and describe how the non-verbal experience of dance may establish contact between the everyday world and a meta-empirical source of meaning. Through annotating¹⁶³ segments of video recordings from the creative process of SEI, I make some aspects of the inner experience of dance verbally explicit. This writing practice uncovers to some extent what usually remains hidden and implicit in dance

¹⁶³ I have explored various approaches to annotate creative processes of diverse choreographers in the context of dance research at ICK Dans Amsterdam with the use of annotation software developed by Motion Bank (a research institute founded by William Forsythe that combines dance studies, software development and design at Mainz University of Applied Sciences). These experiences in annotating dance revealed a great potential for verbally *linguaging* dance and for making explicit implicit dimensions of dance practice. The choice for annotating videos as a still further to be developed research method and documentation is based on these previous experiences. On the practice of dance annotation as a research method see for example de Lahunta, Vincs, and Whatley, "On An/Notations," 2015, 1–2. See also "Annotation and Documentation", ickamsterdam.com, accessed 16.9.23, <https://www.ickamsterdam.com/en/academy/peers-researchers/annotation-and-documentation-47> and "Motion Bank", motionbank.org, accessed 16.9.23, <https://motionbank.org/projekte>.

and what happens on a rather subconscious level during the dance. With *retrospective dance writing* I analyze states of knowing-being as I experience them in dance after the fact. The verbal description of these states also feed into the intentional orientations for corporeal consciousness/attunement (chapter five) which I see as potentially conducive to an experience of *embodied gnosis* in dance.

The transposition from the wordless inner realm of the dance to the realm of words intends to create a meaningful expression of *altered states of knowing* that are generated by the dance. It is a *complementary* expression to the wordless language of the dance itself.

It is a supportive device to identify moments within the dance that have a potential for being interpreted as knowledge processes that arise from the in-between state between conscious and unconscious movement origination. Watching the video recordings of the dance afterwards allows me to see from an outside point of view how these moments may communicate artistically as a *dance language*.

According to Pauli and Jung “the role which measurement plays as a link between epistemic and ontic¹⁶⁴ realities in physics is mirrored by the act in which subjects become consciously aware of ‘local mental objects’ (...) arising from unconscious contents in psychology.”¹⁶⁵

Pauli observed a kinship between the concepts of “consciousness” and the “unconscious” as epistemological coordinates in psychology and the principle of “complementarity” in physics. He remarked that the unconscious is only accessible indirectly, by its influence on our conscious contents, while attempts to consciously access unconscious contents has a direct influence on these contents. Seen through the eyes of a physician, this implies that the impossibility to control the consequences of the observing subject on the unconscious puts limits on the objective character of the reality of the unconscious and indicates to some extent a rather subjective nature.

Pauli states that to conduct a psychological experiment it is necessary to position a ‘cut’ between consciousness and the unconscious while the positioning of the ‘cut’ would belong

¹⁶⁴ The adjective “ontic” refers to something of real existence distinguished from phenomenal appearances. Lexico Online Dictionary, “ontic”, accessed 3.6.2020, <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/ontic> .

¹⁶⁵ Atmanspacher, “Notes on Psychophysical Phenomena,” 2014, 184.

to the realm of free choice of the experimenter. Seen from a psychological perspective, an “observed system” would hence not only be constituted by physical objects but includes the unconscious as well, while the role of the “observing device” would be given to consciousness. Pauli here remarks a striking convergence between the description of nature of both microphysics and psychology. Due to the situation of “complementarity” in microphysics, it is not possible to exclude or eliminate the activities of the observers, which implies the impossibility of objective measurement of physical phenomena. While on the other hand he postulates the existence of an unconscious in the realm of psychology that could hint towards an objective reality.¹⁶⁶

According to Basarab Nicolescu, contemporary theoretical physicist and pioneer of bridging the sciences and the humanities through transdisciplinary research¹⁶⁷, the psychophysical problem (the relationship between spirit and matter) and its implications for our understanding of reality is a pressing issue that still needs to be solved in our current time frame. He summarizes Pauli and Jung’s perspective on the psychophysical problem as: “For Pauli, the holistic nature of *unus mundus* implied that the states describing the material and the psychological fields are nested,” meaning that scientific conceptions of reality would need to include both physical and mental aspects while at the same time addressing a realm of reality that lies beyond them. Nicolescu argues that at the heart of the problem of the relationship between matter and spirit lies in the fact that Western civilization persists too brutally on separating the object from the subject, metaphysics and physics, science and religion¹⁶⁸.

I am referencing here Nicolescu to include another contemporary perspective on the Pauli-Jung conjecture. By equating the psychophysical problem with the relationship between spirit and matter Nicolescu explicitly embraces the dimension of spirit in a transdisciplinary approach towards the sciences and the humanities. Nicolescu’s perspective can thus be seen as another take on the notion of *spiritual corporeality* while positioning his and Pauli and

¹⁶⁶ Letter from Pauli to Jung in Jung, “On the Nature of the Psyche”, 1969, par. 439 footnote 130. Quoted in Atmanspacher, “Notes on Psychophysical Phenomena,” 2014, 185.

¹⁶⁷ Nicolescu, “Une nouvelle vision du monde, la transdisciplinarité”, accessed 4.6.23, <http://ciret-transdisciplinarity.org/transdisciplinarity.php>.

¹⁶⁸ Nicolescu, *From Modernity to Cosmodernity*, 2014, 141-142.

Jung's views in relation to what Nicolescu identifies as one of the largest structural problems of contemporary Western society.

In the *altered state of knowing* (suspended between the sensible and the intuitively intelligible) that is suggested with the term *embodied gnosis*, the focus lies on an intermediary zone of awareness where conscious movement choices or the insertion of pre-written (known) choreographic material interact with unconscious (unknown) movements that emerge in the moment. I unearth deeper layers of movement origination and yet unknown qualities of movement expression from within the *psychophysical resonating space* of my dancing body and transform them into a *dance language*.

Navigating movement in the intermediary space between (supra)conscious and sub/unconscious movement origination gradually shifts the position of the "cut" between the conscious and the unconscious, while both keep informing each other. The movements that emerge from the zone of the area of the "cut", communicate the experience of their coming into being with both the observing mind of the dancer as well as with the audience (and the co-dancers in the case of group pieces). Who or what is the subject or the object of the dance becomes unsettled in a mobile triangle between the dancer, the dance and the observers of the dance. Both the dancer and the spectator are the observers of a dance that emerges from a place yet unknown to all of us.

Understanding the *dancing body* as a *psychophysical resonating space* and as an interface between the metaphysical and the physical implies that the "local mental objects" of Pauli and Jung could in principle also be replaced with "local physical objects". With reference to their quest towards finding evidence of the invisible reality that mediates between mind and matter in both quantum physics and the psychology of the unconscious Pauli wrote: "I am quite confident that the final objective is the same, independent of whether one starts from the psyche (ideas) or from physis (matter)." Pauli also speculated that "a science of the future will refer to such a basic reality as neither psychic nor physical but somehow both and neither

of them. He suggested that the mental and material domains of the basic reality should be understood as complementary aspects under which this reality can appear.”¹⁶⁹

I work with *retrospective dance writing* as a documentation and research method. Besides documenting the creative process and thus gaining space for a reflective overview of its phases and progression, this practice allows me to become consciously aware of movements that emerged from the in between state between conscious and unconscious states of movement origination during the dance. From the video registrations of studio rehearsals and performances, I select fragments that I identify as communicative in the direction of the kind of language that I aim to develop. This means that I base my choice of the fragments on whether the movements are relatable to a movement towards *embodied gnosis* on an inwardly oriented experiential level (based on the memory of the experience of the movement) as well as on the outwardly oriented communicative level as an evolving *dance language*.

The radical opening towards the unknown implied in the concept of *embodied gnosis* is reflected in delegating movement origination to progressively deeper layers of the *dancing body*. Through this process, an intuited spiritual intelligence of the human body is engaged, which usually remains slumbering when only working with movement generation from areas of the *dancing body* that can be accessed consciously.

I associate the choice making involved in the selection of the dance fragments with Pauli’s conscious positioning of the “‘cut’ between consciousness and the unconscious.” The involvement of the “observing device” of the camera allows me to see the dance from an outside point of view – a perspective that I do not have access to during the dance. This outside point of view is thus one aspect that remains unconscious during the dance. By selecting fragments of dance that happened on a rather unconscious level, I identify which sections of the dance I will bring under conscious scrutiny by retrospectively annotating it. The fact that I consciously observe unconscious expressions of my body also changes its expression in following iterations of the performance. Learning to speak, write and read this

¹⁶⁹ Atmanspacher and Primas, “Pauli’s ideas on Mind and Matter in the Context of Contemporary Science,” 2006, 24.

dance language then happens through a reiterative and reciprocal dialogue between conscious and unconscious movements extended in time beyond the actual moment of the rehearsal or performance and facilitated by the observing device of the camera.

A dancing methodology

Bringing the two complementary perspectives of *corporeal theory* and *discursive practice* in dialogue with each other, parallels the process of entering and deepening the intermediary state of knowing-being in dance where sensory, (supra)conscious as well as suprasensory/imaginary/*imaginal**¹⁷⁰ (sub/unconscious) qualities of experience permeate the psychophysical texture of my movements. I approximate this intermediary state with the notion of *embodied gnosis*.

With the *dancing language* that encompasses both *corporeal theory* and *discursive practice*, I suspend an epistemological positioning on either the non-verbal, corporeal logic-based dance or the verbally discursive side. The artistic-epistemic goal is to enable a state of creative mediation between them. The effort required to facilitate this mediation is ignited by leaps of faith towards the suprasensorial and the meta-empirical, grounded in and setting off from concrete physical experience. Performing these leaps of faith in the text also parallels the radical opening towards the unknown that I experience as a necessary condition for entering something akin to a state of *embodied gnosis* in dance.

Embodied gnosis could also be described as “contemplating supra-sensory realities of the Imagination under a sensory mode”¹⁷¹ in an intermediary zone of awareness. In dance, I am working on stabilizing this state of being. This happens among others through *attuning* the dancing body in line with specific intentional orientations for corporeal consciousness (see chapter five.) Through *attuning* the dancing body towards *embodied gnosis*, I seek to establish

¹⁷⁰ I am using here both “imaginary” and “imaginal” as their distinction seems to me to be crucial to whether the state of *embodied gnosis* is achieved or not. When the “imaginary” shifts towards the “imaginal”, a sense of the *real* may be generated with the dance. Whether that experienced *real* for the dancer is imaginary or *real* for the observers is left to the speculation and imagination of the observers. When both the dancer and the observers experience a sense of the *real*, the idea of the possibility of communicating *embodied gnosis* gains more credibility.

¹⁷¹ Henry Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth*, 1989, 155.

and to maintain contact between the everyday world and an intuitable, but neither verifiable nor falsifiable, meta-empirical source of being.

Attuning the dancing body towards *embodied gnosis* stands for an attempt at creating the conditions that allow for a *spiritual-corporeal* way of embodying (the knowledge of) dance.¹⁷²

This intermediary state of being, or *altered state of knowing*, can also be described as suspended in an *imaginal* realm. It hovers somewhere between sensorial movement logic and the space that is generated by an expansive stretching of the subtle fibers of our intellectual and imaginative faculties towards a state of being where a suprasensorial faith in, aspiration towards and potentially gnosis of an unseen, intelligible, intuitable, immanent and transcendent divine or sacred realm may come into being. Navigating motion in an *imaginal* realm during dance influences the quality and texture of speaking corporeality in dance. The body of the dancer can be suspended between [*gravity**](#) and a polar opposite force of what I refer to as [*levity**](#). Gravity is an undeniable, but not yet fully scientifically understood physical force. I see the force of levity as an inner intentional disposition that strives towards enlightening matters of gravity, such as the tendency towards inertia of the matter out of which our bodies are constituted or our body's foundational condition of being drawn towards the earth at all times. Gravity and levity interpreted from an artistic esoteric point of view – such as in Rudolf Steiner's movement art Eurythmy - embody human tendencies towards ethos (levity: towards the spiritual) and pathos (gravity: towards the physical/material).¹⁷³

In my approach to *linguaging* dance, I work with (among others) two major axes along which I explore communicative movement articulation. Additional facets of my approach to *linguaging* dance are described in chapter five (attuning) and chapter six (dance, music and dance language). Whereas the *attunements* are intended as a preparation for entering a state of *embodied gnosis* in dance, the two axes mentioned here relate to the communication of these states from a non-verbal, dance-based logic of experience:

¹⁷² See chapter five.

¹⁷³ Rudolf Steiner, *Eurythmie als sichtbarer Gesang*, 1984, 119.

Many thanks to Eurythmist Gia van den Akker for pin-pointing this from the large oeuvre of Rudolf Steiner.

1. Exploring the dynamics between the experience of gravity and levity: Here I engage with and surrender to these forces. To explore their communicative potentials in relation to each other and to the observers of the dance I play with areas for corporeal expression where both streams of forces intersect in different degrees of emphasis.
2. Activating and engaging with the creative dynamics sparked by the search for unconscious but intuitively intelligible sources of movement origination.

From this foundation, I unearth the communicative and epistemic potentials of the dancing body. Through the becoming of this (non-verbal) *dance language* the *dancing body* is transformed into a [creative interface*](#) that experiences itself as mediating between the metaphysical and the physical.

With this dissertation project I elaborate ways to approximate and to communicate a state of *embodied gnosis* in the dance as well as in the written text. At the heart of this endeavor lies the wish to trigger resonances with *embodied gnosis* in the experiential landscape of the spectators as well as in the readers, and to enable a critical interrogation of this idea and experience from different points of view. The artistic-epistemic methodology for this research is not oriented towards making claims about the nature of reality that such a state may point towards. It is rather oriented towards creating potentialities for knowing that come out of experiencing, communicating and questioning it.

The experience of *embodied gnosis* in dance may happen somewhere in between *gravity* and *levity*, in between pathos and ethos. It may happen in between deep and wordless immersion into sensorial and suprasensorial movement logics and intellectual gymnastics before or after the dance where a thirst for meaning kicks in from having digested the dance experience. It is a place and state of an unfathomable convergence of worlds that may eventually catapult a searching dancer towards the unspeakable beyond sense and beyond the intellect.

Embodied gnosis is both an idea derived from bringing my dance practice in dialogue with the academic study of esotericism, as well as an ideal, in the sense of an aim to be achieved. I am not claiming to have achieved it or to be able to invoke it at will, but I can't help being convinced that it is a state of being that is worth striving towards. This conviction is based on an artistically fueled intuition, on rare but potently transformative experiences of

encountering something of a sacred dimension in and through the *dancing body* which I posit here as able to generate *altered states of knowing*.

Complementary to the non-verbal experience of *embodied gnosis* in the dance, its verbally discursive contextualization opens the gaze of thought towards the corporeal/physical as well as towards the spiritual/metaphysical. It identifies regions of potential significance that relate to the mediating concepts of *spiritual corporeality* and *altered states of knowing*. The written text distills points of entry to substantiate the notion of *embodied gnosis*. Through the written text I seek for meaningful intersections between the physical and the metaphysical that resonate with the idea of *embodied gnosis* in dance. Like the *corporeal theory* derived from the non-verbally speaking text of the dancing body, the *discursive practice* activates a relational play with *gravity* and *levity*. Together, they become a *dancing language*.

The text plays with *gravity* and *levity* by switching the center of gravity between the intuitively intelligible and the sensible, between theoretical speculation and corporeal experience. The edges or intermediary zones between both sides communicate with each other through the mediation of the key concepts. The zone of experience referred to with *embodied gnosis* hovers like a double-edged sword that floats in between these polarities of being, takes part in both and draws them together to become a whole that transcends their distinction.

Methodological positioning

Basarab Nicolescu differentiates between the notions of real and reality. Reality in the scientific context is defined in terms of resistance to our human experience. The [*real**](#) stands for the forever veiled.¹⁷⁴ With Nicolescu, what is irreducibly real involves nonresistance and belongs to the domain of the sacred.¹⁷⁵

The notion of *spiritual corporeality* contains etymologically both the “real” and “reality”. The reality of the body is the first place of resistance to the dance. Openings towards the *real* experienced through the dancing body may hint towards a zone of non-resistance coming forth from within the resistance of the physical body, creating a space for an experience of the sacred.

Altered states of knowing may happen within intermediary and intuitive levels of being that are suspended between what is objectifiable and what is beyond any pre-conceived qualification. They emerge in relation to knowledge processes that progressively move forward through radical openings towards the unknown.

The notion of *embodied gnosis* (rooted in dance experience and brought in dialogue with scholarship on esotericism) needs to be tried out and tested in and through dance practice, in dialogue with other theoretical and discursive contexts and with the dancer as a performative researcher.¹⁷⁶ To attune the dancing body to be able to perceive, to stabilize and to physically understand the state that *embodied gnosis* alludes to, is thus also co-dependent to differing degrees with the knowledge processes that are generated by exploring it from different disciplinary perspectives.

Process philosopher Alfred North Whitehead (1861 -1947) divided ‘intuitive judgments’ into three classes: affirmative, negative and suspended. While the affirmative and negative intuitive judgments conform to objective data, the suspended intuitive judgment “neither affirms nor denies conformity with the data”¹⁷⁷. The *dancing body* in a state of *embodied gnosis*, suspended in an *imaginal* realm between the sensorial and a suprasensorial faith in –

¹⁷⁴ Nicolescu, *From Modernity to Cosmodernity*, 2014, 203.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, 14.

¹⁷⁶ The thought that “new concepts must be tried out without established ways to test or apply them” is derived from Atmanspacher and Primas, *Recasting Reality*, 2008, 2.

¹⁷⁷ Mahootian and Linné, “Jung and Whitehead: An Interplay of Psychological and Philosophical Perspectives on Rationality and Intuition,” 2014, 412.

and at times gnosis of - an unseen, yet intuited immanent and transcendent divine or sacred realm of being, may also be understood in this way: as being in a state of suspended intuitive judgment, lifted upwards towards the information derived by studying revelatory insights and metaphysical speculations that hint towards the *real*, and pulled down to earth by the imperative force of gravity and the undeniable resistance of the physical body to the *real* at the same time.

Continuing this line of thought, a comprehensive understanding of the idea of *embodied gnosis* in dance as the artistic-epistemic goal of a research methodology, may be seen as a modulation of methodological agnosticism developed by esotericism scholar Hanegraaff.¹⁷⁸ Methodological agnosticism states that academic scholarship does not have any instrument for gaining access to the true nature of reality and can neither verify nor falsify any claim for the existence of such a reality. In my view, however, it is possible to work with the *dancing body* to be able to perceive and experience aspects of reality that hint towards the *real*, understood and experienced as a sacred dimension of being. Methodological agnosticism does not claim that the Divine or the Absolute does not exist because it is not accessible to science and to scholarship; it rather admits that it is not possible to know it with scholarly methods. *Embodied gnosis* in dance is a proposition, a potentiality of knowing of the sacred by artistically embodied experience.¹⁷⁹

Methodological agnosticism does not affirm or deny that it might be possible to discover “the true nature of reality” through other means than scholarship.¹⁸⁰ A state of *embodied gnosis* in dance does not necessarily give access to “the true nature of reality”, but it can create an opening to perceive something akin to it, something *real*, which cannot become a scientific truth, but the truth of an artistic expression.

In the following two chapters (chapter four: the subtle body and chapter five: attuning) *spiritual corporeality* and *altered states of knowing* function as focusing lenses to filter information from different fields of practice and discourse. The different perspectives that

¹⁷⁸ Hanegraaff, *Western Esotericism: A Guide for the Perplexed*, 2013, 11-12.

¹⁷⁹ For a proposition understood as a potentiality see Shaviro, *Without Criteria*, 2009.

¹⁸⁰ Hanegraaff, *Western Esotericism: A Guide for the Perplexed*, 2013, 11-12.

appear through the lenses of *spiritual corporeality* and *altered states of knowing* culminate towards *embodied gnosis*. Making sense of *embodied gnosis* is the pinnacle in flight towards which this investigation develops its bodily and verbal moves. Making sense of *embodied gnosis* becomes a balancing cord that spans the abyss between the wordless experience of the non-verbal dance language and the written discourse. This balancing cord is kept strung tight by the tension field between the wordless world of danced experience and the world of the word.