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Automatism and Creativity in Contact Improvisation: Re-Inventing Habit and Opening Up to Change

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Abstract: This article aims to show that the artistic creativity at work in improvised dance depends on the acquisition of automatisms through the capacity of gestural repetition to dissolve the instrumental character of the movements performed and leads to a focus on the mode of their performance. After illustrating how the rupture and experimental character of postmodern dance relies on repetition and the guiding role of feeling in contact improvisation, an analysis is made of how the abandonment of feeling—conveyed by the abandonment of gravity—that takes place in contact improvisation is indicative of the transition from a controlling attitude aimed at "problem solving" to a creative attitude aimed at "problem finding". The recourse to the Straussian notion of pathicity, the valorisation of an aesthetic—affective, expressive, emergent, and relational—character of creativity, and the adoption of a neophenomenological approach will be functional in showing that improvisational artistic creativity arises from the acquisition of a sensitivity to otherness that makes one accustomed to respond in ever new ways to the affective stimuli coming from the circumstances and the affective state underlying the dance style and one's own interpretation of it.

Keywords: postmodern dance; contact improvisation; repetition; habits; automatism; pathicity; creativity; improvisation; new phenomenology

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1. Introduction

In the early '70s, when I was first getting immersed in the world of practicing and performing dance improvisation, I spent a lot of time watching the Grand Union perform. For hours, I would see material surface on shaky ground, get nourished, worked, referred to, developed, and I'd see it begin to strengthen, come into its own, and become the ground of what would happen next. I saw material be given life or death (which in itself could become the next material), and I learned that there was, in practice, no inherent hierarchy of material. Every move had equal potential to unify, clarify, destroy, or transform what was going on. It was not just the material itself but how and when it was delivered that gave it depth and power [...] When Katie Duck teaches improvisation [...] she often tells people not to use their first impulse, but instead to wait for maybe the second or third before taking action. This ability to wait and not follow the impulse is a lot like learning how to break a habit. Holding the moment open a few seconds longer widens the gap where the old behavior/idea/movement/thought/feeling would have gone [...] On January 20th, it was a year since I stopped smoking [...] every time I want a cigarette and don't have one, I'm creating a gap. Moments that once were easily and automatically filled, have become uneasily and consciously unfilled. By leaving them unfilled, I'm not only breaking a "Momentum of being", a pattern of behavior, but I'm bringing attention and charge to a moment that would have passed without remark, one of the thinks that improvising

and stopping smoking have in common is that they both require an appetite for learning. Both are about unconscious pulls and conscious choices, about reckoning with habitual perspective and behaviors[1] [1].

The controversial nature of the relationship between habit and improvisational creativity in dance is evident in these reflections by Nancy Stark Smith, one of the pioneers of "contact improvisation". The disruptive nature of such an improvisational practice turns out to be inextricably linked to the acquisition of new habits, or rather to the transformation of previous "creative" habits. In fact, the emergence of new creative movement material does not depend on the material—which was always the same—but on "how and when it was delivered". The need to learn a way of manipulating the material at hand in order to achieve a creative outcome of one's actions becomes apparent. This is confirmed by Katie Duck's reference to not following the first impulse, which highlights the dividing line between impulsive acting and improvisational acting, which is spontaneous but mediated by a specific way of handling the artistic material.

It is clear, then, that the provocative title of the piece from which it is taken, *Taking No for an Answer*[2], has an obvious programmatic tone; it has to be internalised as a practice that leads one to act immediately, but with an immediacy that could not have taken place without the mediation of a preparation, the acquisition, that is to say, of a mode of action that has become habitual to the point of being acted upon without reflection, such as the habit of saying "No" to the first available line of action. The parallel between improvisation and giving up smoking is in continuity with this idea; it is not a matter of giving up a habit, but rather of transforming the "gaps" previously created by cigarette smoking into "gaps" of intensification and redirection of attention. It is no coincidence that Stark Smith associates both smoking and improvisation with the need for an "appetite for learning". Their initiation into something new depends essentially on the questioning of habitual "perspectives and behaviours", which are dismantled but reconstructed on new bases. We propose to investigate how the novelty of improvisational action is intertwined with such a transformative operation of habitual action, paying particular attention to the link between repetition and creativity.

This investigation will be carried out using the lexicon and the categories of the theory of the felt body (*Leib*) elaborated by Hermann Schmitz, the author of the "new phenomenology". The latter is an approach aimed at "scanning the field of possible experiences in order to find ways of anchoring the will to live in the present" [2] (p. 491), something that is denied to us by the environmental and social systems "constructed by technologists" [2] in which we live and think. For Schmitz, the task of "high specialized thinkers" is "to make the thick veil of artificial constructions transparent, so that modern man can better familiarise himself with his present life and its possibilities" [2]. Among these "veils" is the reduction of the body to its physical component, forgetting its affective experience which depends on affective states that are "atmospheres" that fluctuate in the "lived" space, "animated" by "felt bodily directions" that branch off from the felt body or reach it. Our approach therefore aims to analyse the experience of dancing from the perspective of what happens at the level of the felt body. This concept, introduced by Edmund Husserl (the initiator of phenomenology) to distinguish the living or lived body (*Leib*) from the physical body (*Körper*) [3], informs German and French phenomenology [4] and is very often used by philosophers as well as dance theorists and dancers themselves to talk about dance [5–18]. Our perspective, while fitting into the theoretical context of phenomenological studies of dance, differs from these in its use of the Schmitzian theory of the felt body[3], whose advantage over, for example, a Merleau-Ponty approach is that it allows for a detailed description of what happens at the level of the felt body, thanks to an "alphabet of felt-bodiliness" that is absent in other phenomenological perspectives[4].

2. Repetition as Reinvention. Postmodern Dance and Contact Improvisation

Although our approach focuses on the experience of dance rather than on a historical-theoretical analysis of dance genres, the history of Western dance offers crucial perspectives on the most effective angle from which to examine this question from an aesthetic-philosophical perspective. In fact, so-called postmodern dance, in whose wake dance practices such as contact improvisation emerge, becomes emblematic of the phenomenon, initiated in part by modern dance—and accentuated by contemporary dance—of questioning the theatrical codes to which modern dance has been subjected. The interest in improvisational practice is an integral part of this gesture of "rebellion", which conveys a phase of experimentation aimed at discovering all the aspects of dance that the theatrical codes had made inaccessible. If, with Catherine Kintzler [27], we consider modern and contemporary dance to be the initiators of a process of emancipation from theatrical codes that goes through the emancipation of the body itself, from a mere instrument of "entertainment" to an artistic instrument capable of making dance an art with an autonomous status, we identify the rebellion against theatrical codes as a rebellion against the ways in which the body is conceived and perceived, both in the context of classical dance and in society.

This also concerns a change in the perception and the conception of the physical body; the latter is no longer seen as an objective and fixed entity that must respect the canons of "roughness" and the absence of defects and anomalies [28]. On the contrary, already in modern dance there is a reclaiming of the dancing body as a body "stripped of its heterogeneity, purified of its voice [...] an ideal body whose entire subjectivity is dissolved in favour of an absolutist dance" [28] (p. 110). One of the peculiarities of early American postmodern dance—which was born in the 1960s—is the intention to challenge the distinction between dance movements and everyday life movements. This led to the staging of bodily movements that in everyday life have become largely and for the most part automatic—walking, running, dressing, undressing—and made them the object of attention. Repetition thus takes on a heuristic value; by allowing us to observe such movements "up close", it makes it clear that no movement is the same as the previous one, and that it is repeated precisely because its conditions of renewal change each time.

This becomes clear when one considers the context par excellence of repetition: the rehearsal. It is this aspect that Yvonne Rainer (1936–), a key figure in postmodern dance, focuses on in her performance *Continuous Project Altered Daily* (1969). Inspired by sculptor and designer Robert Morris's 1969 work of the same name, *Continuous Project—Altered Daily*, in which a pile of objects comprising electrical wires, pieces of metal, grass, and rope was rearranged daily by its creator, Rainer's performance consisted of a 30 min presentation of dance movements (with no distinction between rehearsal and performance) at New York's Pratt Institute in March 1969 and repeated over the next twelve months. The inseparability of performance and rehearsal becomes clear when one considers that training and rehearsing for a performance is not merely preparation for it, but the necessary medium for the performance to take place. The performance is both the result and the site of transformation of this medium; indeed, it cannot but continue the process of continuous transformation of the artistic material on which the dancer works every day: his or her body.

Through repetition, the rehearsal also demonstrates the temporality necessary for the generation of new material and shows that this temporality depends essentially on the temporality necessary for the body itself to transform, that is, to acquire the skills that allow it to grasp artistic-expressive resources that would not otherwise come to light. Our thesis is that through the repetition of movements, the dancer not only learns new motor skills—and the set of habits that scaffold them[5]—but also develops the "meta-habit" of paying attention to the qualitative aspect of the movement, i.e., the way it is repeated. Both

in the initial learning phase of a dance genre and in daily training, dancers are made to repeat the same movements over and over again until they become automatic; this does not mean, however, that they move like "automatons", that is, in a completely unconscious way. On the contrary, the fact that they no longer think about what they are doing does not mean that they cannot pay attention to the way in which they carry out this action. In this way, they become aware that the same movement can be performed in different ways and at different speeds, depending on the context and, in particular, on the felt-bodily sensations that the movement evokes in them. Paying attention to the variations in one's own sensations leads the dancer to emphasize or not the expressive effects they have on the movement. This is something that changes according to the sensitivity and experience of the dancer, making his or her interpretation unique.

To carry out our reflection on the relationship between habit and improvisational creativity in dance, we will focus on contact improvisation[6]. Originating from the experiments carried out by Steve Paxton and eight members of the "Grand Union" to discover "what happens when they give their weight, when they lift, when they carry, when they wrestle against each other, when they pour towards the ground and follow the force of gravity" [38], contact improvisation was created with the idea of developing a form of non-verbal communication based on touch, by "letting the movement which comes from the moment of contact exist and permitting the adventure of 'meeting in movement'" [32]. This practice, in fact, is based on exploring all the possibilities of exchanging one's own and another's weight with one or more partners, making this exchange through a point of contact with any part of one's own body and that of the partner. Contact improvisation, which is characterised by the "interplay between gravity, impulse and dynamic" [32] (p. 10) is therefore based on the creation of a kinetic energy that does not come from one or the other partner, but from their synergetic action, which exceeds that of the individual partners:

> The amount of energy apparently expended is not equal to the amount of movement or momentum produced, due to the unpredictable changes in direction and flow produced by gravity, working in conjunction with the physical mechanics of the newly configured "body": one with four legs, four arms, two heads and two torsos. It is this feeling of energy in motion that gives rise to the sense of belonging to a single entity that takes shape with and through their physical movements. [33] (pp. 50–51)

Emblematic of this is the distinction between tactility and ponderality:

> Our communication is ponderal and finds its legibility in the movements of compression (sensation of increased weight) or suction (sensation of decreased weight) between our two bodies. So we should say: when the tactile locates (the place of exchange), the ponderal "speaks" through pressure, modulating. The art of dialogue in contact improvisation is to be sensitive to the slightest variations in the other's weight and to be able to regulate the release of one's own weight in all degrees of the gravitational spectrum. [31] (p. 233)

The distinction between the tactile and the ponderal is based on the distinction between two dimensions of the body, both of which are involved in touch: the physical and the 'felt' bodily dimension. The ponderal is related to the latter, as it concerns the sensation of shifting weight and its variations, which is presupposed and implied by touch. Repetition brings the dancers into contact with precisely this second dimension, forcing them to shift the focus of attention from the act to be performed to its mode of performance, thus opening up the exploration of all the sensations associated with this mode. Contact improvisation seems to emerge precisely from the encounter with the ponderal, to which physical contact, repeated over time, gives access. It is the repetition of falls and collisions between two

partners in space that opens up the exploration of unexpected ways of using one's own weight and, through it, gravity and impulse.

3. Gravity as a Propulsive Thrust to Movement

An essential part of the "subversive" character of contact improvisation, the systematic breaking of the taboo of touching in communication [36] (pp. 158–174), occurs because the repeated "falls" encounter the propulsive thrust inherent in falling, which can only be experienced by transforming, as it were from within, our habitual attitude towards gravity. If, in everyday life, we regard it as a force to be resisted, adopting a rigid posture that locks us into a verticality that tends to "crush" the force of gravity by opposing it with an equal and opposite force, when we dance, the force of gravity is a resource to be exploited. Falling ceases to be frightening when it becomes the experience through which we can break out of the rigidity and linearity imposed by the upright posture and encounter the centrifugal force inherent in falling. A decisive role in the transformation of one's attitude towards gravity is precisely the sensitivity to ponderality, a sensitivity that develops through the repetition of falls and all attempts to discover the artistic–expressive potentialities hidden in the qualitative-affective modulations inherent in giving and receiving weight, one's own and that of others.

To surrender to gravity is to realise that you are participating in the action of a force that, on the one hand, dominates us and, on the other, acts through a body that has the power to modulate this force. And it can do so because the force it discovers in the act of yielding to gravity is not only the one that pushes downwards, but it is the "orientation" that urges it to distribute its weight horizontally, rather than simply opposing it with an equal and opposite movement. In fact, in everyday life, gravity is perceived as a force to be resisted in order to stay upright and to carry out the purposeful movements that permeate our daily lives, where it is precisely the goal to be reached—such as an object, a person, or a place—that dictates the direction and method of movement. In dance, this instrumental function of movement is missing. This implies a change in the perception of gravity, which is no longer seen as an "enemy" to which one must not yield or risk failing to reach the goal, but as a force to be welcomed, to the point of perceiving in it a propulsive thrust, not necessarily linked to a linear course of movement, but rather as a thrust towards a horizontal distribution of weight that affects the dancer physically. This could suggest a twisting of the torso and its variations (bending, turning...) that expose the dancer to his environment and to a different perception of his surroundings (the floor, the objects, the people around him), suggesting ways of moving that are not aimed at achieving goals, but at exploring ways of being in one's own body, of feeling oneself in movement and in relation to the space and its inhabitants that are different from the everyday ones. This implies a change in muscular tone, which is no longer contracted in a stiffness that occurs spontaneously when resisting the force of gravity in everyday life, but rather contracted in a tension; the body is "put under tension" by the force of gravity, to which the dancer does not necessarily yield (by falling), but which the dancer takes as an opportunity to remodulate the management of his or her own weight, distributing it over the surfaces that surround him or her (the floor, objects, people, as in the case of contact improvisation). This is how they interpret orientation, understood as a "magnetisation of perception towards space and towards others" [39] (p. 64, our transl.), which leads one to respond to the force of gravity in an expansive way, opening oneself up, that is, to what surrounds us and which proves to be a support for one's own weight. In fact, such an experience leads one to discover that one's body is involved in a network of forces that interact with the force of gravity, but at the same time provide the necessary support for one's own weight to create

dynamic forms of equilibrium that take advantage of the changing nature of these forces and the variations in one's own weight and the weight of others.

The change in attitude towards gravity is indicative of the extent to which contact improvisation emerges as a transformation of automatism, understood as the mechanical, rigid, and repetitive execution of a pattern of action, into an execution that makes gestural repetition an instrument for refining attention towards the ever-new foundations from which the same movement emerges. The deviation from the linearity of the upright posture is, in fact, the visual representation of contact improvisation's distancing from the instrumental function of direct movement to an end, where the body is merely an object to be used to achieve an end, neglecting its—nonetheless present—affective and expressive nature and effect. Contact improvisation has a qualitative, expressive-creative, primarily aesthetic value because it is linked to feeling, first and foremost to the variation in the sensation of one's own weight. The sensitivity to the change in one's own weight opens up to an alternative way of moving to the directional and heteronomous one. Our thesis is that this alternative arises precisely thanks to the change that repetition brings about on an experiential–affective level; in fact, it is in repetition that the dancer grasps the changes that it provokes inside and outside himself and discovers that he can follow these changes by giving rise to a variation in the automatism itself. As Igor Pelgreffi points out "the gesture, always repeated in the same way, allows the "loss" of the structure, which almost implodes through self-subtraction, leaving the "new" to emerge [. . .] at a certain point in the repetition—without knowing the reason—the subject is able to vary the automatism" [40] (pp. 120–122, our transl.).

Repetition, which is inherent in the learning process of any kind of dance, is what brings one into contact with the fact that automatism is perpetuated by the continuous production of the "new", because it gives access to the qualitative dimension of movement. The "loss" of the structure of the movement is, in fact, what allows one to focus on "how" one moves. The movement has not lost its form or structure; rather, this structure has been internalised to the point where it is no longer seen as distinct from the way one moves. However, as soon as one pays attention to one's own way of moving, one realises that the adaptation of this movement to one's own body has marked a variation in the incorporated motor pattern and, in the process, is like something to be "reconquered" each time. The sensitivity developed to these variations promotes the development of the dancer's creativity because it "prepares" him to grasp the element of novelty that gives way to transformations of his ways of feeling and moving, which are themselves variations of automatisms. As Mariagrazia Portera points out, nothing authentically new can happen unless one has prepared—and habituated—herself to its arrival. Even artistic improvisers can improvise only once they have embodied a whole series of cultural, technical, social, and material constraints that space for improvisation opens up [41] (p. 2).

4. Repetition and Artistic Creativity

The dancer who improvises is above all the one who knows the constraints by which dance techniques are determined, since each of these constraints, by excluding courses of action, imposes, as it were, the discovery of new ones, which takes place through a reinvention of the courses of action given by the constraints, a transformation of them, as it were, from within. This is so because preparing for a creative process does not simply mean acquiring the ability to adapt to the changes that occur each time in the circumstances in which one acts. If that were the case, the creativity involved would be no different from the creativity involved when, in everyday life, one invents strategies to adapt the articulation of one's limbs to uneven or muddy ground. Such an attitude, however, is driven by the intention to reduce the impact of changing circumstances as

much as possible by the efficiency of one's movements, by their instrumental function, and by the task they are intended to accomplish (reaching a place by crossing a bumpy or muddy road). On the contrary, artistic creativity concerns the reconfiguration of one's way of "experiencing with" the world [42], that is, one's capacity for doing, for bodily adaptation to changing circumstances, the possibility of discovering new ways of feeling and moving. As a "formative doing that invents the way of doing" [43] (p. 27, our transl.), artistic improvisation makes this rediscovery explicit with a peculiar effectiveness that does not seek to preserve the effectiveness of the instrumental function of one's movements in changed circumstances, but rather to exploit the change in the latter to bring to full expression the affective, expressive, and motor transformation that such a change provokes within oneself. Improvisational artistic creativity has to do with "immersing oneself in the uncertainty of interacting in and with the situation" [43] and promoting the emergence, beyond one's capacity for control, of an "expressive resonance and the making sense of the aesthetic unexpected (and unheard)" [43] (p. 50, our transl.).

A similar argument is made by Roberta Dreon [29], who, from a pragmatist perspective, identifies a continuity between ordinary experience and artistic experience, and locates the fulcrum of the latter in the operation of intelligent habits. Based on the notion of habit introduced by John Dewey, according to which habits are an integral part of "complex interactions occurring between living organisms and their environment" [29] (p, 139), Dreon also uses Dewey's definition of 'intelligent habits', or habits that, unlike routine habits that are "the mere repetition of previous actions" [29] (p. 143), are "a kind of ability and art, formed through past experience [whose] key aspect distinguishing [them] from routine ones lies in their stronger or weaker sensibility to environmental circumstances. Habits are intelligent when they are sensitive to the environment and consequently more flexible and capable of envisaging new forms of interactions, of enlarging and enriching the field of possible transactions with the environment" [29] (p. 144). When a "crisis" or 'memotion' occurs, there is a "disturbance from the collision or failure of habit" [44] (p. 54), which means that habit, from being routine (repetitive and performed with inertia and therefore inattention to the environment), becomes intelligent and becomes the fulcrum of the creative process. For Dreon, as for Dewey, the latter is not a creation ex nihilo; on the contrary, artistic expression is "the transformation or re-working of already existing sources and elements, a process intended to offer a new experience of the work of art to the people who will share it" [29] (p. 147). In our opinion, the notion of intelligent habit and this characterisation of creative expressiveness are in line with our idea of artistic experience as the emergence of a new way of experiencing the environment, conveyed by the receptivity to the reciprocal changes between oneself and the environment in which the artist finds him/herself. Nevertheless, some distinctions must be made: firstly, the distinction between routine habit and intelligent habit is influenced by a reductive view of the notion of repetition and automatism. Our thesis is that not only do automatisms function to develop the same receptivity and responsiveness to changes in the environment that Dreon talks about in relation to artistic creativity, but also that the way in which dancers repeat the exercises or figures of a dance they have learned is precisely aimed at making them aware of the way they are moving, the expressive quality of their steps and poses, which reflects those very changes in the environment. This means that repetition contributes to the "intelligent" reproduction of habits, since it is through the repetition of gestures that sensitivity to changes in oneself and the environment is developed and refined. In our opinion, this aspect is important because it highlights the contribution of feeling in the artistic process; although Dreon, following Dewey, stresses the inseparability of habits from the bodily component, especially the motor one, we feel that the role of proprioceptive feeling in the development of this sensitivity is not sufficiently taken into account. In fact,

it seems that feeling is the key to distinguishing the creative artistic experience from the creative experience of everyday life; in our opinion, whereas the latter can be reduced to a simple adaptation to changes in the environment through a reorganisation of pre-existing elements, the former seems instead to be responsible for a more pervasive operation that presupposes a transformation of both the self and the environment. The attention paid to the qualitative dimension of the movements performed by the dancers, and the consequent valorisation of their own feelings, leads to the discovery that interaction with the world produces modes of being that are interwoven and, above all, unprecedented. We believe that dance is the tool and the result of the body itself—and with it, the ways of feeling, moving, and relating to oneself and to others—that emerge with and through interaction with the world, especially artistic interaction, where the body is not used as a mere tool to achieve ends, but as an artistic–interpretive tool that leads to development.

5. Dance as a Phenomenon of "Emergence"

In contact improvisation, this is made even more evident by the absence of a predetermined script, so that the way of perceiving and adapting to circumstances changes in comparison to ordinary life. Adaptation to the circumstances at play in dance improvisation is driven by the impulse to extract from these changes all possible clues in order to fully express, in the postural and motor reorganisation imposed by this adaptation, the reconfiguration of the terms of the interaction with the world that has taken place. Thus, in a scenario similar to the one described above, the improviser could grasp, in the speed of movement imposed by a slippery floor, the possibility of discovering arm movements that counteract this speed and whose braking effect allows him to stop in poses that allow him to grasp other expressive cues (from contextual elements to lean against to aspects such as the beam of light coming in through the window) to be incorporated into his way of moving and managing this motor speed. Artistic improvisational creativity is the response to a "prepared" response to the unexpected variation offered by circumstances, where preparation is what enables the introduction of new elements of transformation of the self and the world. Therefore, the attitude of the improvising dancer and the artist in general "cannot be conceived (only) in terms of solving problems, but (also) in terms of finding problems" [43] (p. 161, our transl.).

If, in everyday life, creativity is used to solve problems, that is, to adapt to changing circumstances in such a way as to preserves one's ability to carry out a task, artistic improvisational creativity, on the other hand, turns this adaptation into a way of drawing from the circumstances the checkmate of the very possibility of "completing" a task, emptying, as it were, the instrumental function of the body and its movements, now forced to make the circumstances an instrument for reinventing oneself and one's own expressive-relational capacities. The latter refers to the ability to renew one's way of encountering the "other" dimension constituted by the circumstances, to adapt to them in such a way as to remain receptive to one's own "becoming other" from oneself, and to choose those modes of action that are capable of awakening such receptivity to the otherness within and outside oneself in its users, the only possible way of imagining and realising new ways of feeling, expressing oneself, and behaving that are alternative to the pre-established ones. Dance improvisation seems to manifest through the visibility given to it by the undeniable centrality of the body in the process:

> Dance manifests the recursive character of improvisation as an open system in which the results of the process—body, gestures and movements—become its constituent elements and acquire a processual character: to improvise by dancing is not only to improvise with the body, but to improvise the body, a body already prepared to be unprepared and reactive in the confrontation with

> contingency and with the other. The instrumental character of the body is thus also negotiated in the process: the suspension of control over the body, which from being an instrument becomes a subject of and to the process, entrusting itself to the present moment and dedicating itself to what is happening, is the way in which performers realise the dialectic between questioning and staging authorship in choreographic improvisation. [43] (p. 75, our transl.)

These considerations are in line with the idea of the work of art, in this case the performance, as an entity that by its very nature transcends the artist's intentions: "The creative work [. . .] transcends the artist's control and intentions. Just as improvisers do not have complete and rigid control over what is happening, the artist, no matter how well he masters the techniques of his craft and has learned and incorporated the skills involved, does not completely dominate what he does" [43] (p. 162, our transl.). The improvising dancer, especially in a dance such as contact improvisation, where there is never a "fixed" dance figure that can be traced and therefore prefigured, but where the interweaving of bodies and therefore the poses that the dancers assume are constitutively unpredictable, demonstrates this emergent dimension and, above all, that the performance transcends the intentions of the dancer. This lends itself to a closer examination of two aspects: the role of the artist's technical skills and the success or otherwise of a contact improvisation session.

With regard to the first aspect, it should be stressed that what seems to characterise artistic technique is its irreducibility to a mastery of rules which, when correctly applied, produce the desired result. On the contrary, artistic technique seems to be successful precisely where it is able to stimulate this surplus, this going beyond the work of art with regard to the artist's intentions; this is what is at the basis of the emergent phenomenon at the origin of the dancing body of the contactors themselves. Contact improvisation helps us to understand that it is precisely by following the trajectories of feeling, the nuances of "weightlessness" that we are traversing, that we go beyond the mere application of a rule, and by simply being guided by the principle of exploration and going beyond our limits—trivial ones such as those given by "what has been done before" or "how much has been done so far", as well as the insurmountable limit of not physically hurting your partner—you discover the shape of the body and its movements, inventing in real time ways to reproduce this new shape. This aspect is intertwined with the second; a performance or a session of contact improvisation does not fail; on the contrary, it succeeds precisely when it has not exceeded the artist's intentions, where it would fail if this inventive dimension, dictated by an attitude that is also challenging and provocative towards one's own motor habits, did not take place. In this respect, we follow the theories of Adam Andrzejewski and Alessandro Bertinetto [45], who share an emergentist approach to meaning and aesthetic value—which we do not have the space to explore here—according to which artistic failure is actually successful from an artistic point of view precisely because it testifies to the fact that the work of art goes beyond the artist's intentions. In our opinion, this should be included in a broader perspective that questions the very idea of error in art; Bertinetto states that "an error is not just something that contradicts a given normative order: rather, it is something that contradicts a given normative order and does not contribute to changing these normative conditions [.] Thus, movements or qualities that were errors in a previous normative order may turn out to be correct in the new context whose normativity they (more or less) accidentally helped to (trans)form" [46] (p. 285, our transl.). If there are errors in the art, in our case in contact improvisation, they lie in the failure to understand which new configuration of the management of one's own weight and that of the partner is taking shape on the basis of one's own motor choices, and thus the failure to understand which variations are taking place at the level of normativity itself. This is consistent with a conception of artistic normativity as something in fieri that is (trans)formed with

and through the transformation of a way of being of the dancer that is inseparable from a way of being of the circumstances—be it only the configuration of 'weight' relations between contactors.

6. Pathicity: Being Exposed to Our Own Transformation

The way to prepare oneself to be "unprepared and reactive in the confrontation with contingency and the other" is through repetition, which by inducing the acquisition of habits and automatisms, makes the dancer receptive to even the most subtle forms of variation in and out of oneself, precisely because the repeated act empties the body of its instrumental function—it renders it "inoperative" [47]—and instead renders visible its essentially aesthetic-expressive nature, its being, that is, at the fulcrum of the process of reinventing one's way of "experiencing" the world. The result is a radical change in attitude towards oneself and the world, symbolically represented by the dancer's change in attitude towards gravity, which is indicative of the transition from a "controlling" attitude of the individual, who conceives himself as a subject of action, capable of planning, monitoring, and foreseeing his own actions and their consequences, to a "pathic" attitude, which is typical of when the individual realises that he is subject to the "action" of what surrounds him, which conditions his way of feeling and moving.

This term was introduced by the psychologist and phenomenologist Erwin Straus (1891–1975) [48] to designate the moment of perception related to the way we perceive; it concerns the qualitative character of our experience, which, according to Straus, characterises our "original" relationship with the world. The condition of pathicity lends itself to being characterised as that to which diathesis media refers in languages such as ancient Greek. Diathesis media does not simply refer to a reflexive action, i.e., one that sees the subject as the initiator of an action that falls upon itself. On the contrary, it refers to an action that is not initiated by the subject, but which nevertheless takes place with and thanks to it. Emile Benveniste effectively highlights this aspect when he says that the middle diathesis "indicates a proviso in which the subject is the seat; the subject is internal to the process" [49] (p. 172, our transl.). An effective example of this is the ancient Greek verb *haptomai*, "to come into contact", which is an action that is neither initiated nor undergone; on the contrary, it denotes a phenomenon characterised by reciprocity and interdependence. In other words, it is a movement that can only take place with and through the movement of the other, which in turn can only take place with and through its own movement.

The state of pathicity is therefore not a state of passive reception characterised by immobility, but rather a state characterised by the feeling of being "in the grip" of a movement of which one feels to be at the centre, but not the author. It is a sensation comparable to that of the child at play [50,51], when he feels, that is to say, is in the grip of, a movement that makes him act and move in space with an unprecedented ease compared to when he is not playing. He is in the grip of an expansive movement from which he derives an astonishing security, since he has no physical reference point in space, but rather his reference points are like the waves of the sensations with which he is invested in that space, and which magnetically attract him towards modes of interaction with it that have no rational explanation. This magnetic attraction, which induces expansive action and opens up to interaction with otherness, is the same as that experienced by the dancer as soon as he listens to gravity and as often as he allows himself to be guided by the pathic dimension of his experience through repetition. What determines his movements in space are no longer measurable reference points that can be traced in qualitative space, but the sensations he feels at certain points in space, which lead him to decide with unprecedented certainty on the "right" movement for that place and that moment. This phenomenon, which is evident in dance improvisation—especially in contact improvisation—differs from

that of childhood play in that the dancer has gone through a long process of training to arrive at such decisions, a process that continues in his or her daily training. And it is precisely the dancer's training and rehearsal routines that allow him to renew each time his access to that "state of play" that makes him listen to the sensations that guide him towards the "right" motor or postural choice, that is, the one that most fully expresses the style of the dance genre in question and the most emblematic affective tonality of that performance. We argue that this happens because training leads dancers to develop a very particular sensitivity to their proprio-corporeal sensations and to how the context in which they are dancing affects how they feel. Improvised dance manifests this aspect because in improvisation the choice of movement itself (and not just the way it is executed) is made in real time on the basis of how the context affects the way they feel. In the case of contact improvisation, this means, for example, choosing to transfer one's weight to your partner(s) instead of supporting their weight, or choosing to explore the exchange of weight with one's partner(s) on a particular part of the body (the chest, the pelvis, the legs...).

7. A Neophenomenological Approach: Getting Used to Atmospheric Affordances and Their Changes

The crucial role of felt-bodily sensations becomes clear when we look at style from the perspective of the new phenomenology. Born with the intention of regaining access to the spontaneous dimension of experience, the new phenomenology focuses on the "felt" experience of the body, that is, "whatever someone feels in the vicinity (not always within the boundaries) of their material body as belonging to themselves and without drawing on the senses seeing and touching as well as the perceptual body schema (the habitual conception of one's own body), derived from the experiences made using the senses" [52] (p. 65). According to this perspective, our affective states are not internal states projected outwards, but atmospheres, entities diffused in space that affect us in the form of "motor suggestions". The latter are prefigurations of movements that we experience in the forms (animate and inanimate) that we encounter, and we experience them at the level of the lived body, in the form of sensations of contraction—in correspondence with angular or shrinking forms—or of expansion—in correspondence with rounded forms, for example. Such sensations are in fact indicative of the phenomenon of 'felt resonance' through which an atmosphere manifests itself. Our experience coincides with the change it causes in us at the felt level, at the level of the felt-bodily dynamics on which the actual body depends. This dynamic consists of the alternation between a tendency to contract and a tendency to expand. This becomes manifest when we are affectively affected in a sudden way, as in the case of a sudden shock or pain. In these cases, we feel confined to a sense of narrowness: an "absolute" dimension of spacetime in which we feel that we coincide with what is happening to us. The contraction experienced triggers an immediate expansive response, which in the case of pain, manifests itself, for example, in the emission of a scream.

Contraction, in turn, provokes an expansive response, and it is thus that contraction and expansion combine to create the felt-bodily dynamics. According to Schmitz, the moments of stasis and those of 'gliding momentum' present in every dance are the representation of the moments of contraction and expansion, respectively. In this way, dance is an exhibition of the formation itself of one's own felt-bodily dynamics and the contribution of bodily movements to this emergence. Far from being mere displacements from one point to another in space, these are processes that mark the transition from confinement to primordial presence to emergence from it, an "active" emergence, through bodily movements that are coherent with what is happening at the felt body level. Contact improvisation is particularly suited to analysis from a neophenomenological perspective, precisely because

it is based on finding a balance between the sensation of contraction and the sensation of expansion:

> Tension masks, covers sensation. So, it's a balance. If I am too tense, I don't feel gravity, I can't tell if I'm falling and then it's very late. I am relaxed and I feel it's going down, I work with it. Too loose it's not good too, tight is difficult. I am not already committed to a shape, I'm in the movement and I feel the support and I feel it very quickly, but I wait . . .. But I am not too loose and I am not already committed, I'm in between. [53]

The whole practice of contact improvisation can be seen as a continuous search for this "in-between". The instability of this state fosters artistic creativity because it prevents one from imposing movements on one's own body; by not binding one to a commitment, it leads one to adopt that (pathic) attitude aimed at "problem finding", which opens one up to unprecedented affective-motor and relational modalities. In fact, motor suggestions do not provoke a punctual response; the motor response to them is part of their self-giving, which therefore reveals itself as an expressive affective self-giving and is therefore essentially bodily. An illustrative case of this is music, which for Schmitz is the 'realm' of motor suggestion: "The bodily movement in space that is guided by music does not orient itself to the expert according to instructions that are to be heard step by step in the sound, but follows a global preliminary designation that he has within himself, as a musical guide" [54] (p. 41, our transl.).

The motor suggestions that come from the music or the dancer's gestures should not therefore be considered as stimuli that elicit a specific response. On the contrary, the dancer finds himself fully invested in a way of moving that he does not impose on his limbs; on the contrary, he takes possession of them, thus conditioning not only his way of moving but also his way of making himself receptive to the other motor suggestions that surround him. This becomes even clearer if we follow Tonino Griffero—author of a neophenomenological "atmospherological" approach[7]—and characterise motor suggestions as atmospheric affordances. The term affordances was introduced by the American psychologist James Gibson to show that our perception is a perception of affordances, understood as "invitations to act", which vary according to the characteristics of the subject and the environmental circumstances in which he moves[8]. Griffero, however, takes up this expression and gives it an affective meaning; motor suggestions are first and foremost invitations to feel in a certain way, which corresponds to a way of moving and thus of "experiencing" the world.

Atmospheric affordances are the source of creative inspiration for artists, because they put us in a certain "felt-bodily disposition" which constitutes the affective tonality—the atmosphere—emblematic of the style to which the work of art in question—in our case, the performance—adheres. This affective state, which is more integral and lasting than the individual and fleeting affective states that pass through us, nevertheless requires these emotional movements, without favouring any of them; these affective states, which are inherent to the bodily disposition in question, are the ones that are translated into the performance through the motor suggestions that it evokes in the dancer (thanks to its formal characteristics). Art, then, is "the result of an encounter between the felt body's specific "gestures" and the feelings" [61] (p. 23), the atmospheres which, as felt-bodily dispositions, are translated into the performance in the form of motor suggestions which, in turn, are translated into the bodily movements and even gestures of those who experience the performance in question. In fact, both the artist and the spectator enter into a "felt" communication with the performance, resonating at the level of the "felt" body with the style underlying the work, understood as "a formal-creative objectification of the felt-bodily resonance to the expressive qualities of the environment, arousing impressions due to a specific felt-bodily communication" [61] (p. 23).

Our hypothesis is that learning a dance genre occurs through the acquisition of the habit of paying attention to felt-bodily sensations that correlate with the steps and poses that characterise that dance genre (or that inform the nature of the improvisational practice, in the case of an improvised dance genre). These felt-bodily sensations are like variations in what we might call the "affective tonality" that underlies the dance genre in question (passion in the case of Argentine tango, or attention to weight exchange in the case of contact improvisation, or the sensation of lightness, grace, and elevation in ballet). Each of these affective tonalities is evoked by the atmospheric possibilities stimulated by certain contextual elements: the music (in the case of tango), the clothing and other accessories (the pointe shoes in the case of ballet), the spatial characteristics (the unobstructed space that allows contact with the floor on which two or more people can move in the case of contact improvisation). Daily practice allows the dancer to become receptive and responsive to these specific elements and the atmospheric possibilities they offer. In this way, they learn to incorporate or improvise the steps and poses of a particular dance genre, guided not by the teacher's instructions or the mental "commands" they give to their physical body, but by their felt-bodily sensations. In fact, their body develops the habit of "feeling" the affective action of the atmospheric affordances relevant to the type of dance and responding to them in a way that also takes into account how the particular circumstances in which one is dancing vary these atmospheric affordances (the movements of a particular partner or a particular tango music might make the tango danced even more passionate or melancholic or virtuosic; a larger space changes the timing and the way the weight is exchanged between the contact partners...). Once such a habit is formed, one reacts automatically to the atmospheric affordances associated with it and is able to replicate that attitude, that way of doing things, even if only with a posture or a gesture[9], but also in response to different atmospheric affordances. In our view, the practice of improvisation makes this aspect manifest because improvisation, as the "coincidence of process and product" [63] (p. 1), makes it clear that the real-time creation that characterises it is never realised without preparation. On the contrary, the choices made by the dancers at the time of performance are the clearest example of the internalisation of the improvisational style in question, and they reflect the individual dancer's interpretation of that style.

Common to all contact improvisation performances, for example, is the maintenance of a point of physical contact with the partner(s). However, there are dancers who prefer to exchange weight in a more dynamic way, with quasi-acrobatic lifts or grabs and movements in space—as is particularly the case at the beginning of this practice; they also respond to the atmospheric affordances of objects and incorporate their manipulation and use into the practice. Others prefer to shift weight horizontally, using all the atmospheric affordances of the floor. In improvised dance, it is precisely the dancer's acquisition that the way of making oneself receptive to certain atmospheric affordances is not a 'closed' way, based on responding to them in an always identical way, but an 'open' way, so to speak: the dancer has made oneself sensitive to certain affordances in order to respond to them in an always different way, but always in tune with the bodily disposition associated with that improvisational style (the experimental, playful, but also diplomatic approach to physical contact in the case of contact improvisation).

What then needs to be trained is the ability to maintain that style by varying it, i.e., by taking the creative cues offered by the atmospheric opportunities present to express the proper bodily disposition of that style. For example, when Nancy Stark Smith and Karen Nelson, in a contact improvisation performance [64], begin to climb and hang upside down from the rafters of the space in which they are dancing, they are not only restoring the acrobatic character of contact improvisation, but above all they are doing so by seizing the invitations to feel and move offered by the architectural characteristics of the place. In

doing so, they extend the principle of "tactile" communication on which this practice is based to non-human entities. This is an aspect that would not have emerged so clearly in a planned dance; what improvisation makes manifest is precisely the emergence of the work of art "beyond planning and realisation [...] The creative work, although produced with skill and intelligence, goes beyond the control and intentions of the artist" [43] (p. 162, our transl.), as Alessandro Bertinetto states. Contact improvisation shows the imposition of the work of art in an unpredictable way, but carefully provoked by the artist who, although surprised by the new declination of the artistic style offered by the work of art—in our case, the performance—has trained and prepared himself daily to be receptive to this otherness and to consider its unfolding in all its modulation and expressive potential.

8. The Transformative Nature of Automatism

This receptivity is nothing other than the capacity to surrender oneself to the pathic dimension of one's own experience, a capacity that is developed and maintained precisely through the acquisition of automatisms and by using the repetition of the pattern of action performed to increase one's attention to the manner of its realisation. For this reason, the acquisition of automatism is of crucial importance in improvised dance. Indeed, they bring one into contact with a relational dimension that, as Pelgreffi points out, is inherent in the etymology of "automatism": the Greek *autós*: the self. There are two ways of considering the self. In the first case, it is:

> The centre of a centripetal movement: something is directed towards the self [...] we indicate it in ordinary language, that something is inherent in the interiority [...] The second option, on the other hand, thinks of the root autos as that of the self in expressions such as going from the self, moving from the self [...]. The autos is the site of this overlap between the two great senses (in itself and of itself) [...] The dynamic inside and outside (entering and leaving) typical of a threshold, of a zone of exchange between two dimensions that are not reducible to each other but that nevertheless communicate [...] It is never quite clear whether repetition means re-entering one's own basic form or exiting it. Or both [...] the same is also true [...] for the [...] impulse to automatic action, which is at the same time inherent in becoming other than oneself, but also in reconfirming oneself in the flow of the vital-natural movement that literally makes us be. [40] (pp. 54–55, our transl.)

Dance makes visible precisely these two movements of going out of oneself and returning to oneself, but "other", transformed. Stark Smith's characterisation of "gaps" as these "open" moments, empty spaces created precisely to make room for new movement, seems to illustrate well how dance offers moments when the dancer is led to assume, so to speak, how they have been changed by the situation in order to carry out a creative activity. When the contact improviser refrains from acting impulsively, he listens to his sensations and to what is affecting him and how in the context in which he finds himself. He can then choose from the sensations he feels those that make him feel most in harmony with the underlying sensation that animates this particular practice, or even those that are in clear contrast to it; for example, if he has preferred to practice changing weight with his partner in an upright position, perhaps with jumps and leaps, he may be seized by the desire to try exploring weight on the floor [65].

However, dancers have to get used to feeling this transformation and using it creatively, hence the crucial role of training, which is based precisely on exercises that are repeated daily, in other words routines. By teaching a shift of attention from what we do to how we do it, it transforms the controlling and active attitude into a pathic one, one of openness and listening, but also one of "play", which makes one capable of grasping both atmospheric

affordances that one had not previously noticed or considered collectively, and thus of exploiting them creatively in a way that one tends to underestimate in goal-directed movements. What happens is a change in the kind of attention involved in dancing, a change that occurs while learning the dance genre itself.

9. The Creative Potential of "Floating" Attention

Useful in this regard is the use of the notion of 'floating attention' introduced by Undine Eberlein. Following a neophenomenological approach, Eberlein adds to the Schmitzian categories that of "active focussed" felt-bodily experience and "peripheral felt-bodily experience" [23]. The former designates the experience of when one turns one's attention towards one's affective state in search of a certain sensation, for example, and of 'peripheral' attention. The former designates the experience of when one turns one's attention either towards one's individual bodily sensations (this is "active" focused experience) or towards one's general affective state without focusing on a particular sensation (this is the case of "passive" felt-bodily experience)[10]. Peripheral felt-bodily experience, on the other hand, concerns those moments when one turns one's attention to one's affective state in a semi-conscious manner, such as when one turns one's attention to a specific activity and one's attention to one's affective state remains in the background. The learning of a dance seems to be marked by the passage through the three forms of attention involved in these two forms of own-body experience described by Eberlein.

If in the first phase of learning the emphasis seems to be on peripheral felt-bodily experience, focusing on the type of steps and postures to be performed rather than on the feeling, then in a second phase one moves case by case through all three forms of felt-bodily experience, specifically through one's overall affective state. As one learns the basic steps and postures, one pays attention to the bodily sensations that one learns are associated with each of them. At this stage, one can speak of an active, focused bodily experience until, with practice, attention begins to turn more and more to one's overall affective state and what is causing it. With Schmitz, we can read this process as a change in the orientation system one uses, with a transition from a predominant use of the perceptual body system to the motor body system. The first phase of learning a dance is characterised by the use of the perceptual body system. This is the visual and tactile representation of our physical body that allows us to visualise our body parts with our eyes closed by connecting the different body parts with reversible lines.

This is the system we use when, immediately after a dance step has been explained to us, we ask ourselves whether we should move the right foot or the left foot when repeating it. Through practice and repetition, the movement becomes 'automatic', especially the basic steps and poses. We move with ease, no longer wondering about the relative positions and distances of our body parts but turning our attention to our general way of moving. In this way, our own bodily experience becomes "peripheral"; we turn our attention to how our surroundings affect us affectively, conditioning the specific way we feel and move in that circumstance, which is also consistent with that of the style of dance at play. Automatisms are associated with the exclusive use of what Schmitz calls the "motor body schema". The latter consists of irreversible felt-bodily directions, i.e., motor suggestions that depart from the body—such as the gaze or one's own gestures—but also reach it (such as the gestures of others or motor suggestions from surrounding human and non-human entities). Unlike the perceptual pattern, the motor pattern does not have a fixed zero; it is variable and unattainable (for example, when we are reflecting it is the head, while when we are in a precarious position of balance it is in the pelvis). Dance is the activity in which the motor system acquires its "free development" [67]; in particular, it seems to us that it undergoes the transformation that Schmitz attributes to the motor system when one

learns to manipulate an object. Such manipulation does not occur by imposing movements on an object, but rather by allowing the object's own conformation to guide the way in which it is handled. The repetition of this leads us to a state of automatic unconsciousness, which is an indication of the fact that, at an unconscious level, our motor scheme is gradually expanding, i.e., enriching itself with motor suggestions either coming from the object or directed towards it. This state of unconsciousness is the one that pervades all automatisms, without, however, preventing a conscious focus on the sensations associated with their performance, i.e., the intervention of peripheral and sometimes even focused attention does not prevent conscious moments of attention. They are "embedded" in the unconsciousness that forms the background of every automatism and whose conscious thematization, however, makes it possible to remodel one's automatisms.

This hybrid dimension between consciousness and unconsciousness, also with regard to automatisms, is an aspect to be appreciated. If, for Eberlein, the acquisition of a dance is associated with an increasingly "peripheral" felt-bodily experience, in our opinion, one has learned to dance—and above all to improvise—when peripheral attention alternates with the attention typical of passive felt-bodily experience, which is not related to the search for a specific affective state, but rather to one's overall affective state, an indispensable tool for grasping what atmospheric affordances are at work and what changes they produce in one's way of feeling. This seems to be in line with Alessandro Bertinetto's thesis that the acquisition of the type of attention in the game adopts what Eberlein calls "floating, self-forgetting attention", which seems to be the focus of a state of being relaxed and calm and of naturalness with at the same time extreme concentration and the right amount of tension [so that] the permanent dynamic of inside and outside, centring and opening, condensing and widening seems to extend beyond the outer body boundaries into the felt-bodily directional space and to fill this space [26] (p. 105, our transl.). In contact improvisation, an example of this hybrid state between awareness and unawareness can be seen in the head-to-head exercise, in which two contactors have to move while maintaining part of their head as a point of contact. In this way, they are initially forced to focus their attention on the sensations they feel; they both feel the same pressure and are led to focus their attention on the way this pressure influences their motor choices, in particular their management of their own and the other's weight. Little by little, however, they give themselves over to the flow; a kind of osmosis is created so that one does not have to wait for the other's reaction to understand which movement to make, but both act as if they were a single organism. They have become accustomed to experiencing the other as an extension of themselves, so that as the exercise progresses and they gain confidence, their attention fluctuates, sometimes focusing on specific sensations and sometimes on their general state of being, which includes the other's state of being.

10. Critical Learning and Aesthetic Know-How

The acquisition of automatisms during the learning of improvised dance and the relevance of repetition in the dancer's daily practice are functional to the acquisition of this "in-between" state, where a floating (*schwebend*) attention is the key to avoiding the adoption of a controlling attitude that anticipates movement by imposing it on the body and the situation, making it a sterile mechanical repetition of embedded patterns. This is because what is at stake in dance is a "critical" learning of automatism [40], that is, a way of learning motor patterns that, in becoming automatic, become an instrument for cultivating the ability to pay attention to the smallest variations that make the same gesture emerge each time on a new basis. The peculiarity of dance is that it shows the key role of corporeality in the development of this sensitivity to the otherness inscribed in each repetition. In this respect, following Merleau-Ponty, Pelgreffi points out that:

> There is an essential relationship between the incorporation of habits, the modification of perspectives or schemes, and the physical resistance to this assimilation [...] This indicates that the body is resistance, just as it contains the effort in the modification of our learned automatisms, that is, the effort associated with a new corporeal learning [...] In the future of the next gesture, we can [...] interrupt the automatic repetition, and this precisely because of this constitutive complexity that is determined by the past of the gesture...] in the future of the next gesture, we can [...] internally interrupt the automatic repetition, and this precisely because of this constitutive complexity that was determined in the past of the gesture, that is, in the time and space of its existing learning. It is thus in the bodily learning mode of automatism [...] that the key to the divergence from the self in repetition, that is, the ethical quality of the bodily gesture, must be sought. [40] (p. 142, our transl.)

In our opinion, the quality of which Pelgreffi speaks is essentially aesthetic, precisely because it has to do with the coincidence of the emergence of the gesture with the emergence of an affective-bodily sense that finds its expression and unfolds in the gesture. The emergence of this otherness goes hand in hand with the emergence of the body itself, the new corporeality that gives rise to each dance gesture, hence the sensation of a "divergence of the self", a feeling of being "other than oneself" while feeling oneself. Repetition is the tool for developing and maintaining this sensitivity to otherness in the continuous becoming of the dancer's daily learning and training process; hence, it has a necessary presence in the improviser's daily life.

Dance technique, which is learnt through repetition—and thus through the development of automatisms—is precisely what directs the dancer not only towards the acquisition of physical skills, but also towards the development of this sensitivity to otherness. This is dictated by the fact that the constraints imposed by the technique force the dancer to constantly rediscover in himself and in the context the expressive means to return to the style of dance to which the technique learnt belongs, in accordance with the effects produced by the encounter between the technique and its circumstances in his becoming corporeal, in the affective, motor, expressive, relational interweaving that compose it. It is therefore not just a matter of learning individual motor habits, but rather what Bertinetto calls a "(meta)habit of responsive sensitivity" [68] (p. 66), a habit of "sensory-affective attention to the concrete environmental situation" [69] (p. 40, our transl.), and which essentially concerns the ability to grasp the new configuration that one's own relationship between oneself, the dance style, and the circumstances implies. The sensitivity to the otherness within and outside oneself, which is conveyed through the acquisition of the meta-habit learned by the dancer, is related to the development of what Giovanni Matteucci calls "aesthetic know-how", distinguishing it from a "pragmatic know-how":

> The first form of know-how, the pragmatic one, is embodied in a technical competence: you have to learn certain rules that govern a practice—a method for playing a musical instrument, for solving a score, etc [.]. The second form of knowledge, the operative one, on the other hand, takes concrete form in what could be defined as "aesthetic know how", where one has to orient oneself towards the material in order to find a way of also using what one incorporates into a practice in order to produce an expressive instance in the interweaving of objective and subjective elements. [42] (pp. 94–95, our transl.)

Knowledge as aesthetic know-how, as opposed to knowledge as operational, does not seem to be distinct from the process of learning a dance technique. On the contrary, it develops with and through it, since the technique is the instrument with which the dancer

discovers, from time to time, possibilities of variation consistent with the maintenance of the style, a maintenance that passes through the changes brought about by its reinterpretations. What seems to be thematised here is the distinction between the initial phase of learning basic physical skills and the exercise of one's own creative abilities, a distinction that is reflected in the way one approaches the practice associated with its acquisition, whereas the dancer, when practising to acquire a technical skill, is in fact in the "problem solving" perspective, once he is immersed in the practice of dance. This includes, in the case of the improviser, the repetitions that characterise his daily training; he sees it as a tool for grasping the essence of the dance; he sees it as a tool for grasping the criticality of the technique itself, to discover how not to "accomplish" a task—"Exercise is done to be missed", says Francis Ponge, quoted by François Berquin [70] (our transl.).

In fact, the intention is to find in it the critical points, those constraints that, thanks to the resistance that the body puts up against them, make it discover itself as capable of grasping an otherness that makes it discover a new configuration of its experience of the world. In fact, the sensitivity to otherness that the body is accustomed to perceiving inside and outside itself leads it to ask itself "what if?", that is, to explore alternative modes of being to those already established, and this is also the question that any study of improvisation hopes to pose in a new way[11].

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Notes

1 Katie Duck (1951–) is a professional performer and multidisciplinary artist. She uses improvisation as both a creative tool and a performance strategy. A key figure in experimental performance, Duck is also committed to teaching and mentoring young artists through workshops such as those mentioned by Stark Smith.

2 Echoing Yvonne Rainer's "No Manifesto" (the programmatic text of postmodern dance), this title emblematises the spirit of rebellion towards the theatrical codes to which dance had conformed up to that moment, proving the coincidence of this gesture of negation with the affirmation of a way of "doing otherwise" with respect to tradition.

3 We prefer to refer to this dimension of the body as "felt" rather than "living" or "lived" because, according to the neo-phenomenological approach we adopt, the emphasis is precisely on the role of affective states and bodily sensations experienced by the dancer as inseparable from a specific way of being, which is always also a way of moving.

4 Among the authors who use the new phenomenology to study dance, we mention the sociologist Robert Gugutzer [19–21] and the philosopher Undine Eberlein [22–26].

5 We follow Roberta Dreon's suggestion not to confuse skills with habits, and Dreon's characterisation of skills as complex capacities acquired through training and thus through the acquisition of knowledge: "a complex variety of habits [. . .] such as focusing our visual and acoustic perception on the potential dangers to be avoided in the street when driving the car, or attuning the movement of our back towards and away from the keybpard with the rhythm of our breathing when playing the piano. Skills are clusters of habits so to say, and many of them are not acquired intentionally [. . .] but rather through attunement to the circumstances and the process of mutual adaptation of the different components interacting with one another." [29] (p. 243).

6 On the subject of contact improvisation, we suggest: [30–37].

7 See at least [55–58]. The difference between Griffero's approach and Schmitz's is that for the latter there are only "prototypical" atmospheres that we experience as soon as we enter a space. In contrast, Griffero posits that there are also "spourious" atmospheres, i.e., atmospheres that we generate—in response to these prototypical ones—and "relational-derivative" atmospheres: the atmospheres that arise from the interaction between human entities and between human and non-human entities. The link between dance and atmospheres deserves to be further explored, also in dialogue with an approach such as that of Gernot Böhme, who, like Griffero and unlike Schmitz, recognises the capacity to "generate" atmospheres. Worthy of note, for example, is the

notion of the "ecstasy of things", which emphasises the "affective" power of non-human entities, that is, their ability to create the conditions for an atmosphere to be generated, as happens in the theatre [59,60], but, in the case of dance, also outside the theatre, including urban spaces, whose affordances are expressed in movements that are different from those used when moving through the city with purposeful movements, thus generating a new urban space and a new way of experiencing it and relating to and through it.

[8] For a bug, a water surface is perceived as an invitation to walk on it, which is not the case for humans. We would also like to take this opportunity to emphasise that our reference to Gibson's characterisation of affordances—rather than to the more recent debate on the subject—is motivated by Griffero's explicit reference to it in formulating the notion of 'atmospheric affordances', which retains the qualitative, relational, and emergent character of Gibson's notion.

[9] [62] From minute 1'45 to minute 1'48. In these few seconds, a flight attendant moves her hand to the rhythm of the music of the dabke, the Lebanese folk dance, performed here by professional dancers and the participants of a flash mob held in the duty-free shop at Beirut airport on 5 March 2011. The dabke is encapsulated in this swaying gesture, as if it were permeated by a slight vibration. It is this sinuous, spiralling line, suggested by the music of the dabke and made its own by the figures of this dance, which finds a different declination in each of its regional variations.

[10] Although a similar distinction has already been made by Ernst Gombrich [66], we refer to Undine Eberlein because she uses these terms with the specific purpose of integrating Schmitz's "alphabet" of the felt body.

[11] It is Ann Cooper Albright [71] who suggests replacing the question "what is improvisation?" with "what if improvisation", thus giving an epistemological indication that is also highly relevant to an aestheticological investigation of dance.

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