

**PERFORMING PHENOMENOLOGY: A practice –
led investigation of contemporary performance**

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A thesis submitted to the University of Bedfordshire, in
fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of MA.

February 2013

Abstract

This thesis is an analysis of three contemporary performances. These performances are very different, what they have in common is that they were either performed, or curated by the author. The problem under investigation in this thesis concerns the experience of dance practice and the manner in which that experience is articulated. In other words, this MA is an attempt to describe three contemporary performances in a coherent, revealing, analytical way. The central purpose here is to bring into theoretical focus these contemporary accounts of dance practice. It follows that the thesis asks how revealing and how successful these conceptual accounts of dance are?

The methodology employed in this thesis may broadly be called phenomenological. This term is characteristically associated with the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961). The emphasis in phenomenology and in this thesis is on the experience and perception of the agent or actor herself. This thesis shares this emphasis. The phenomenological method is best described as a constellation of concepts rather than a series of immutable principles.

The primary conclusion of this thesis is to recommend phenomenology as a useful tool for the understanding and analysis of dance practice. Critical, in this respect are the ideas of embodiment and the lived body. In so far as this thesis makes a modest claim to contribute to our knowledge of the subject under enquiry it reminds us that a practice as complex as dance requires a discrete, experience-based theoretical explication. My sincere hope is that the reader will find such an account in what follows.

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of M.A. at the University of Bedfordshire.

It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University.

Name of candidate:

Signature:

Catherine Ann Bennett

Date:

13th February 2013

I wish to dedicate this work to the memory of Gill Clark.

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Introduction

This thesis provides the written component of a practice-led research project that comprises three chapters, which outline the research context, the practice based method, analysis of practice and finally a conclusion summarising the research outcomes. This introduction will provide a brief statement of the aims and objectives of the study and a definition of key concepts and terms.

There are three performance works discussed in this thesis. There is a duet, an improvised solo and finally a film. The duet was performed by Matteo Fargion and myself, under the Artistic Direction of Siobhan Davies. This performance took place at the Hayward Gallery in London, the Ikon Gallery in Birmingham and at the Victoria Miro gallery also in London. The title of the whole performance was *The Collection* (2009), the duet discussed here is called *Minutes* (2009). The title was chosen as the performance was sub-divided into one- minute length pieces. Each of these pieces also has their own title, which will be referred to in the methodology section of this study. There were fifteen pieces and some were repeated during the course of an hour. Each minute performance had its own rhythmic structure and choreography. The structure was fundamentally musical and the movement, text and voice were in conversation with this structure.

The second piece of practice to be considered in this discussion is an improvised solo, which was part of a theatre performance, *i-witness* (2009), which, was in turn based on WG Sebald's book *The Rings of Saturn* (2007). *i-witness* (2009) was performed widely throughout England and Wales. The improvisation was in response to WG Sebald's photographs. The photographs are included in the text, however they are never explicitly referred to in the *Rings of Saturn* (2007). They function as an alternative, ghostly spine to the text and the argument that Sebald was prosecuting. There were twenty-two photographs in total and the order in which they

are seen are consistent in the book but changed for each performance. The character of the improvisation was determined both by this random structuring device and by Sebald's insistence on the importance of memory, recovery and translation in historical documentation. The final performance project analysed in this MA thesis is the film, *Things We Found* (2009). This film was also part of the theatre piece *i-witness* (2009). Film images are invariably integrated into a theatre or dance performance; what was unusual about the film *Things We Found* (2009) was that it was screened right at the start of the theatre performance. The film was fifteen minutes long and set the tone and subject matter for the following live performance.

An aim that is threaded throughout all of the writing presented here and is particularly in evidence in Chapter Two is the utilisation and development of core phenomenological concepts. These concepts - resonance, reversibility, pre-reflective, reflective - were developed first by the French Philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961). The broad aim in this thesis is to demonstrate the continued relevance of these concepts for contemporary dance practice. This relevance is made more pressing when consideration is given to the clarification, and where appropriate, modification of these concepts. An additional aim of this thesis is to provide a methodological framework or model for other dance artists to explore and utilise when they come to make their work from a phenomenological stance. In the conclusion I shall consider how far I have managed to articulate this model of phenomenology in practice.

The analysis of the duet known as *Minutes* (2009) had two aims. The first aim was to unpick and analyse the tension, between the performer as the object of vision and at the same time capable of vision, or seeing themselves. How far I was capable of achieving this will be considered in Chapter Two where the methodology of the score will be discussed. Here I hope it suffices to say that my dance practice is geared to improvisation and adaptation both across the "stage", between performers and between myself and the audience.

The aim is to examine the seen-seeing relationship of the performer through the prism of exchange. As a principle exchange has historically been associated with

economics and Marxist economics in particular. “Exchange value” is the mystifying principle at the heart of the circulation of commodities. For Marx the activity of exchange is ideological; it hides the true worth of value, which must always be use value. In this thesis I use the word exchange to represent the possibility of communication. Exchange communication is the bridge between the audience and the performer. It might also be said that exchange is the bridge between the internal and external worlds of the performer. The second aim pursued in *Minutes* (2009) concerns an understanding and analysis of the division between tacit knowledge and intention. Tacit knowledge refers to that knowledge that is drawn from, and about, the world. Tacit knowledge is not, however, the subject of conscious attention. Riding a bicycle or catching a ball, are good examples of activities that, once mastered, require little conscious thought. It might be said that tacit knowledge is knowledge that our body accumulates; it is, as I discuss below primarily “action knowledge” in the world. Margaret Whitehead a Physical Educationalist describes tacit knowledge as “that which is acquired through interaction with the world... it is learned through experience rather than being articulated and subject to detailed description”. (Whitehead, M. 2010:28) In as much as the duet in *Minutes* (2009) was performed many times during the course of the day it was important that the performers did not behave as if their movements were unconscious manifestations of a tacitly held understanding. On the contrary it was vital, in spite of the repetition, that the duet retained a real sense of intention and purpose. Intention implies that humans are intending beings. Individuals come into the world and interact with the world, have goals, plans, purposes and experiences. Experiences may be modified and there might be a restless desire to interact with the world. Intention places emphasis on life as a singular accumulation of experiences. Intention is not necessarily the polar opposite of tacit knowledge. Nevertheless in the case of the *Minutes* (2009) duet the aim was to analyse the performance as if tacit knowledge and intention lay continuum. How did I relate in performance to these two points on the continuum? What strategies did I employ to remain intentionally embodied during this performance? These questions will be addressed in Chapter Two.

My aim in my improvised movement response to photographs appearing in WG Sebald's *The Rings of Saturn* (2007) is to expand an understanding of just what the phenomenological, concept, of the pre-reflective can mean when an individual is engaged in movement. When I use the concept pre-reflective I am referring to experience or understanding that exists below the level of consciousness. This does not mean that tacit knowledge resides somewhere, within, for example, the sovereign body (neither is it helpful to think of this kind of knowledge as "residing" within the mind). It is, in my view, better to think of tacit knowledge as present in the act of its doing. Tacit knowledge happens. It exists in the imperative, rather than in the spoken or theorised, mode. Often as Whitehead, again, remarks the pre-reflective experience goes un-remarked as "there is no descriptive language available to articulate this embodied relationship with the world"(Whitehead, M. 2010:26). I aim to enrich and reveal the pre-reflective element in improvised movement.

The final performance under consideration in this thesis is the film, *Things We Found* (2009). The primary aim in this was to investigate how far I could engage in a kinaesthetic editorial process with the material. In other words I wanted to edit the film in a way that was consistent with my research into phenomenology, and edit with an embodied choreographic determination.

This introduction not only attempts to set out the aims of the thesis that the following pages will, hopefully, go on to exemplify but also promises a clarification of some of the technical vocabulary that is employed. I have said something about what I mean when I use the word intention, but perhaps a little more can be said to clarify. Intention as I use it requires a relationship to the body, this is because intention as existence is bodily. To follow the terminology of Merleau-Ponty, intentionality as existence is expressed in the body as "motor (moving) intentionality (*intentionnalité motrice*)" (Merleau-Ponty, M 2008:115). By this I mean that movement can inhabit and convey meaning and secondly intentionality can clearly reside in movement. So when I use the word intention in this thesis it is most emphatically crossing the Cartesian divide and suggesting movement. "Bodily movement itself is meaningfully about "things", it is intentional". (Merleau-Ponty, M. 2008:112-13) By Cartesian I am referring to work of the French Philosopher, Rene Descartes (1596-1650). Descartes

was of the view that mental states and physical states were states of two quite distinct aspects of human experience. Those aspects were the mind and body. A body occupies space and a mind is a thinking, conscious thing. Cartesian dualism implies that these two different states are almost two different worlds, composed of entirely different kinds of things. (Norman, R. 2004:65-7).

Most researchers and practitioners working in the field of dance and performance encounter what is known as the Mind-Body problem. I am investigating these three dance encounters from a phenomenological perspective, in opposition to the Cartesian view of the human condition. Just as Merleau-Ponty opposed the view that the mind was fundamentally separate and superior to the body, so this thesis follows what is generally known as the “monist” position. Monism is generally taken to mean that humans are entities that are not divisible into separate parts or elements. (Whitehead, M. 2010:22-3; Merleau-Ponty, M. 2008:85) Nevertheless it is the case that a unified approach to mind and body, faces not only the continued challenge of Cartesian dualism but also a deeply rooted linguistic attachment to the body as something that has to do things. For example it is not unusual to say that I am going to get my body “into shape”, or that that the body (my body) needs to be dressed or washed. (Whitehead, M. 2010:23) Indeed it is the case that Merleau-Ponty’s concept of the body as a “momentum of existence” rather than either a biological construct, objectified in the moment or a mere vehicle of subjectivity was central to his work. This writer shares Merleau-Ponty’s enthusiasm and determination to go beyond the standard ontological division between mind and body. (Merleau-Ponty, M. 2008:112-13)

An important concept that the reader will encounter frequently, and in a number of different guises, during the course of this thesis is embodiment. It is a fundamental concept and one that is crucial in providing the intellectual grounding for our opposition to the mind, body split. Embodiment can be understood as the potential individuals have to react with the environment via movement. Merleau-Ponty claims that the body is not merely “in space, or in time, but inhabits space and time”. (Merleau-Ponty, M.2008:114). There are however different ways in which I use the term embodiment in this thesis. There is lived embodiment, which is unconscious,

presumed and one might say often taken for granted. Secondly I will use the term embodiment-as-instrument, here I am referring to our conscious attempts to control and monitor our movement in the world. (Whitehead, M. 2010:28) With synthesis in mind Gill says, “Embodiment is, after all, the axis or fulcrum of all tacit knowing, which in turn is the matrix of all explicit knowing”. (Gill, J H cited in Whitehead, M. 2010:25)

This thesis is constructed in four chapters and a conclusion. Chapter One provides the reader with the context within which this research takes place. It outlines the core arguments of phenomenology and considers how this piece of research differs from other studies of dance inspired by phenomenology. Particular attention is given to the concepts of pre-reflection, reversibility and resonance. Merleau-Ponty’s emphasis on the “pragmatic embodied context of human experience” (Merleau-Ponty, M 2008:35) is a central feature of this chapter’s argument. This pragmatism is elaborated upon. The chapter concludes with an introduction to the three contemporary performances that are the subject of the thesis.

Chapter Two is called Practical based Method, it is divided into three parts and is largely concerned with a close description and analysis of each of the three creative projects. The first piece is *Minutes* (2009) and much of the methodological argument concerns the relationship between the “interior” life of the performer and the exterior world of the art gallery and the audience. The second component of this chapter concerns the methodology that informed the film *Things We Found* (2009). The emphasis of this section is on the kinaesthetic, choreographic possibilities afforded to the editor of film. In other words can phenomenological principles be used to inform the decisions that film directors and film editors make. In the specific case of the film *Things We Found* (2009) the unequivocal answer is yes. The final part of this chapter is given over to an analysis of the methodology used for the movement improvisation in the production of *i-witness* (2009). Here consideration is given to the characteristics of movement improvisation and particularly, improvisation, which takes its lead from a changing palate of photographic images. How does one respond? Is improvisation simply a reordering of already existing behaviour or, as I argue in

this chapter, a performative, embodied practice that attempts to make something new in the moment of moving?

Chapter Three, the Conceptual Framework and Research Method carries the argument forward from the specifics of Merleau-Ponty's recommendations to the cultural acts under investigation. Thus in the case of the performance of *Minutes* (2009) I argue for a reflective intentionality on the part of the performer, one can see/feel/hear oneself performing whilst one is performing. Next I investigate whether there might be a kinaesthetic relationship to the direction and editing of the film, *Things We Found* (2009). What would this kinaesthetic relationship or empathy look like? The argument focuses on the role of the editor and the manner in which it becomes necessary to "perceive and be in the movement of the film" (Pearlman, K 2009:10). Finally I examine the intricacies of improvisation and consider whether the pre-reflective and reflective loops are good examples of pragmatism in action

Chapter One: Research Context

This research is a phenomenological analysis of three contemporary works. Phenomenology is associated with the work and writings of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Definitions of phenomenology may obscure more than they reveal; for example Heidegger claims that phenomenology “lets that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself”. Husserl envisaged a process in which the World or Being(s) spoke for themselves (Matthews, E. 2006:12). Far away, in time and space, from these continental musings, Margaret Whitehead offers this definition:

Phenomenology (is) the philosophy based on the principle that we as human beings give meaning to the world as we perceive it. Objects in the world have no meaning prior to an individual’s perception of that feature. Objects are only what individuals make of them.

(Whitehead, M. 2010:204)

My practice aims to embody a physical, experiential and intimate form of performance. Phenomenology is used in this thesis to analyse this practice. The research will present my performance practice as embodied phenomenological experience. Specifically this thesis will document and analyse two performances and one film. Phenomenology prioritises a respect for lived experience. What does this idea of lived experience mean? Lived experience begins by listening to the senses and noting insights that arrive in the midst of practice and performance. By combining performance and choreographic practice with phenomenology, a fertile entwinement between experience and reflection can occur. Through capturing experience at a subjective level this research is clearly dependent upon my experience. (It could be argued that all research is dependant upon experience; however in my view it would be more accurate to see research as contingent upon processes of academic

investigation and explication. Research takes place within systems or paradigms of knowledge. Life may be a collection of experiences but it is well to remember that experience does not take place in a void – there is the small matter of ideology, community, class, power, gender, the State – all contesting and shaping experience.) What kinds of experience is this thesis investigating? The answer to this question is that embodied experience is central to this thesis and this argument. By embodiment I mean the degree to which individuals have the potential and capacity to interact with the environment via movement.

I contend that the nature of performance practice is such that it cannot be understood as a particular instance indicative of a universal concept or practice. In performance the present moment or tense is invariably at odds with what has previously taken place as it strives to testify to the wealth of our ability to re-conceive our Being (in the world) and detach ourselves from that which has gone before; to create new experiences out of, and beyond, old ones.

The argument here is not meant to contest the specific value of using some theory to explicate some dance practice. However a wholesale theorisation of dance apart from how dance is danced is not what is advocated here. These points are made forcefully by Judith B Alter in *Dance-Based Dance Theory* (1991). Judith Alter does not deny the value of theory, indeed she draws heavily upon Wittgenstein's rule-based pragmatism, but she does argue ,that “dance theory must be derived from dance practice and not from sources other than dance.” (Alter, J.B. 1991:8). This thesis shares Alter's preference - just as philosophy stands as an autonomous field so must dance. This thesis aims to make a contribution to the development of a phenomenological -centred theoretical discourse of dance. The goal is to consider the most appropriate means to articulate a body of knowledge that is no longer present or evident exclusively within the body. The artists' movement practice can be utilised to interrogate language and so create a more tangible and durable account of practice. By movement practice I also mean thought that is embedded in practice, or to put it another way thought that derives from practice. Movement practice is intimately related to experience. Movement derives from and implies experience. By experience I mean:

Whether it is a question of another's body or my own, I have no means of knowing the human body other than that of living it, which means taking up on my own account the drama which is being played out in it, and losing myself in it. I am my body, at least wholly to the extent that I possess experience, and yet at the same time my body is as it were a "natural" subject, a provisional sketch of my total being.

(Merleau-Ponty, M. 2008:113).

I will be using Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology to examine my specific dance practice. Experience, embodiment and movement yet-to-be- undertaken might play a part in any analysis of perceptual practice, creativity and subject centred learning.

My approach to this research was informed by the experience of having embodied different systems of knowledge and discipline that were (and remain) indicative of professional performance. The aim of this thesis is to demonstrate that performance research can be emotionally, kinaesthetically and aesthetically engaging, and, to analyse three performances from within a coherent conceptual framework.

Instead of the body in motion being relegated to at best the beautiful, and at worst the invisible my aim is to use motility to reveal previously unseen, facets of my practice. Writing is too often seen as the most enduring communicative modality of phenomenological reflection, the objective here is to present the act of writing with choreographic practice and performance, both of which can be seen as phenomenological documents. Writing, here, is not presented here as some kind of transcendental summation or conclusion, rather it is intended as a complementary activity. Phenomenology shifts the emphasis in this research from an attempt to discover a single unified result, to an attempt to understand the complexity of process and the experience of exchange and communication.

The phenomenological imperative is not only to understand ourselves, but also to share knowledge with others. It is important to place this study in context with other researchers working in this field. One of the first dance books to utilise the theoretical methodologies of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) and Maurice Merleau-Ponty was Maxine Sheet-Johnstone's *The Phenomenology of Dance* (1966). Whilst this was in many ways a groundbreaking book, it is more notable for its synthesis of philosophy and dance than for a phenomenological analysis of the author's dance practice. It is, in

other words, a theoretical account of what a phenomenological account of dance might look like. Sheet-Johnstone is emphatically not presenting an embodied, phenomenological investigation of her dance practice. Phenomenology has also been used as a methodology for the investigation of other artistic endeavours. In the field of music studies David Sudnow's *Ways of the Hand: The Organization of Improvised Conduct* (1978) is a study of improvised jazz. As an Ethno-Sociologist Sudnow details his experience as a novice pianist and acknowledges how his interest in phenomenology fundamentally shaped his ability to describe his experiences. He provides a detailed account of skill development charting how one's hands can learn to play the piano rather than adhering to the discipline of technical exercises. Elsewhere phenomenology has played a critical role in the study practices of those interested in psychotherapy and its relationship with dance. In this regard see Marina Rovas' *Towards a Phenomenology of Dance Movement Psychotherapy* (2009) – an investigation into six practitioners' work with the body. Far more well known has been the work of Judith Butler. Her *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory* (1988) undertakes an epistemological critique of performance with particular relevance to the construction of female identity.

A phenomenological approach has also been taken by Dr Alison Stuart in a recent article on *The Inner World of the Dancer* (Stuart, A. 2008). This article focuses specifically on the psychological support needs of the dancer. More recently still, Shantel Ehrenberg at the University of Manchester has undertaken an investigation of dancers' self-knowledge, kinaesthesia and self-image. This is a piece of ongoing doctoral research constructed around a qualitative methodology that requires extensive interviews with dance practitioners.

Susan Kozel who was, when she published *Closer* (2007), a Principal Researcher in Dance at the University of East London is far more concerned with rescuing, returning to, and building upon the legacy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty particularly, and phenomenology in general. Kozel's particular research interest is the intersection of body, mind and machine or technology. As such it lies outside of the scope of this

study but her work vividly demonstrates and documents the continuing relevance of the phenomenological impulse. As she says:

This book elaborates a version of phenomenology that does not attempt to posit truths, but instead acts as a chiasmic, embodied, first-person methodology with the objectives of understanding, expressing and extending lived experience.

(Kozel,S 2007 :16)

Perhaps what is unusual about her work is that she uses phenomenology to reveal aspects of dance-performance in the emerging areas of responsive architecture, film, motion capture, computerised wearables and what she and others refer to as telematics. Telematics as understood by Kozel is the use of technology to track, monitor and understand the body. The body is conceived as a networked system and physiological information is received via wearable computer objects. This information is then processed at a computer station. (See Kozel, *Closer* and www.fondation-longlois.org)

Sudnow and Stuart's studies into the phenomenology of music and psychotherapy are particular and specific; they are studies that appear to be using phenomenology to investigate something that they are not themselves practised in. It could be thought that these endeavours are akin to classical anthropology. They retain a critical distance from their object of enquiry. Alison Stuart's study is an attempt to connect the existential subjectivity of the dancer to social support structures. Its outcomes and recommendations are practical. Within the discourse of dance Kozel suggests that theory enjoys a privileged position. (Kozel,S. 2007:5-6) Judith Butler's work on philosophy, language and performance is indicative of the triumph of theoretical reflection. Butler utilises JL Austin's work *Sense and Sensibilia* (1964) in the philosophy of language. The idea of "speech acting" is developed into a theory of language performativity. Butler applies this idea of performativity and speech acts to gender constitution and feminist theory. There are, undoubtedly, aspects of Butler's work that are illuminating – the idea, for example, of rehearsing, in a phenomenological sense, our identity. But this insight requires empirical documentation not further theoretical elaboration. It seems to this writer that some of Butler's theoretical disquisitions are best related to literary analysis rather than

providing the foundations for a new social theory of identity or performativity. For example the primary argument in *Gender Trouble* (1990) is that identity is dramatised and performed and not an essence. This argument, however, is never related to-either the ordinary language, meaning and practice of performance or to the dualism that it so opposes. (Butler, J. 1988:519-531)

Movement also has its own character, it might be possible to understand this character if specific, observable generalisations and concepts were developed. Empirical propositions about what the dancer is doing and thinking might be something like the following:

1. We might say that the dancer is moving but we cannot understand what her movement means.
2. We might say that she appears to be moving according to some system or code and we think that we can observe certain elements of this code.
3. Lastly we might say that her movement conveys an emotional feeling or quality.

Of course there are other propositions that we can generate when we observe a dance performance. The primary argument here is that this thesis should have regard for the practice of dance and the practitioners themselves. Theory, systematic or otherwise, may seduce the reader with the sleek lines of its internal clarity and the dazzling brocade of linguistic innovation but, in my view, the test of theory is how far it concurs with the experience of practitioners (dancers) themselves.

A phenomenological account of dance practice acknowledges the particularity of each performance. Whilst this study may trace lines of similarity or difference between certain dance performances it does not propose or conclude with a new theoretical framework or set of guiding principles. The findings presented here do not represent a document that suggests repeatability (science) or universality (theory). Rather, this phenomenological practice is cast in the mode of an investigation: discrete, analytical and descriptive. It offers other practitioners the chance to experience a methodology in which phenomenology is its guiding principle. Of course it could be argued that

first person subjectivity resists or prevents the systematic transferability of discourse. The claim is that this kind of research (and this thesis) as documentation is ineluctably hermetic (Seamon, D. 2007) However, I want to suggest that my practice and my film make clear that this thesis details a signpost, a map and even a plan, or model for other dance artists, and academics interested in phenomenology, to follow.

In a very different discipline the triumph of scientific methodology has been documented by Richard Cytowic. As a Neurologist Cytowic, in his study of synesthesia, encountered such resistance to accepting subjective experience and a tendency to believe anything confirmed by technology, that he claimed our culture to be addicted to notions of external objectivity. "We are ready to reject any first hand experience, we are addicted to the external and the rational. Our insistence on the third person, objective understanding of the world, has just about swept aside all other forms of knowledge". (Cytowic,R 1995,9:1). This thesis is a phenomenological study of my practice not the practice of others. The phenomenological gap between what is being investigated and the investigator is, I maintain, more in the character of a fissure or fracture, rather than an anthropological leap in the dark. This thesis assumes that certain knowledge is constructed through the activity of bodies within the world. This research hopes to deepen our understanding of the subjective position, a subjective position, which articulates experience from the perspective of a dance artist.

The work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty is crucial to this research. I will use three core ideas that Merleau-Ponty proposes. The first is to shape a reflective process that opens itself onto the richness of pre-reflective experience. The pre-reflective is the "prior ground or condition of both the subjective or objective" (Maitland, J. 1995:75). It allows one to avoid pre-conceived notions of subjectivity and suspend, as much as possible, expectations or prior knowledge in order to inhabit the immediate moment of perception. Phenomenology invites a duality between reflection and the pre-reflective. This circular movement between reflection and the pre-reflective is a dynamic notion of hyper-reflection. Hyper-reflection is a process of thought that takes into account its own functioning. It is an operation beyond "the conversion of sense experience into reflection" (Merleau-Ponty, M. 1968:38). Theorising the pre-

reflective and the hyper reflective as loops in the process of phenomenology is important as it allows us to consider the Cartesian distinctions between the body and mind, and can open a way of understanding the inter relationship between reflection and experience, between thinking and making.

A second core concept of Merleau-Ponty's I will use is known as reversibility. Merleau-Ponty's hypothesis is that an inter-subjective and embodied self is in a mutual relationship with its other; put another way the self is always simultaneously subject and object at the same time (Merleau-Ponty, M. 1968:68). Merleau-Ponty uses the relation of reversibility to clarify this position, arguing – 'That I can see and can also be seen. I am both subject and object through the act of seeing' (Merleau-Ponty, M. 1968:115). I see the world and the world sees me, objects look back at me. In Merleau-Ponty's words this is being as 'seeing-seen' (Merleau-Ponty, M. 1968:125). This proposition can be visualized in the shape of an infinity symbol, where the exchange is in a constant sliding state. Reversibility forbids us from conceiving of vision as an operation of thought that would invite representation of the world. It suggests vision is fundamentally embodied, my vision and action are affected by the people and things in my world. The sliding state of infinity is significant for the creation and reception of work. It might be said that the art maker and art receiver are both subjects collaborating mutually, the idea of mutuality leads on to the third concept of Merleau-Ponty's. That concept is known as resonance.

Resonance presupposes a shared communality, a world where there are some common experiences potentially available to all. Resonance requires a commitment to empathy at cognitive, emotional and physical levels. In this sense it is clear that the concept of resonance contains a real idealised humanism. It is possible to resonate, feel even understand another's experience. A phenomenological description is received subjectively, as an account of lived experience with the potential for new knowledge contained within it. Bachelard claims that only phenomenology can "restore the subjectivity of images" and "measure their fullness, their strength and their trans-subjectivity" (Bachelard, G. 1969:15). The phenomenological impulse is to move from subjectivity to trans-subjectivity. By trans-subjectivity I mean it is possible to experience the existence of the 'Other' in relation to the 'Self'. Living

bodies may have kinaesthetic empathy, with movement they perceive because of a shared ability to construct sensations empathetically through imagination or perhaps as a consequence of a common history or culture. Specifically in the film, “Things We Found” I used my kinaesthetic memory and senses when examining and editing the rushes. More generally one might say, for example, that our assembly of senses and our varied experiences allow us to experience the movement of say falling, by integrating images of falling into a context that has an emotional and physical sensory reality for us. It becomes a body- felt experience.

Pre-reflection, reversibility and resonance are the three concepts that I will use from Merleau-Ponty in an effort to articulate my dance practice. I will pay particular attention to experiential embodiment, and the direct intuition of phenomenon. Phenomenology is more method than system; it engenders a particular point of view rather than a fixed body of beliefs (Thevenaz, P. 1962:49). This investigation of embodied dance practice is limited by what is called “our propositional modes of representation”. Whilst it is extremely difficult “to express the full meaning of our experience”(Johnson, D.H. 1955:23), I will offer my own account, addressing the creation of meaning and experience within these contemporary performances.

Phenomenology engages first a practice of doing, but accompanying this doing is a weaving in and out of a line of thought, a line of questioning. This is why phenomenology has been significant to my practice. Phenomenology is a conversation with experience and Merleau-Ponty “stresses the pragmatic embodied context of human experience” (Merleau-Ponty, M. 1993:19). Revealing and unpicking the contours of a pragmatic approach to experience is part of what this thesis is about. In this respect a number of aims can be articulated:

1. Firstly, this thesis is a description and analysis of my dance practice as a lived body of experience. Whilst I use concepts that are primarily associated with the work of Merleau Ponty, I do so in a pragmatic way – when the concepts are useful in the analysis of my dance practice, I use them, when they are not I aimed to try and find other ways of describing my practice.(This objective

echo's Merleau-Ponty's opposition to what, he thought, was an over emphasis on the collection of sense data and on the other a value preference for thought rather than experience.) (Merleau-Ponty, M. 2008:44-8).

2. Secondly I aim to see if phenomenological concepts can enhance my understanding of my dance practice, particularly improvisation. Improvisation demands the pragmatic mode; it requires an openness of reflection and intention. Movement is created in each moment. It is not a recycling of learnt behaviour. As Merleau-Ponty says the present may be certain but we cannot seize it "avec une certitude apodictique". Just as in improvisation so in life, the present is all around us and yet it slips through our fingers. The present eludes us. (Priest, S. 1998:27).
3. Thirdly I aimed to follow Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on the lived body. Consciousness and the body as a biomedical object were not reference points. What is under investigation here resides within me and is 'me.' It is simple and providing it can be excavated, natural. For example in the case of the film, *Things We Found* (2009) I wanted to immerse the viewer in a lived experience with the objects in the film. I did not want the viewer to watch the film from some supposedly impartial, "outside" place.
4. Fourthly the dance practice analysed here is interested in and committed to art form complementarity. By this I mean two things. Firstly that the dance practice is conceived and presented in conjunction with other art forms – music, theatre and film. Secondly, my phenomenological methodology aims to be the space or arena within which art form complementarity and dialogue can take place.
5. Finally I aim to present a model or framework for future dance practitioners who are interested in phenomenology as a method of analysis that may deepen, change or least enrich their dance practice.

Working and teaching as a dance artist, collaborating across disciplines such as musical composition and film, have made me appreciate (and appropriate) the relevance of a modified phenomenological approach. Dance theory might benefit from the development of thoughtful, and philosophically well-grounded, first person or subjective approaches to research.

This research is an investigation with the aim of understanding, expressing, and extending lived experience. It permits, even welcomes the philosophical concepts of the wider world to interact with concepts and ways of being that have become embedded in my body, and evident through and in my movement practice. The experience is from my practice in first person mode, in contrast to a theoretical context where the concepts might not been directly experienced. This methodology not only respects my subjective experience, but also suggests a dynamic for revealing broader cultural assumptions and practices; for acknowledging the reality that all bodies exist with and through other bodies, in social and political contexts. This methodology operates as a resonant, congruent, experiential structure. The unspoken comparison is with the truth claims of science. Whether objectivity is problematised or not, this research does not pursue falsification or promise repeatability. (Deleuze, G. 1994; Popper, K. 1944) Falsification and repeatability are the watchwords of the scientific method. For a different view of how science proceeds see *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Kuhn, S 1962:14-32).

In my first case study I aim to perform a movement vocabulary and musical composition that communicates through the basis of phenomenological intentionality. It is through our bodies as living centres of intentionality that a score was enacted. The score was the structure for the piece *Minutes* (2009), a modular part of the whole piece *The Collection* (2009). This was a site-specific performance, which had previously been presented at the Victoria Miro Gallery in London, the Ikon Gallery in Birmingham and at the Hayward in London. The score for the movement structures the practice, and was developed with the Composer Matteo Fargion. What the structure did was to present us as individuals using actions to communicate our individuality. Its significance is that it enabled us to interpret the score ourselves. While performing this work, attitudes and responses are played out and generate a

direct relationship between audience members and performers. The performance material attempts to engage the bodies of the audience directly and intimately through experiencing physical interactions between themselves and us as performers.

The respect for subjective experience at the heart of this phenomenological investigation does not sever one from others, but can actually form a conduit to the other. The phenomenological experience of another person unfolds across a physical description with latent conceptual elements extrapolated, and can be relevant because we have the ability to construct meaning empathetically, perhaps through imagination or previous experience. According to Bachelard the poetic image “takes root in us even though it originates from another, and we begin to have the impression that we could have created it, that we should have created it” (Bachelard, G. 1969:119). The praxis *Minutes* (2009) is concerned with acknowledging how we enact ourselves. In re-looking at everyday actions as performance identity, *Minutes* (2009) intends to examine how as an individual I am performing myself in the present moment of the piece, and trying to offer the audience an emotional and physical experience through an intimate, physical and visual/aural engagement. *The Collection* (2009) was performed five times a day, the performance was filmed and observations were noted. Through applying these observations to each following performance, I intended to reflect on how the score became a lived experience and a series of intentional actions.

This piece is centred on the use of a score as a creative pivot from which comes movement and rhythmic structures and possibilities within performance. In this sense the score is fundamental. A number of questions follow: How do artists generate scores? Can they be collaboratively constructed? What happens if a score “feels” unsatisfactory? Does the audience have to share in the knowledge of the pre-existing score? If they do, does it add to their understanding of the movement? Does reading the score in performance help mediate the relationship between oneself and the audience? Do the parameters of the score define the performers relationship to the score, in a way that the performers observations can be fed back into their performance?

The second case study, the theatre piece *i-witness* (2009), utilises the viewpoint of the actor/dancer as a collaborator within a theatre piece. There are two aims: first to practice the direct embodiment of the phenomenon through improvisation in response to visual stimulus. Secondly to analyse the decisions that structure the film according to the phenomenology of time. The film and movement sequence were made in response to the writings of W.G. Sebald (1944-2001). Sebald was a German writer who was shaped by the attitude of his fellow countrymen after the Second World War. He developed a compelling new literary form the part hybrid novel, part memoir and part travelogue. In Sebald's work the thematisation of vision is rendered more concrete and complex by the inclusion of photographic material. His integration of photographic images into the written narrative raises questions as to the role of the visual in memory and the construction of narrative, it is suffice to say that memory plays a central role in Sebald's work. I responded through improvised movement to a number of photographic images that are integrated into the text. The aim was to embody an understanding of Sebald's work and simultaneously articulate a phenomenological concept of rhythm through movement (Sebald, W.G. 1996).

When I responded to the images in *i-witness* (2009) my praxis embraced the realization that we can loosen even abandon structures of meaning sufficiently to permit qualities that are associated with the pre-rational: most notably the ambiguity of meaning, and the scope for entirely new thought and reversibility of meaning and paradox. These are three key elements to my approach and they function as methodological recommendations. Effectively this approach brings a commitment to the porosity of reflection. Reflection that requires new modalities that reach beyond existing methods might be explained through the process of hyper-reflection after Merleau-Ponty. The relationship between the pre-reflective and hyper-reflective indicates a dynamic, almost ontological, state of entwinement between the two (Merleau-Ponty, M. 1968:34). The aim is to attempt to access firstly a sensation, which is pre-reflective, and secondly practice a method in which concepts are drawn out of new experience, which is hyper-reflection. My hypothesis is that the roles of the pre-reflective and hyper-reflective will function as loops in the phenomenological process of making, and will open a way for understanding the deep entanglement

between reflection and experience, thinking and making, and most importantly add insight into the dynamic relationship between theory and practice. What is clearly prescriptive here is a theorised sense of the pre-reflective. The pre-reflective involves the following key activities:

Firstly I practiced the ability to suspend, as much as possible, expectations or prior knowledge in order to inhabit the immediate moment of perception, and to follow impulse and intelligence in the moment instead of being pulled towards patterns of movement that are familiar to my body.

The second prescriptive element to this mode of working was a commitment to the dialectical method as the pre-reflective and the hyper-reflective must inform each other. In other words, change and exchange were built into this process. This methodology requires a strong commitment to change. Change happens through the entwinement of action and awareness, and change allows for the adjustment of action whilst in the flow or midst of action. This methodology used concepts associated with movement that embrace change, concepts like distortion and mutation. These concepts are intimately related to the notion of disequilibrium.

The third consideration was to see how a duet between the pre-reflective and reflective works at the speed in which we are able to sense experience. I wanted to find out how this experience would affect the intention and timing, the continuity and connection of material, and therefore the rhythm? I interviewed the experienced dance artist Gill Clark with regard to her practice of pre-reflection, and analysed her experience in relation to mine. Gill Clark was also of the view that as dancers we needed to acknowledge that formal training and our dedication to form could inhibit our ability to dance in the present moment. If reflection helped us find the “present tense” of our dance then we could be seen to be performing in relation to the world of others and not just to and for ourselves.

The complementary part to *i-witness* (2009) under investigation was the phenomenology of rhythm and time in the film. I aimed to utilise a choreography that embraced phenomenology and used editing as a form of choreography. The editing was informed by my bodily intuition. I thought physically and used kinaesthetic

empathy creatively. It was my body that thought about and created the films rhythms. Alongside this I will be researching how manipulation of the composition of moving images and sound can shape the rhythms of the film, as well as developing a practice in editing that looks at the way in which the editing can shape the flow of the film as a unified action of mind, emotion and body. What the film will hopefully demonstrate is the lived-body expressed on film. Time and intimacy and the role of the spectator will all be crucial here. A contemporary exemplar of this approach is the Austrian auteur Gotz Spielmann (Spielmann, G. 2009). As with the other case studies – in this film, we will observe the phenomenological body at the centre of time: past, present and future.

Chapter Two – Practice based Method

This chapter describes the three works, all of which were presented publicly on a number of occasions. The first piece discussed is called *Minutes* (2009). It was a duet between myself and Matteo Fargion and was part of a larger performance called “The Collection” directed by Siobhan Davies. *The Collection* (2009) and my part in it was performed in the following art galleries. Firstly the Victoria Miro in London, then the Ikon Gallery in Birmingham and finally back in London at the Hayward Gallery. The whole process from the beginning of rehearsals to the final performance took place over a period of 18 months. The *Minutes* (2009) duet between Matteo Fargion and myself was structured around time, music and numerical precision. Our performance was composed of fifteen one minute pieces, each of which was completely different from the other. We repeated the whole sequence 4 times during the course of a four hour performance. Our duet and the whole of *The Collection* (2009) was presented in the white light that one would customarily encounter within a contemporary art gallery.

The second project discussed here is a film that I directed and edited, called *Things We Found* (2009). This film was part of a theatre performance called *I-Witness* (2009). The film was shown as part of the theatre tour in more than twenty venues around the United Kingdom. The film was nearly fifteen minutes long and was presented as soon as the public had taken their seats. It served to introduce the audience to the actors and, more importantly, I hoped that it would encourage the audience to appreciate the peculiar pace and weight of Sebald’s prose and vision.

Finally in this chapter I analyse my experience of improvising to the photographs that appear in WG Sebald’s book *The Rings of Saturn* (2007). These black and white photographs appear unannounced in Sebald’s book. It is as if they were the ghosts

that haunted Sebald and Western Civilisation itself. I improvised movement to these pictures. They were presented on a screen, simultaneously to the audience and me. Crucially I did not know in what order the pictures were going to be shown. I did not want to anticipate which picture was going to be shown and what I was going to do. This improvisation was not accompanied or fore-grounded by music. It was presented entirely in silence and received no post facto explanation either. My intention and my hope was that the improvisation would mirror the mysterious foreboding that Sebald's photographs suggest.

2.1 Methodology for "Minutes".

The score for *Minutes* (2009) was developed, by composing one-minute pieces, each structured by rhythm. It was devised in collaboration with the composer Matteo Fargion and benefited from a direct link between mathematical and musical systems. Mathematical systems provided the basis of the score. We replaced numbers with rhythm, which was sung played or represented by movement. These systems demonstrate the relationship between theory and performance. A key methodological principal was that what was made was embedded in how it was made and should communicate itself physically. Each minute was composed around a self-similar structure. Its principle being that a structure replicates itself on more than one level. A self-similar composition, then, is a composition in which the detailed movement from step to step is reflected in the way the whole composition is structured, and the larger organisation reflects the details. They are constructed entirely by repeated applications of a single procedure. For example this is a mathematical structure that was filled with movement and sound material. Each number represents a value in beats.

3+3+1+1+2 was repeated 3 times.

3+3+1+1+2 was repeated 3 times.

3+3+1+1+2 was done once.

3+3+1+1+2 was done once.

3+3+1+1+2 was repeated twice.

Finding material to fill these structures meant I had to consider the effect of the whole piece. The benefit of writing a score when composing a piece is that it affords a distance in order to consider what is possible and what is feasible. It promotes attention and response, drawing on Merleau-Ponty's concept of reversibility. I was a performer, the object of vision and at the same time capable of vision, or seeing myself perform the score. I could stay close enough to the material to feel what I was doing but at the same time I could distance myself momentarily to grasp what someone else might perceive. I endeavoured to perform the score with intent as opposed to relying on my tacit movement knowledge to carry me through the performance. By intention I mean that I experienced a particular embodied relationship to the score in which my perception and response were acute. Tacit knowledge is an aspect of perception that is often overlooked, it operates on a level below consciousness. In my experience of performance my movement patterns were taken for granted and performed without full consciousness. Having this relationship with the score meant that I could sense and adjust how I responded to the score, within each performance. Therefore I could see and shift the relation of material according to what felt appropriate. Perhaps it is worth explaining that what I am referring to here are component sections or parts of the whole piece. The whole piece is called *Minutes* (2009) but it was comprised of fifteen sections. The sections 'Please don't Send Your Wrath'¹ and 'Oh No'², are examples of how I sensed and consequently adjusted the counterpoint in the midst of the performance. Reading the score during the performance helped as a mediator between myself, and the audience. The score represents the piece and is separate from my personality and desires as a performer. The separation between score and performer allowed the audience to have a direct relationship with what they are seeing and hearing.

¹ DVD 1 - 12:19

² DVD 1 - 31:24

The score was developed for a specific environment. The piece was repeated six times a day. This offered me the option of re-visiting and dwelling within a set of experiences. There was repetition of the whole piece and repetition of some of the individual minute pieces within each performance. Repetition was employed to arrive at rhythm. As I was interested in how the performance of a rhythm can be shared with the audience by heightening their participation through the sharing of the beat. The experience also allows patterns to be recognised, so consequently the spectators can predict what I, as the performer will do next. My approach to performing repetition was to re-discover each moment through attention, perception and response. This involved linking each movement to an intention. The intention of each movement must be embodied. I found that by using action verbs as an impetus for movement, I was attending to, perceiving and responding to each movement even if they were repeated movements. During the experience of repeated performances, the sequence can become so well practised that it can operate at a level below consciousness, becoming almost tacit movement knowledge. The performer can be viewed in a trance like state instead of being fully present in the moment. I investigated this notion within my practice, and how 'I' acquired physical skills through repetition, how these skills set up movement patterns, which would pull me in the direction of those patterns. By allowing patterns to become familiar information stops being gathered for the present and for the future. To overcome this I investigated how once the piece has been crafted, if I returned to 'how' I was executing a movement I could discover the intention again.

As a performer I was required to receive, as well as transmit the composition, form and idea of each moment in time. By experiencing this two-way flow, I propose that I was practising Merleau-Ponty's concept of reversibility. An exchange between myself, and the audience was in a constant sliding state. I was in turn, affected by my immediate surroundings. This meant that I was engaged in the act, the perception of what I was doing was shifting constantly. I performed with the objective of finding each moment all over again. I found it increasingly the case that in order for this to happen, the intention of each movement had to be an actuality. So I worked specifically with attaching an action to each movement. Examples of action verbs I

used are; I open, I close, I pick up, I drop, I shift. The action verbs are executed to correspond with the rhythm, which was played by Matteo Fargion. The section 'She Is Dancing'³ is a concrete example of this. As a consequence of this research process instead of responding to existing movement patterns, I could respond by searching for the actuality assigned to each movement. This focus guided me to see how the intention of the performance is not about display. It is attention, perception and thought set in motion, in such a way as to kindle and ignite the space for change. Resonance is the key to this ignition. Through a commitment to embodiment the potential for the audience to experience resonance is far greater. The audience receives an account of my lived experience, and within that is the potential for new knowledge.

Due to the length of time in which the performances took place I found it necessary to retain an acute degree of attention and perception. This involved spontaneously adding details to the score, with the view that once I negotiated more information my presence would once again be revealed. A game with my consciousness allowed other things to reveal themselves. Repetition can feel like a burden depending on ones energy on that day, so a distraction could take me away from what I had to do. In the piece 'Tall Medium Short'⁴ I changed the time intervals between each phrase to add complexity. It was by being confident that I could embody the score that allowed me to do what I set out to do and make present (even improvise) spontaneity. The score meant that if I was fully engaged in my task and there would be no danger of being in a trance like state and the audience would simply be invited to watch me, and the performance unfolding.

I am proposing that performance is about the performer existing in an emergent state. The performer is moving actively while at the same time allowing themselves to be moved by things or people. Performance can expand the space between control and being controlled. I needed to practice the entwinement between my reflections of each moment and the articulation of the score.

³ DVD 1 - 36:23

⁴ DVD 1 - 18:23

In order to further consider this hypothesis I used the concept of reversibility because I had to learn how to use my reflective capacities in a different way. I had to create a new way for cognition to co-exist with my inner and outer experience. The process began with observation, and choosing what I was aware of while I was doing the tasks; calling my attention to my body and what it was experiencing. I had to enact a balance between reacting and responding through my senses in real time and fine-tuning my ability to realise the score. I questioned whether this could occur under highly charged circumstances. I found that it is not antithetical to the realisation of the score; the fractured state of consciousness need not be disruptive to performance. The body can reflect on many levels. We can do more than one thing at once; think from more than one position at once. My body could be in a state of flux without depleting the quality of thought. By viewing performance as an emergent condition one sees its power as flexible rather than sedentary and rigid. I did find that it took practice to weave in my reflections, to re-pattern and allow the space to expand between being in control and being controlled.

My body received and initiated the information between the internal and external and then modulated a response accordingly. These responsive relations that are created from a relationship with others and the environment, transcend language. I understand these experiences by integrating data received through my senses with my fluid capacity for understanding. I identified the principles by which I made sense of this sensory data. For example I identified which senses dominated and whether other senses came in to play. Did I observe a sense of proportion, arising from the fact that we translate and regulate? Did I surprise myself and draw on a sense of humour or seriousness? In answer to these questions, I did observe a sense of proportion. I translated my material according to the closeness of the audience. Their very closeness allowed me to be bolder, louder, more extreme, and sometimes more serious. By sensing the anticipation and enjoyment of the audience I was encouraged to be more playful and provoke further humour. My vision, hearing, touch and kinaesthesia were all exercised and challenged. I found it important to observe when what had once made sense could change, and adapt accordingly. My senses became a perceptual map that ordered experience. By building a practice guided by the

principle of reversibility, I could apply my practice and connect to it. I could navigate how to go on. My doing led to concrete experience, which led to observation and finally conceptualization.

The third concept I included in my approach to this performance was “resonance”. The very nature of an art gallery meant that the space I was sharing and communicating with the audience, was not defined by a stage and seating. The setting attempted to engage the audience directly and intimately through experiencing physical interactions between myself, and the audience. It was important to question how the work could be engaging at any given moment an audience at an art gallery “event” enters, leaves and attends in a very different way from an orthodox theatre audience. By choosing a score to work from it was established that I would always be absorbed in an activity. The idea of performing a collection of one-minute shorts was developed to address the expectations of the art gallery audience.

My aim was to draw attention to the visceral, to facilitate a re-engagement with the audience’s physicality. One such way was to utilize rhythm. The audience shared an embodied experience with myself as a performer, through the anticipation achieved by hearing a rhythm. The rhythm was heard through song words or an instrument. Rhythmic success contains time, and it is in the midst of slowed down time or in the midst of risk, that rhythm can transmit as much pleasure for the performer as it does for the audience. These rhythmic patterns also contained the presence of silence or stillness. My embodied feeling of time during each performance was affected by the adrenaline pumping through my body. For example the pause is a pregnant pause; it is sewn into the fabric of time that the audience and I experience together. When a pause was written into the score, it enforces its presence by stepping outside the time of experience and bringing a counterpointed pause to the flow of the piece. However during the performance I instinctively manipulated the duration of these pauses and the result of this can resonate with the audience members’ bodies. I was constantly negotiating this manipulation of time. I was engaged; and it might be conjectured that the audience became engaged too. Other manipulations involved performing material in the wrong time frame, to challenge myself, and my relationship to the material. For

example in one of the minute-long sections called 'Yep'⁵ the speed at which I performed it demonstrated how a lot of material can be manipulated into a smaller time frame. In my practice I have a tendency to make things more efficient, to make shortcuts. So by being aware of my own changing sensory perceptions I had the freedom to negotiate my way through the temporal world. I discovered the importance of being predictable and unpredictable in the performance, through rhythm. As my body organised itself around the rise and resolution of each beat so did the spectators. Alongside rhythm I investigated the collision between tension and release as a detail that can resonate. Tension was caused by the audience experiencing an unknown factor, whilst release was experienced as a result of something familiar and known. When we search for meaning we look to the body, to language and to humour. Humour however, needs to be balanced, so the serious proposition behind the score must be made visible too. The piece 'Ah'⁶ always seemed to provoke humour amongst the spectators. My performance of the score was always charged with the risk that I might fail at executing it. The scores are visibly complex and this was an important aspect of the performance. The audience in realising this were encouraged to feel recognition and empathy. Humour was employed when I knew I was failing and this was part of allowing what might go wrong to be included and conquering it. I experienced both concentration, and release, and it is hoped that the audience were guided towards concentration and release. By acknowledging the shifts in each performance, my relation with the audience became a duet between guiding them as to how they might watch and at the same time, giving myself the permission to experience what I have come to do.

I considered the resonance of the space with the view that performance has the power to ignite a space. The space transforms through the exchange of lived-experience, it contains the potentiality for new knowledge. The gallery space was in dialogue with and affected by each performance that took place within it. I juxtaposed the purity of an art gallery with the pedestrian language used in the score. Although

⁵ DVD 1 – 29:20

⁶ DVD 1 – 17:18

not wishing to alienate the audience, the accumulation of my pedestrian one-minute shorts could be read as a story even when there was no story. I considered the placement of myself in the space, recognising that one simple shift can approximate to a narrative even when there is nothing else to suggest the narrative (look at the shifting distance between Matteo and myself.)⁷. This included the direction in which I orientated myself in relation to the space and the people watching. If the audience members were bold and came in close proximity to where I was performing, I was conscious of confrontation. The question of whether this confrontation should be gentle or direct then became part of the exchange. At times I dared to turn away from their gaze to see if they would follow me.

Each moment promises the transformation of the next. In this instance an empty art gallery transforms into a place of happenings. Once the gallery is opened (or ignited, if you like) the gallery can appear infinite and the bodies of the watching audience may be open in empathetic response to a freedom they believe they have perceived.

2.2 Methodology for *Things We Found*

My phenomenological approach to making this film was to investigate a potential synthesis between theory and practice, by using editing as an embodied choreographic process. Karen Pearlman in her book *Cutting Rhythms* (2009) makes numerous references to “physical thinking” She says; “Deep knowledge is not just something you know, but something you are and feel” (Pearlman, K. 2009:2). I approached the edit by thinking physically and using kinaesthetic empathy creatively, but this time without inhabiting the ideas physically in a live performance. Karen Pearlman hypothesizes that the editors’ physical thinking is an acquired body of knowledge with two sources – “the rhythms of the world that the editor experiences and the rhythms of the editors body that experiences them”. Pearlman, K 2009:1). Physical thinking involves the functioning of known neurological processes, with, in this instance the living breathing body of myself as an editor. I developed a practice

⁷ DVD 1 – 42:20

whereby I utilised my somatic intelligence to create the films rhythms, with the hope that this would enhance access to an embodied knowledge. Somatic intelligence is created primarily through a directly physical and experiential process.

My starting point was to examine how the insights of phenomenology could be made relevant to the editorial process of film. I was particularly interested in how Merleau-Ponty's concept of resonance could be applied to the editorial role. Was it possible to conceive of the editorial role as something other than a neutral, impartial spectator? Could I, the editor, have a symbiotic relationship with the objects and people of the film? How could this symbiotic relationship be achieved? To answer this question, we need to consider rhythm and kinaesthetic empathy. To enhance rhythmic intuition one must perceive rhythm, one must perceive the rhythm of, in this case, the film. Rhythm is not a totally unknown quality. There are rhythms that frame our existence, expectations, and knowledge of the movement of time and energy in life. If we actively see, hear and feel the world's rhythms, what we are actually seeing, hearing and feeling is movement. Movement is the means by which we perceive time and energy. When I viewed the filmed rushes, I embodied the sensations of each character. I embodied these sensations in relation to my own experience, drawing on remembered sensations to recognize feeling in movement. Through our kinaesthetic memory of life lived in time, space, energy and movement, it is possible to account for responsive movement in the filmed rushes. During the editing I actively needed to perceive and shape the flow of time and energy through movement to decide on the film's rhythms. Andrey Tarkovsky the filmmaker writes: "we know the movement of time from the flow of the life-process". He describes movement as the means by which we perceive time and energy (Tarkovsky, A. 1989:119-120). I drew on my direct experience as a dancer to accrue a body of rhythmic knowledge that could be utilised in my response to the films rushes.

A "lived-body" actualizes intentionality by being alive and present in the world. When movement is intentional, our responsive attention to its rhythms is augmented by the mirror neurons in our brain. Richard Restak explains: "Neuroscientists are exploring how our observation of another's persons behaviour allow us to infer his or her conscious or even unconscious intentions" (Restak, R. 2003:35-37). Neurologically

speaking, we physically participate in the movement of the people we see. So the way I cut the film is through my own mirror neurons. This allowed me to participate in the actor's intentional movement. My body did the movement with them. My sensing body perceived the rhythmic knowledge of the world and provided rhythms as a living breathing body. The rhythm of my body acted on the material in the film rushes in a very direct physical way. My own rhythm of blinking, breathing, my heartbeat, as well as the rhythms of my cycles of eating, thinking and feeling all contributed to the films rhythms. My personal experiences and rhythms played a fundamental part in the perceptual act of how to approach the edit.

I wanted the audience to "live through" the mechanics of the film and experience the world of the film. By experiencing patterns of the characters breathing and blinking, they would get a glimpse of their thoughts and feelings and feel altered by the actors' bodily rhythms. I experienced the rhythm of the material through my own body. Walter Murch said "one of the many ways you assume those rhythms is by noticing – consciously or unconsciously- where the actor blinks" (Murch, W. 1992:21). I used my kinaesthetic empathy to relay the external rhythm of the blink, which I perceived in the developing edit, through my internal rhythm to create the pattern of the characters blinking. There are three examples of these blinking patterns in the film⁸. Each pattern aims to reveal that there is thought within each of their gaze. All the sources of movement in the rushes activate kinaesthetic empathy, so I turned my awareness of the movements in the film to the rhythms of my own body. And in doing so I established a correlation between the movement of my body the movement in the rushes and my sense of rhythm as I was arriving towards editorial decisions. This created a unified and, I would argue, unique sense of flow to the film and to the editorial choices made.

Rhythm is part of the visceral experience of film. It is how we understand the meaning of information, interchanges and images in relation to one another. A choreographic principle is to devise movement phrases into perceptible and intentionally formed physically expressive sequences. We use rhythm to create a

⁸ DVD 2 – 0:42 1:52 13:49

series of related movements with moments of emphasis. Editors use the term ‘pulse’ as a rhythmic tool to shape the intention behind movement and make the intention perceptible to the spectator (Pearlman, K. 2009:63). My approach was to apply the pulse in the film through utilising my choreographic experience. I applied a single pulsation where an extra effort is placed on one part of the movement. Accents can be attached to words, gestures, and camera movement. The accent that felt appropriate in this case was attached to a specific action that was repeated by one of the characters in my film⁹. In this instance the hammering of the post into the earth was considered by the space left between each strike, and the decision to finish the sequence with a close up of the hand. I also considered the self-contained phrases of movement in the rushes realizing the rhythm that already existed within them, so my job was to shape the sequencing of the phrases. Due to the inclusion of old, or found, footage this also meant that I could shape the rhythm between the different sources of material¹⁰. By satisfactorily designing movement phrases I sought to give the spectator the kinaesthetic information they required and once they had assimilated this information they could move onto the next part of the film.

Another parallel to choreography is to see the whole piece of work as a sum of its parts. I created a pattern by deciding which shot should be put in relation to another, and considering how long each shot should be held. If there is a change to one of these parts it can affect the entire interacting network of these elements. I played with this idea by forming a pattern with the inclusion of black and white stills¹¹. It felt important to include them as a marker of time, to allow the spectators a chance to absorb what they were experiencing. When I embody a movement phrase I create a passage of time. I play with the rise and fall of emphasis, the direction and speed changes. When I edited the film I actively choreographed these rhythms too. The difference in this case is that I am not just working with abstract movement. I applied these same principles to the naturalistic movement of the actors or objects. The

⁹ DVD 2 – 12:06

¹⁰ DVD 2 – 4:28

¹¹ DVD 2 – 1:42 3:49 5:04 8:51 15:19

action is shaped into a phrase. Therefore the phrasing of the movement rhythms in each shot, carry a significant portion of the movements meaning. The precarious movement of the bottle in the film is an example of applying this phrasing technique to an object¹².

I transcribed other applications that I usually apply to dance to the medium of editing, once I saw the effect that they had. I looked at where I could include breath and shifts of emphasis, where to accentuate the rests and high points. I also looked at the space in the frame of each shot. The composition of the joins of each frame will have an impact on the material. An example of this is the sequence cut between the character, building her pen (who is always central), and the character suspended, (who is always at the edge of the frame)¹³. The close up of the hand striking the post to the cut of a full body hanging deepened the impact of the image. Throughout the film I decided that the movement should flow in a consistent direction. I considered how spatial organization akin to dance phrases are shaped in relation to one another making an overall experience of time, energy and movement. The difference in this situation is that my edit is not only making an experience, but shaping characters – it is not working exclusively with human movement. The movement available to choreograph into patterns of time is not only limited to the human body. Water, for example, has certain properties of rhythm. I wanted to bring this into the rhythmic composition of the film to help extend emotional meanings across images¹⁴. In this case the gaze of the solitary figure is conditioned by the movement of the sea, which is then extended by the movement of wind caressing the dress.

When I analyse the film I can see that I was struggling to articulate and achieve two goals. Firstly I wanted to connect my visual perception to my body and the thinking that I do when I move, to the thinking that I do when I choreograph for the screen. Secondly I wanted to encourage the film's audience to actively watch the film, to embody the peculiar rhythms and characteristics of the actors Both of these goals

¹² DVD 2 – 3:58

¹³ DVD 2 – 12:10

¹⁴ DVD 2 – 0:42

were, in many ways, only partially achieved – however as consequence of engaging with Merleau-Ponty I am now better qualified to appreciate the possibilities of the “phenomenological edit”.

2.3 Methodology for *i-witness*

In the case of *i-witness* (2009) I used improvisation as a mode for research and a principle for performing. I was interested in applying some of Merleau-Ponty’s key concepts. In particular I was interested in the role that hyper-reflection, tacit knowledge and moments of disequilibrium play in the improvisation process. Improvisation is an approach to performance that demands focus and clarity of intention and time. The concepts that arise through improvisation are impossible to conceive in stillness. My aim in this instance is to improvise my response to Sebald’s photographic material. In a sense my movement occupies the same improvisational space as Sebald’s project. Improvisation encourages the freedom to follow impulse and intelligence in the moment. In this instance I improvised to negotiate the parameters of each moment without binding it to any formality. One particular parameter I explored was the complexity of the historical embodied self. Through an investigation of Sebald’s photographs and writings I explored how I could empathetically express the nature of the artist’s work. His internal physiology is embedded in his work and is inscribed by his culture, language and history. Sebald lived within an acutely historical dimension, and the history that he occupied is that of the German experience during and after the Second World War. He writes as if the past comes before us (and him) where as we often imagine the past behind us and figuratively locate it as distant if not dead. Consequently the proximity of the dead to the living, the vertiginous presence of the past, are, expressed in his work. His photographs suggest that we consider our relation to things left unnoticed. So in

improvising I sought to magnify the detail of his chosen subjects and bring them via movement to the attention of spectators.

I was interested in the notion that something past is being embodied in the present. Sebald translated existing cultural material into another kind of cultural articulation. I took this idea of translation and exchange and investigated how this process can connect an artist's physiology, his experience and his work. In this case how Sebald's existing material could be filtered through the embodied sieve of myself as a dancer. This is a complex artistic process as a number of sensibilities are involved from the observational to the improvisational and choreographic. The physiology of translation is delicate; a certain resistance is essential, as is an openness and transparency. I observed and recognised, explored and selected, reviewed and discarded whilst being submerged in the material.

Improvisation is an intentional practice and I must consider the relationship between my attention and the world. Attention is both selecting and forming my experience in real time, but also understanding that what is being selected and formed is not completely of my choosing. This connects with my research for the performance of *Minutes* (2009) where the concept of "reversibility" sought to demonstrate how we might be moved beyond our expectations. The performance is never one-directional; the world is improvising and determining too.

There are three relationships that I investigated in order to further understand the specifics of this improvisational practice. Firstly, my relationship to the kind of material I wished to perform; secondly, the relationship between myself, and the improvised material I performed; and finally the relationship between the environment and myself. The kind of material I used involved making decisions about how to place things in relation to each other. Each movement creates its own unique temporality and spatiality by virtue of the manner in which it is projected. Consequently my response to each new image will project a unique qualitative relationship. I embody a new movement in relation to each new image. Each movement changes one or all of the proceeding qualities and affects the overall dynamic. It changes the linear design of the body and therefore the tensional

qualities. Movement isn't merely added, change relates to the internally regulated qualitative flow of movement. Movement can change previous qualitative definitions. The beginning of each movement creates a new accent; it creates a new temporal qualitative flow. I was interested in how to go beyond the mastery of accents and temporal values, and realise the qualitative flow of the piece. My understanding is that this qualitative flow only exists, as it is being created, presented, framed or performed. Therefore my reflective capabilities and my empathetic response to Sebald's work were, woven together and unified dynamically. In the end I hoped to create a unique interrelationship of all qualities.

My starting point was to put an action through an idea. The idea comes by actively selecting and prioritising information from the visual imagery and my environment. I noticed how associational memory encouraged me to develop gestures. Qualities from my observations of the images were stored in my memory until triggered by existing conditions during an improvisation. Decisions must be made quickly during an improvisation, and I needed to bring to my consciousness the patterns my body has learnt through a lifetime of training, to challenge aesthetic agendas held within my body and expand what might be possible. These patterns can be seen as reflexive actions. My consciousness can easily reject the experience of these reflexive moments and I can do something without 'knowing it'. This rejection leaves a gap in the knowing of the experience. Full consciousness is important and can be felt to change according to what it experiences. A willingness to explore the realm of full consciousness involves finding other paths of reflection. This is where the concept of 'hyper-reflection' was utilised. Hyper-reflection offers, a dislocation, it yields potential for a transformation. Like a hiatus it allows for an adjustment of action while in the flow of action. There is an entwining of action and awareness. I was keen to challenge the notion that improvisation is the re-cycling of learnt behaviour. I saw it as a performative embodied practice that attempted to make something new in the moment. I engaged with the process of emptying my mind, forgetting existing paradigms in order to find other pathways. This is a commitment to the process of change. I built up a practice where I would discard the first impulse to move (if it was a known experience) and wait for the next impulse to filter through. Sometimes I had

to discard the second and third impulse, but through practice my ability to let go of known movement patterns increased.

Once the pre-reflective thoughts filtered through, a circular transaction between the pre-reflective and reflective became possible. The reflective made sense of my experience permitting the emergence of a range of responses. I navigated my way through these responses by applying verbs such as – modifying, exaggerating, manipulating and following. These verbs were important for the second relationship I investigated, which was between myself, and the improvised material I performed. I explored what affect these verbs would have on my material. I wanted to find my body in a place of disequilibrium, this meant not only being concerned with the form of the material. The beautiful, in nature, concerns the form of the object and this object is easily integrated into our categories of understanding and reason. I was keen to uncover the notion of that which moves us, to challenge the aesthetic of the beautiful and investigate the sublime. The sublime, which moves us, is found in formlessness, it is an indirect pleasure. We might say, following Kant, that the sublime moves us but the beautiful merely charms us (Kant, I. 1963:54). But the sublime can be chaotic – it can cause disequilibrium. In relation to the duet between the pre-reflective and reflective, I investigated the importance of finding these moments of disequilibrium.

In this particular enquiry, as with much else, I have followed in the footsteps of Merleau-Ponty. His famous remark that the body is “unstably suspended between a before and an after”, has inspired much of my thinking and doing. (Merleau-Ponty 1989:35) They pose a challenge to form because they embrace distortion or disequilibrium. Disequilibrium and distortion are significant ideas because movement can be read through them. This instability led me to apply the verbs such as mutation, vibration and discordance to my response. Distortion can be at the centre of a highly charged experience. I utilised it so that it would be part of my perceptual experience. By exploring the boundaries of instability my body was in a constant restoration of shape, it couldn't hold onto a fixed notion of form. The physical states were fleeting.

My third relationship is to the environment. During this process, whilst I was cataloguing poignant images, emotions, and addressing my relationship to form, I was also interacting with an equally engaging world beyond the boundaries of my skin. The action verbs I used to gather information were to listen, feel, track, sense, notice and scan. I responded to the environment conflicting or not conflicting with it, building a relationship between myself, as a mover, and the world in which I moved. By allowing my senses to be fully alert I could penetrate my physical awareness. I saw my body as part of the landscape rather than as an instrument that views or arranges it. In this dialogue between my self and the world I became more aware of the intriguing possibilities of inter-dependence. With this, came a deeper sense of responsibility to respond and be present with my environment as a way of being present with myself. This utilised Merleau-Ponty's dynamic interplay of touching and being touched. It is an ongoing process in which the experience of being touched can transition immediately into the experience of touching. (Merleau-Ponty, M. 2008:140). All the fragments that I was experiencing were gathered into a unified, ambiguous whole.

By investigating sensations that are both external and internal, my sensed separation of myself, and my environment, became less of a separation and more of a fluid exchange. I strove to re-conceptualize the physical borders of my body, through attention to sensation and an empathetic embodiment to Sebald's work. Alongside this dialogue between myself, and my emerging methodology, I had Gill Clark's observations to refer to. The parallels drawn between our investigations pointed to the importance of reflection. Our attention to decision making, reacting and responding to sensations – this is where reflections can and do happen. When reflections are folded back into our practice, our attention to awareness reveals layers of what is possible in the present moment. I quote from Gill Clark "What excites me in performance is to feel like I am seeing behaviour, which involves attention, decision-making, reacting, responding, whether that's set material or improvised, instead of seeing masks of reflection". These tools of attending, do, however need refinement and practice. Clark used the term 'tuning' as a description of this process. "What is interesting about that tuning is that it brings to our awareness what is

happening automatically or unconsciously.” The act of reading was another parallel between my practice and Clark’s. However, Clark, who was inspired by architectural writings, was looking to find metaphors and appropriate language, to apply to the development of imagery throughout an improvisation. “The reading that I do that’s in other areas is stimulated by finding an appealing language for things that we know already, but we become more aware of knowing them, and maybe this language could be used to make bridges, to be better understood by people”. My reading was undertaken with a view to responding to Sebald’s text through an embodied resonance. Both reading practices are conscious of making a translation; my reflections after interviewing Gill Clark suggest further questions and hopefully the promise of utilizing my findings from this methodology and applying them in a different setting. Specifically, in the future, I think it would be useful for me to consider the role of reflection and movement in so far as it may influence and affect a group or number of dancers.

Chapter Three: Conceptual Framework and Research Method

The framework that I used to analyse my practice is inspired by some of the core concepts of Merleau-Ponty. Whilst the debt is obvious, this does not mean that there were not times when the concepts did not fit or best describe the practice. When the concepts of Merleau-Ponty did not assist in the analysis of my research I have indicated as much. The other point to be clear about in this introduction is that this framework of analysis was applied post facto in the case of the film, “Things We Found”, but in the case of my improvisation to the photographs of W.G. Sebald and my work with Matteus Fargion on “The Minutes” the practice developed as I encountered the work of Merleau-Ponty. These two research based performances developed over time and over time my practice shifted and altered as a consequence of my academic research.

Without wishing to appear too schematic I conceived of a framework of analysis that had the appearance of a geometric shape. On the bottom of the rectangle (holding the whole structure up if you like) is a line that shifts, left to right from pre-reflection to reflection to hyper-reflection. The right hand line of the rectangle would be governed by resonance and point upwards to disequilibrium. The left hand upright of the rectangle would be governed by reversibility and would also take us up to a point marked by disequilibrium. The top line of the rectangle would be marked by the constant debate and flux between subject and object. Finally within the rectangle stood what I would argue to be the “golden fleece” or treasure of phenomenology and movement – the lived experience and embodiment.

Clearly this framework is only useful if it is treated as a guide to the constellation of concepts that inform this study. I think it is helpful as it demonstrates the manner in which the analysis presented in this thesis oscillates around a key term, embodiment – and uses a series of interrelated concepts to help us unlock and understand this centre term - embodiment. I am aware that the framework finds no place for

intention, kinaesthetic empathy and perception. However there was a degree of overlap in the way in which these concepts were used by Merleau-Ponty. The framework of analysis that I used in this study is flexible; in so far as it helped me to capture and analyse my dance practice when it was useful – where it was less helpful or just opaque I hope I have said so.

3.1. Intentionality, Reversibility and Resonance

In my first case study, *Minutes* (2009) (a modular part of the whole piece *The Collection* 2009) my research focused on the communication of three core concepts of phenomenology: intentionality; reversibility and resonance. I used these concepts in my performance of composed material. The key objective throughout this research was to document my experience. The central theme of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy in *The Visible and the Invisible* (1968) is that each of us is a body, which 'embraces and constitutes the world'. He puts the point in *The Phenomenology of Perception* (1989) in the following way:

By thus remaking contact with the body and with the world, we shall rediscover oneself, since, perceiving as we do with our body, the body is a natural self and, as it were, the subject of perception.

(Merleau-Ponty, M. 1989:64).

His main claim then is that our embodiment brings to our perceptual experience an *a priori* structure that presents to us, in consciousness, an experience of a world of things, in time and space. It is as Merleau-Ponty writes, our "motor intentionality" which brings the possibility of meaning into our experience: through the body we perceive the world. (Merleau-Ponty, M. 2008:115). The role of the senses in perception is to make it their business to cover up their tracks as they organize experience in such a way that it appears to us as a world of objects arranged in a three dimensional space within which we are located as just another object. It could be argued therefore, that we do not notice the role of the senses in organizing experience and 'constituting' the physical world. To re-discover and articulate the senses we have somehow to get a detached, "sideways" look at experience. Theories of how we perceive the world are contentious. Merleau-Ponty was of the view that the world was not a mere collection of

sense data that we may access rather “my body must itself be meshed into the visible world; its power depends precisely on the fact it has a place from which it sees” (Merleau-Ponty, M. 1964:116). The things of the perceived world are manifest to us in experience, not substances hidden behind a veil of appearances. When we experience works of art their meaning resides in our experience of them; it does not reside in their relationship to something else – something not perceived but represented. It may be relevant here to note two things. Firstly that Susan Kozel is very much concerned to “rescue” from the condescension of posterity Merleau-Ponty’s key terms – resonance and reversibility (she places far less emphasis on what I discuss here – motor intentionality) (Kozel, S. 2007:24-27, 36-39). Secondly I found it appropriate to make a connection, however tangential, with those writers within the worlds of dance who have been inspired by the work of Judith Butler. Butler’s post-Foucaultian emphasis on the role of language and performativity in the construction of identity has encouraged writers and dance makers to focus on the role that choice and intention play within the performance space. (Beveridge, J.M. 2007).

It is through our bodies as living centres of intentionality that we choose the world and the world chooses us. Phenomenology holds that consciousness is intentional. Consciousness selects, sorts out and organizes stimuli according to present, purposeful perception. Our perceptual consciousness is purposeful as it is directed towards and involved with the world. When we understand the body in terms of intentional consciousness, body and consciousness take on a new meaning. The body is intentional; it is implicated in, rather than separated from, will and freedom. An entire lived experience determines a body; it is a mutable changeable living substance. The individual creates herself or himself by the subtle interplay and exercise, of freedom and restraint. Here the contrast is clearly with Butler’s early view that the individual is merely a subject born within and determined by an ideological apparatus the power of which, the individual, can at best be dimly conscious of. The systematic nature of this ideological interpolation makes any discussion of freedom so much, in Butler’s view, bourgeois (male) fantasy (Butler, J. 1988).

As the introduction to this thesis has made plain, neither I nor Merleau-Ponty subscribe to what is known as Cartesian dualism. Merleau-Ponty argued for an indivisible unity of body, soul and mind. This unity was especially evident in motion as we experience our energies and choices. In relation to the praxis for this particular case study, I investigated how we dance/move to enact the lived basis of embodiment as freedom. We experience freedom when we merge fully with our intentions and fulfil the purpose of the piece. Intentional movement, as I proposed in the introduction is movement done on purpose, not accidentally or tacitly. The intentionality of a movement becomes complex as we notice what precedes and what follows. Singular movements do not establish meaning. Meaning arises within the entire context of movement and its perceived purpose. In dancing as in life our intentions may be forceful or yielding, and intentionality regularly slips into movement beyond effort. I aimed (and I continue to do so) to make manifest intentionality through a specific method that seeks to get to the core of phenomenon. This is not a purely mental phenomenon; it is the entire self that is conscious of intentionality. This phenomenon could be described as realizing the movement as you yourself become the movement. This has been described by Bachelard as having grace (Bachelard, G. 1969:92). You become absorbed as yourself and in so doing you are changed, if not transformed. This is also true in everyday life. Grace is life lived in the present moving of its own accord. Bachelard, proposed that it is both phenomenological (a matter of consciousness) and metaphysical (concerned with describing grace as transcendence) (Bachelard, G. 1969:76). It will not, perhaps, be surprising to learn that Susan Kozel refers to Bachelard's declaration that "On principle, phenomenology liquidates the past and confronts what is new". Furthermore Kozel notices that Bachelard is an enthusiast of resonance and sees it as the "royal road" to understanding the depth of our existence. What Kozel and others are less willing to see, is the manner in which Bachelard's *Poetics of Space* (1969) relies upon an ontology of immanent subjectivity (Kozel, S. 2007:3).

It could be said, then, that dance/movement exists through the life of the body; it is wholly lived. Dance stands at the source of all the arts that express themselves in the human person. To live in the moment of one's dancing suggests the performer may

return us to a source in nature and link us to ideas and issues beyond aesthetic manifestation. (Merleau-Ponty, M. 2006: 94) Performance has the power to ignite, not just spaces, but also an ontological substratum of being. Kozel's work in *Closer* (2007) tends to draw back from the claims of ontology. She does, however, acknowledge that human beings are engaging in an expanding range of experiences and that these experiences "indicate that our current mental and physical states are intolerable and we are desperate to merge them with some sort of norm [...] or that we are searching for even, craving, something new." This kind of idealism may provide the motivation for a new kind of writing as Kozel says there are few "paradigms for translating lived, embodied experience into the professional discourse of the academy". On the other hand Kozel's call to the cause of experience may just ossify into the reification of reflection itself (Kozel, S. 2007:6; Varela, Thompson and Rosch, 1993:27).

There are two further phenomenological concepts I have used in the performance of *Minutes* (2009): reversibility and resonance. I used them as both conceptual and investigative tools. Reversibility and resonance are, in my view, vital to better understanding structure and improvisation in dance. The basis of the relation of reversibility in Merleau-Ponty's theory is that 'I can see and that I am also seen'. I am both subject and object through the act of seeing. Following the realization that we are both seeing and seen, Merleau-Ponty asserts that there is touch in vision and that we operate according to the touching-touch; just as I see and what I see sees me back I touch and am touched by objects. "Since the same body sees and touches, visible and tangible belong to the same world". (Merleau-Ponty, M. 1968:134). To utilise this concept for my performance of *Minutes* (2009) I must constructed a methodology that not only relies on the combination of seeing and touch, but also extends Merleau-Ponty's dynamic of reversibility into bodily movement. As Merleau-Ponty himself writes:

It is by lending his body to the world that the artist changes the world into paintings. To understand these transubstantiations we must go back to the working, actual body – not the body as a biological space or a bundle of functions, but that body which is an intertwining of vision and movement.

(Merleau-Ponty, M. 1964:118).

Bodily movement in this research can be viewed in the dynamic “the dancing-danced”. The dancing body is an example of the entwinement between identity and difference. Dance is an active exploration of that region where the subjective control over the body is at its limit. In this sense the dancer dances and is danced *by* the force that she sets in motion. Although the performer exerts strong subjective control over their body by virtue of the physical effort necessary, the momentum of any movement is a created force that in turn animates the body in movement.

The sliding state between moving actively and letting ourselves be moved by things, or people, or the world, is about expanding the space between control and being controlled. In this regard performativity is a concept that has entered the contemporary lexicon of key terms. Whilst the term primarily draws our attention to the manner in which the pragmatics of language exist within a context of authority and social rules and norms, it does remind us of the control and controlled continuum. In Judith Butler’s view we have been assigned a very prescriptive script indeed; or to put it another way – the choreographer has inscribed upon our very bodies every step we shall take. There will be no improvisation. We are just required to play our parts and then get off stage. As Dino Felluga comments:

For Butler, the distinction between the personal and the political or between private and public is itself a fiction designed to support an oppressive status quo; our most personal acts are, in fact, continually being scripted by hegemonic social conventions and ideologies.

(Felluga, D. 2002:92).

The performer mentally controls her body but also plays at the edge of control, letting physical momentum chart a path through space. As with space, time is not fully controlled by the performer. Although the performers may approach the movement with a particular rhythmic intention, the bodies own momentum and balance may dictate otherwise. It is as if movement were determined by the temporality of the piece that is in the process of emerging, as if it were shaped by the space and timing particular to that moment. You might say that performance embraces the art of equilibrium giving way to disequilibrium. It is in the hiatus of equilibrium that time and space intervene.

Merleau-Ponty captures the resonance of reversibility in the following words:

Not to see in the outside, as the others see it, the contour of a body one inhabits, but especially to be seen by the outside, to exist within it, to emigrate into it, to be seduced, captivated, alienated by the phantom, so that the seen and the visible reciprocate one another and we no longer know which sees and which is seen.

(Merleau-Ponty, M. 1968:139).

In a similar spirit this research has interrogated the performer's relation to reversibility and questions whether phenomenology is relevant to the creation and to the reception of work.

Resonance is the third concept I have investigated through my performance of *Minutes* (2009). If I experience a phenomenological piece of work it has the potential to resonate within me on a cognitive, emotional, and physical level. We live in worlds of shared and overlapping experience, cultural, social and historical formation, so it is possible for one person's lived experience to shed light on another's world. The phenomenological experience of another person unfolds across physical description and can be relevant to me based on my having experienced the same thing, or simply because I have the ability to construct meaning empathetically, through imagination or previous experience. In examining these matters Gaston Bachelard argues that first there is a reverberation, followed by the experience in oneself of resonances, and then there are repercussions in the way we see or feel the world. The "poetic image takes root in us" (Bachelard, G. 1969:18) even though it originates from another.

The dynamic of resonance not only addresses the question of shared truth by replacing it with relevance, but can also be used to consider the question of the origins of an experience. Does it matter where an echo originates? Gaston Bachelard was of the view that the notion of origin needs to be re-scaled or re-conceived so that it referred to the origin of a poetic image with and through a being's creative consciousness.

Through this creativeness the imagining consciousness proves to be, very simply but very purely an origin. In a study of the imagination, a phenomenology of the poetic imagination must concentrate on bringing out the quality of the origin in various poetic images.

(Bachelard, G. 1969:20).

The origin of the poetic image, then, becomes the fleeting moment shaped by the flow of time, memories, and corporeal insertion into being. The origin is an ontological freeze-frame within current experience, which reverberates outwards and resonates in those who experience it. The origin of an echo can be seen as the point where we insert ourselves into its reverberation. This point of origin relates not just to the movement upon which a phenomenology is constructed but is the moment in which it is recovered. By considering this notion of resonance and origin it can be said that it is not located at one point along a temporal spectrum. We may use a phenomenological method to create a work, but a phenomenological experience is fundamentally how we receive work. If origins are located at any experiential moment along a spectrum of production and reception, then the body performing phenomenologically can be that of the performer or the audience.

I can summarise, that my approach to performance, which is under investigation for the piece *Minutes* (2009) relies on the Merleau-Ponty's proposed dynamics of intentionality, reversibility and resonance. A phenomenological performance entails a reflective intentionality on the part of the performer, a decision to see/feel/hear oneself as performing while (one is) performing and a decision to see/feel/hear others performing all within the shared gaze of the audience.

3.2 Beyond Perception and towards Kinaesthetic Empathy.

The second case study is the analysis of the theatre piece *i-witness* (2009) This section is divided into two parts. The first part is a phenomenological approach towards directing and editing the film *Things We Found* (2009) The second part section posits an improvisational approach to visual stimulus.

Realism best characterises the approach to making the film *Things We Found* (2009) because it foregrounds the actual process involved in grasping what a picture represents. Phenomenology provides one possible framework for this task. Phenomenology is a way of looking at both the subject and object in the cognitive act

while maintaining that the object of perception exists independently of perception. Phenomenology aims to make explicit the experience of meaning, encourage us to reflect upon our experiences, and where appropriate, to change our position and our perspective in relation to the world as experienced. Phenomenology insists on the world as it is lived, and demands a clear and insightful acceptance of the responsibility we have for the meanings that we assign to the world and to ourselves.

To utilise a phenomenological methodology in the context of film I made I wanted to draw upon Edmund Husserl's methodological claim that the subject and object can be viewed at the same time. Husserl allowed me to recognize how represented objects remain as they are. In contrast to the idealist approach, which holds that how the world is and how we know it are dependent on the activity of a knowing mind. From this perspective this way none of the objects in my picture would exist independently of it. The characters would be a mere construction of the elements in our experience of the film not entities existing independently of our own acts of apprehending. The objective of phenomenological analysis is to enable us to realize that an experience of a film limits the direction of our consciousness in the act of apprehending representation. We do not have absolute freedom. The act of spectatorship is an active "being in the world" in other words the act of spectatorship is constitutive of the very object of perception (Spielmann, G. 2009). Husserl's core insight is that depicted objects exist independently of spectator's perceptual acts of apprehension (of what is represented). Objects of art are not just of the world they are in the world (Casebier, A. 1992).

My aim when making the film *Things We Found* (2009), was that the audience would "live through" the film, and as a consequence they would not make the mechanics of the film the object of perception. In other words the audience would watch the film and pass through line, shape, camera-placement, editing relationships and so forth to grasp the flesh and blood of the characters. The spectators would then experience what the characters experience, there would be no need to "read" the film as a complex layered semiotic text. The contrast here is with both the classical view of editing and camera work as functions requiring their own innovative, even virtuosic display and hence legitimacy; and more recently as noted by Christinn Whyte a

contemporary return to this classicism with an unabashed, unapologetic even brazen use of camera and editorial process. (Whyte, C. 2003)

Intention and perception are important phenomenological principles that needed to be grounded within the methodological framework of making the film *Things We Found* (2009). Consciousness must be understood in its “fullness” and the “fullness” of consciousness is experienced through the key phenomenological concept: intentionality. The term was used to designate the nature of consciousness as a “stream between two poles, subject and object” as “a vector that effects an organized synthesis” (Koestenbaum, P. 1975:27). Consciousness as we live and reflect upon it in experience is always mediated, and mediating consciousness, it is always conscious of something. For Husserl intentionality was a term that described directness and was always co relational to character and structure. Perhaps it is structure that Merleau-Ponty had in mind when he described intention as primarily “motor intentionality”. That is; usually the phenomena of our experience is always co-relational with the mode of our experience. The notion of the lived-body derives from Merleau-Ponty and is central to the research in this thesis. My aim is to document three very different movement practices and, without anticipating the conclusion, present a model for future projects interested in engaging with movement practice and phenomenology. I am interested in how the lived-body actualises intentionality in the very gesture of being alive and present to the world and others. The lived-body articulates intentionality as “flesh”; that is, as dynamic, concrete, situated, and both materially and historically finite. As Merleau-Ponty said “My body is my point of view of the world” (Merleau-Ponty, M. 1989:70).

If we consider the role of the editor as it has been articulated, by Walter Murch we can see how these ideas may have (filmic) weight. Thus Murch in describing the “performance of editing” stressed the importance of identifying visual patterns in the raw material. This first, intentional, identification process is followed by a highly personal, second stage investigation in which a kind of intuitive, “frozen dance” takes place. As Murch himself said of the editing process, “sometimes this process reaches the point where I can look at the scene and say, ‘I didn’t have anything to do with that

– it just created itself” (Whyte, C. *Motion Studies* MA, Middlesex University London, 2003:3).

Murch’s rather startling idea that “something just created itself” might appear the antithesis of Merleau-Ponty’s notion of motor intentionality, but I believe this is to misread Merleau-Ponty’s emphasis on perception as a rationalist project. Merleau-Ponty believed that the lived-body was both the subject and object for the world and others. The lived-body does not merely provide a ‘place’ for perception and expression but also performs the exchange of perception to expression and vice-versa. Exchange is the key activity here. It might be said that my body is always where I, and the world meet in the experience of consciousness and the conscious exchange of experience. Exchange is right at the heart of this process. It signals the willingness and possibility of improvisation; it also signals that the lived body is conscious of its many potentialities. In Merleau-Ponty words:

If I draw the object closer to me or turn it round in my fingers in order “to see it better”, this is because each attitude of my body is for me, immediately, the power of achieving a certain spectacle, and because each spectacle is what it is for me in a kinaesthetic situation. In other words, because my body is permanently stationed before things in order to perceive them and, conversely, appearances are always enveloped for me in a certain bodily attitude. In so far, therefore, as I know the relation of appearances to the kinaesthetic situation, this is not in virtue of any formula, but to the extent that I have a body, and that through that body I am at grips with the world.

(Merleau-Ponty, M 2008:129)

Situated in the lived body, intentionality is manifest in the always “directional value” in which we live through perception and expression as the experience of consciousness and the consciousness of experience – in other words as pre-reflective and reflective meaning. The phenomenological paradox of perception has been rendered, by Susan Melrose, as a kind of heightened professional intuition. This has been further elaborated as indicative of an “expert-practitioner ethos”: an ethos comprising of ethical engagement, sensing, intuitive play, drive and attitude. If this is helpful it is in part because Melrose herself acknowledges that she is a short step from resonance and empirical appropriateness (Whyte, C. 2003:1). Anchored by our professional, empirical intuition we are able to engage in a filmic practice that has

something in common with the procedures familiar to those improvisation strategies seen in dance. Thus in my film, *Things We Found* (2009) there was no pre-determined end point for the film or the material generally. If I did not emphatically follow Murch's imperative to "treat footage as if it's a found object" I nevertheless embraced something of his enthusiasm for the documentary maker (Whyte, C. 2003 Ch.2:4).

Things we Found (2009) is not, in fact, a documentary but perhaps the genre and term are appropriate – they remind us of Merleau-Ponty's view of perception as the "original text" of conscious experience. There is something in the nature of an epistemological claim here, as Merleau-Ponty seems to be suggesting that we will know the world if we perceive the world in this way. As ever there is still a great deal of interpretation to be done – phenomenology is rarely prescriptive, this might be one way of knowing the world and being in the world – but what will we know and how shall we be? We can of course improvise our answers to these question –what we cannot do as performers is to know the answers in advance of the experience.

As Merleau-Ponty comments "perception is not a science of the world, it is not even an act, a deliberate taking up of position; it is the background from which all acts stand out, and is pre-supposed by them" (Merleau-Ponty, M. 1989:10-11). Perception both grounds, and figures as, the very action and performance of existence. Correlating consciousness and the world through the agency and action of the lived-body, perception is a living and organizing organization of the world, a textualizing of the sensing body in its contact with the world. Thus, perception is always already the expression of intentionality in the world and, as such, always already an interpretation.

My research investigation as presented in the film, highlights the role of interpretation particularly within the editorial process. Perception of any object within a motion picture cannot involve everything about that object, yet the object itself with all of its properties is what we perceive. In any view of one of the characters in the film *Things We Found* (2009), there is, incompleteness. For example, if we see a character from the front the back is unseen. If we sense the inner life at a particular time in the film experience we do not sense his/her disposition in other

circumstances. Yet despite these absences we may perceive all of this character with all of its properties. It could be argued that an understanding of the “complete” character requires the constructive presence and activity of the spectator. Specifically we do not make the film but we interpret it and ultimately understand it in a way of our choosing. The phenomenological principles I have mentioned allowed personal experiences to play a fundamental part in the perceptual act. I wanted the audience to be free to feel the weight of their perceptual experiences as they watched the film. We can make our own contribution in the co-determination of what appears to us.

Personal experience, then, is key to a phenomenological methodology. When I viewed the film rushes and make editing decisions for *Things We Found* (2009) it will be recognized that it is a physiological activity that is undertaken with kinaesthetic empathy. Kinaesthetic empathy is feeling with movement, a sensitivity that is developed by perceiving and being in the movement. Neuropsychologist Arnold Modell describes the activation of kinaesthetic empathy by saying “the perception of feelings relies on the corporeal imagination, which in turn is determined by the history of the self” (Modell, A.H. 2003:145). Modell suggests that the body not only thinks but imagines in relation to its own experience, drawing on remembered sensations to recognize, feeling in movement. We know the laws of physics in our body because we live in them. So movement speeds, directions and energies have meaning when we see them, even if we have not experienced them. Beyond these sensitivities Karen Pearlman has argued that various “brain functions that respond physically to movement” are common to both the dance artist and the film editor (Whyte, C. 2003 Ch.2:4). An editor choreographs movement and an audience sees and re-interprets this movement. Through utilising our perceptive acts, alongside our kinaesthetic memory of life lived in time, space, energy and movement, it is possible to account for our responsive movement in the act of viewing. When I made the film a key objective was to encourage the embodied knowledge of the viewer, by highlighting the films nuanced rhythms.

The rhythms of the film are also bound up with the perception of time. (Pearlman considers there to be three essential rhythmic categories – event rhythm, physical rhythm and emotional rhythm) (Pearlman, K. 2009:5). Time can structure rhythm,

and is one of the fundamental categories of experience and key to how film generally is perceived. Merleau-Ponty's reflections on temporality were indebted to both Sartre and Heidegger. (Merleau-Ponty, M. 2008:119). From a phenomenological perspective, perceptions of time are analyzed as a function of consciousness rather than as absolute objective reality. A formative phenomenological question was whether our colloquial and intuitive sense that time flows is an objective fact, or an illusion created by some part of our own perceptual/editorial apparatus. Edmund Husserl in a seminal formulation proposed that the sense of flow is achieved through a tripartite structure of temporal cognition. The perception of any immediate moment, Husserl thought, always contains moments of "retention" and "protention" of what has just passed and what is about to occur. The "now" cannot be prised out of the sequence of the immediate past and the immediate future (Husserl, E. 1992). In relation to film this allows us to see the singular moment as containing both past and future. Drawing on this phenomenological methodology, a film-maker might depict an interior life through behaviour, to examine what remains of past experiences, and intimate what the future may hold. It is possible that the lived body on film may contain and reveal this information. It is where the attitude of the body relates thought to time. Rachel Davies, an independent dance film maker, in her film *The Assembly* (2007) asks from the very start of her film can we see time moving? She celebrates individual memory and collective action creating a chorus of voices and a deconstruction of group identity – revealing gesture and spontaneity as performance and fragility.

It is not just the body that can relate thought to time. Within the context of the film *Things We Found* (2009) what I wanted to show was mental states and landscapes carrying rhythm, time and even memory. The quality of humanness, the landscape and memory are in a constant process of exchange. The choreographic process for the film was buried within this dialectical exchange. Furthermore it is important to insist that this exchange between landscape, the sense of self, and memory is often improvisational. That is to say as director and editor the memories revealed themselves as much as they are displayed.

Specifically in the film *Things We Found* (2009) it is evident that a consciousness of destruction preoccupies the protagonist. This character is the way he is precisely because he returns from death, from the land of the dead, he has passed through death and is born from death; death whose sensory motor disturbances, he retains. It does not matter that he did not participate in the war; it is a cross-generational memory phenomenon. The sense of continuity – of our own being – is inscribed into the very structure of his (and our) brain. As we summon certain memories and move mentally over them, consciousness is turned inwards. We compose the ongoing narrative of our lives. In the inner world, time is constructed from the materials of feeling.

3.3. The Pre-reflective, Reflective and Rhythm.

In the second part of the analysis of the theatre piece *i-witness* (2009) I improvised movement to a number of photographic images that have been integrated into the text of *The Rings Of Saturn* (2009) by W.G. Sebald. I used Merleau-Ponty's concept of the pre-reflective and reflective to inform my dance practice and hopefully I enhanced my understanding of Sebald's work while simultaneously articulating a phenomenological concept of rhythm through movement.

The phenomenological notion of the pre-reflective attempts to make explicit what is implicit in our every day life. It defines an embodied practice by establishing a dialogue between intention and action. This dialogue involves a suspension, as far as possible, of expectations or prior knowledge in order to inhabit the immediate moment of perception. The understanding of the pre-reflective in this research is not to reveal fully, or to dwell, within a primordial, pre-linguistic or pre-conceptual state. Rather, the pre-reflective state attempts to loosen (or free) the (habitual) chains of the rationalist structure of meaning in order to allow for qualities that are associated with the pre-rational. These qualities, namely ambiguity of meaning, fluidity of existential and conceptual structures, invite new thought, including contradictions and reversibility of meaning or paradoxes. A notion of the pre-reflective world, not yet contained by our conceptual framework, is essential for us to be able to conceive

of change. If we intend reflection to suspend itself in the face of the pre-reflective we make a commitment to maintaining the connection between reflection and its other, in a fundamentally non-dualistic way, effectively a commitment to the porosity of reflection. As Merleau-Ponty said:

If reflection is not to presume upon what it finds and condemn itself to putting into things what it will then pretend to find in them, it must suspend the faith in the world only so as to *see it*, only so as to read in it the route it has followed in becoming a world for us; it must seek in the world itself the secret of our perceptual bond with it. It must use words not according to their pre-established signification, but *in order to state* this prelogical bond.

(Merleau-Ponty, M. 2008:131)

The paradoxical relationship between reflection and the pre-reflective is fundamental to knowledge. Merleau-Ponty indicates “It is by a secret and constant appeal to this impossible-possible that reflection can maintain the illusion of being a return to oneself and of establishing itself in immanence, and our power to re-enter ourselves which is neither older nor more recent than it, which is exactly synonymous with it” (Merleau-Ponty, M. 1968:34). If we were to express this conceptual movement through gesture the philosophical impulse reaches beyond ourselves conceptually, perceptually and existentially, only then to return to ourselves. We can then say that it is similar to reaching an arm or leg that takes the body into a state of disequilibrium and then back into an equilibrium that is somehow transformed through the process. What is suggested here is a circular movement between the pre-reflective and the reflective. A circular transaction is necessary as it would be impossible to harness our reflective processes and less than desirable to encapsulate fully the pre-reflective. However, it is possible, at least in movement, to accept and modify our reflective processes, to improvise through them in order to permit openings that allow for the seemingly illogical and ambiguous, or even the contradictory or the sublime. This cyclical transaction allows disequilibrium to punctuate a state of equilibrium over time. Maintaining a distinction between the pre-reflective/reflective and the rational/pre-rational can move us to a place beyond duality. The pre-reflective does not negate reflection but indicates a dynamic ontological state of entwinement between the two. It is not a steady state; it appears and vanishes in a constant sliding exchange with reflection. The relevance of this concept in relation to my investigation

is highlighted by the notion that Merleau-Ponty posits a fluid dynamic to thought, and uses a spatial and gestural understanding of embodied perception, coiling itself and its object so that separating them makes no sense. The zone existing prior to the codes of thought and language is only ever a “mutilated thought of the beginning” which is like a “ladder one pulls up after oneself after having climbed it” (Merleau-Ponty, M. 1968:35).

What Merleau-Ponty presents here is a metaphor of action. The notion of a pre-reflective experience located both outside and inside oneself is a crucial starting point for an embodied phenomenological process. The starting point involves a willingness to receive something that may seem adverse to existing conceptual structures and an acceptance that it may arrive unformed in the midst of our experience. As Merleau-Ponty said, once some notion of the pre-reflective is drawn into the process of reflection:

There is a thought travelling in a circle where the condition and the conditioned, the reflection and the un-reflected are in a reciprocal, if not symmetrical relationship where the end is in the beginning as much as the beginning is in the end.

(Merleau-Ponty, M. 1968:42).

I have said that this thesis seeks to uncover the complexity of the construct of the pre-reflective, when it is investigated from the perspective of the body. Merleau-Ponty's notion of the pre-reflective is a challenge to language and logic. As Merleau-Ponty says the body is the site of the “creative operation which itself participates in the facticity of (unreflective) experience.” (Key Concepts pp. 118-19) Metaphorically speaking physical experience spans registers of language: words, gestures, sounds, colours, textures and smells. Bodies are at home at the fringes of language having both feet planted upon ground, from which new knowledge can emerge and enter into new paradigms. Bodies can be articulate. As one commentator on these matters says:

The body is forever at the heart of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, that his philosophy is truly a philosophy of the body, a philosophy that is not only about the body, but that springs from the body as emblem of an opening that exceeds us.

(Merleau-Ponty, M. 2008:119)

Alongside respect for our fundamentally reflective and rational make-up (who we are and what we are) remains our appreciation of (and participation in), the parts of ourselves that may live beyond language such as emotion, effect and intuition.

The pre-reflective and reflective loop can be utilised to remind us that “nothing is more difficult than knowing precisely *what we see*.” (Key Concepts p. 56) Structures of thought and judgement help hide perception from itself. Even if we are able, like Merleau-Ponty, to escape from theory it is impossible to prevent thought from pinning down experience, just as it is impossible to prevent experience from meeting social structures that attempt to codify, control and change that same experience. In my improvised response to W.G. Sebald’s photos, I sought to prevent reflection from intervening and shaping the flow of movement, but accept that reflection will change the process, perhaps by making it more conscious, providing more depth. In my dance practice improvising under this notion allowed concepts to be drawn out of raw experience and emotional and intellectual connections to be made, like the partnership between thought and action. By crafting a role for the pre-reflective from the subjective point of view, I could receive information from my body and the bodies of others. Utilising this framework made possible a deeper understanding of the entanglement between reflection and experience, between thinking and making. As my understanding of phenomenology developed, I tried to ensure that my dance practice made evident that the reflective and pre-reflective exchange takes place in the real, lived body. The exchange is not further evidence of a Cartesian split or a conceptual fantasy. Rather it gives back – to a body that dances – agency, power and biology. Of course what that dancing body does is up to the dancing body itself. It might entertain, it might just content itself with being beautiful or enchanting or engage in acts of worship or even politics.

Throughout this investigation, it has been important to consider the choreographic form in which improvised movement takes place. My aim has been to create a form (or a framework of practice) that articulates a phenomenological concept of rhythm through movement. As I respond to each photograph I demonstrate how a revelation of form can be projected with a specific tensional quality and in a specific qualitative

manner. Each movement as a revelation of form creates its own rhythmic temporality by virtue of the manner in which it is projected. Each projection not only creates a unique temporality but also a unique spatiality. Phenomenologically speaking the core concept is to investigate how a rhythmic structure embracing temporal and accentual values, can also become intertwined with the unique intricacies of qualitative and temporal shifts, which are intuited dynamically.

Conclusion.

This thesis has been an account and an analysis of my dance practice. Whilst the film, the improvisation to the photographs of W.G. Sebald and the duet with Matteo Fargion are all clearly very different – they have all been analysed with the help of key concepts borrowed from Merleau-Ponty. My conclusion is that the evidence and experience gathered from my practice amounts to a model or guide for other dance practitioners to use when they are engaged in work of this nature. This model has a number of key features. The first feature illustrates the way in which this model changed my dancing practice. (We might say that a successful phenomenology opens up surprising pathways between, and combinations of, theory and practice.) Merleau-Ponty's ideas resonate with me and give much more depth to the translation process between the reflective and pre-reflective exchange. In particular when I was improvising to the photographs of W.G. Sebald my responses fell within a range of potential phenomenological experiences. I noticed that sometimes my responses were more “felt” than at other times. I considered that I was at different times less able to fully engage with or digest a pre-reflective state. Why was this? Well obviously I encountered fluctuating levels of fatigue, concentration and distraction. The photographs appeared on a monitor in very quick succession so the speed at which my perceptions, actions and reactions had to be organised within my body was very quick indeed. Put simply, sometimes I failed to anchor the pre-reflective, reflective dialogue within my body; instead I relied upon impulses and practices that my body was already over familiar with. Nevertheless the benefit of having a theoretical structure with which one can order and analyse movement choices is something that I have found of incalculable value. Specifically my improvisation in performance is now clearer, more focussed and more available for analysis.

Related to improvisation this model also insists on the importance of disequilibrium as way of suspending expectations and prior knowledge when engaging in movement practice. When the body is in a state of disequilibrium it passes through the structure of form and function. In disequilibrium we are reminded that there is a connection between the rigorous training of the dancer and disintegration. The skilful body and the body out of control are one and the same. For my own practice, as I hope I made clear in connection with the *Minutes* (2009) duet and the improvisation with the

photographs, a commitment to disequilibrium gives me licence to take risks, push boundaries, to – in other words- relinquish full control of my body and yet paradoxically to develop a new physical capacity.

My practice has had to negotiate new ways of thinking and in doing so has been enriched. The reflective, pre-reflective, and the notion of disequilibrium are important to this model but so, perhaps surprisingly, was Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on the relationship between the subject and the object. I understood this to be an invitation to abandon the either/or-ness of the world and being. It became important to me to see how the object of perception and the viewer fold into one another. Thus in my dance practice my body and the space in which I dance fold into one another. There can be no dominant direction of control and identity. When I am dancing I am the space and the space is in me. If I had to think in terms of control I would think in terms of a sliding loss and then temporary gain of control. In my practice control is active and passive, it moves like water – playfully eluding me even when it seemed most clearly within my grasp.

A fourth reference point within this model is what Merleau-Ponty called reversibility. The origin of the term may lie within the existential philosophical tradition, but its potency resides in its applicability. Reversibility stresses the active nature of perception. Perceptions are our means of communicating with ourselves and with the world. This simple notion helped me see my relationship with the audience and my partner as I performed, particularly, in *Minutes* (2009). In place of seeing myself as a self-contained entity, secure in objectives and identity, I saw that my identity was changeable, dynamic and fundamentally connected to Matteo Fargion. Reversibility also enabled me to appreciate that the audience left traces of their perceptions of our performance. This complex palette of connections helped me to generate a dynamic space and, sometimes, an expanded corporeality. I felt sometimes, in the case of *Minutes* (2009) that the audience and we the performers were sharing the authorship of the performance. This kind of engagement required a containment and a sharing; an exchange between myself and myself and others. I observed that (in retrospect) the balance between these two conversations can be very delicate. Sometimes I reached out with the objective of sharing and sometimes I remained relatively

contained as a consequence of fatigue, vulnerability or some unknown sense of disengagement.

If reflection in all its modes: disequilibrium, subject-object and reversibility can be thought of as the grid references for this model of phenomenology and dance, what else have I observed during the course of this investigation? In the introduction I wrote about the manner in which the practice that this thesis is exploring was founded upon a belief in art form complementarity. My belief was that phenomenology would allow my dance practice to flourish within different artistic arenas. Given that my dance practice was engaging within spaces dominated by music, art, theatre and film – can it be said that a commitment to this phenomenological model enriched these artistic partnerships or dialogues? I believe that the answer to this question is an unequivocal yes. The phenomenological method allowed my dance practice to find ways of speaking even when silent. My dance practice both found common ground with other art forms and enriched the social space within which it functioned. Dance practice that explores and utilises Merleau-Ponty's core concepts can indeed contribute to art form complementarity.

It may also be recalled that, in Chapter One, I aimed to emphasise the importance of a pragmatic approach to the core concepts of Merleau-Ponty. This thesis is a description and analysis of my dance practice. In many ways this is a straightforward question of excavation and exposition. I have aimed, for the simple, lived body account of what I was doing. In reflecting upon how far it could be said that I achieved this, I feel it is relevant to recall my practice in the *Minutes* (2009) duet. In the duet I hope it was clear that the repetition and lack of artifice in the performance was critical in helping to establish an immediate and simple relationship with the audience. For my practice in dance the notion of lived experience has become a critical benchmark in the creation and performance of material. In other words the application of Merleau-Ponty's concepts to my work, in rehearsal and performance, has informed, altered and improved what I have been doing since undertaking this research. And in so far as my understanding of film image and editing has evolved – which I believe it has – it can be attributed to an appreciation of the importance of the embedded experience of the viewer. Furthermore as the editor of the film *Things We*

Found (2009) I was creating rhythms through an awareness of the rhythms of the world and the rhythms of the body. This rhythmic editorial practice can, I believe, be encouraged and sharpened through an appreciation and application of Merleau-Ponty's core concepts.

It could be argued that of all artistic endeavours dance is the most ephemeral. Its bewitching transience has left it prey, on the one hand, to those conceptual enthusiasts who feel that all human endeavour requires theoretical explication if it is to be legitimate, and on the other to those who would argue that the transient nature of dance is its core characteristic. Beauty requires no grounding or legitimacy – it just exists. The argument could be summed up as: “you dance therefore you are” (Lepecki, A. 2006). I have tried to chart a course between these two positions. I am of the view that dance benefits from theoretical speculation and conceptual renewal. In an age of revolutionary communication change, we can hardly lock ourselves away from the upheavals of the present by adhering to the practices of the past. At the same time it is vital that we acknowledge the radical difference that dance is. Dance is ephemeral. But dance is a discipline and a practice. My dance practice has developed and benefited hugely from bringing it under the gaze of phenomenology. A considerable part of this thesis has been given over to documenting how Merleau-Ponty's key concepts, resonance, reversibility, intentionality and pre-reflection have impacted upon my practice. I believe that an understanding and practice of these concepts has enriched and extended my work. Perhaps more generally my practice has benefitted from Merleau-Ponty's insistence on writing about the perceived body as *lived*. Neither objective nor biomedical, the dancing body is saturated with momentum and potentiality. In my dance practice this idea of the body has helped me place emphasis on creativity and openness. These are qualities that are vital for improvisation. But; further I would argue that my dance practice has been transformed by Merleau-Ponty's claim that the body can be conceived as a “sort of hollow or fold” and that from within this place I make and negotiate multiple meanings and possibilities. (Key Concepts pp.118-9) My dance practice is not pursuing an arcane long forgotten or highly technical vocabulary. On the contrary it is now an expression of my being and it is full of meaning and communicative potential.

Appendix

Transcript of my interview with Gill Clark, July 2009

Catherine Bennett-

Phenomenology offers a return to the lived experience, it shapes a reflective process within our practice. When our existing paradigms no longer do justice to our range of experiences, we attempt to find other paths of reflection that reach beyond existing methods, while maintaining relevance to our lives. Can you discuss the modalities of reflection you have used in order to maintain a fluid practice.

Gill Clark-

I think one important thing was about attention to what's happening in the present moment as a mode of reflection and letting that be one's teacher. And... something very clearly about to feel at a certain point that I could counter my experience to form, and go internal or self absorbed. I guess increasingly what I am interested in is that that continuum is always flowing, that ones always in relation to the world of the other. So that's also about needing to do to other things that are outside of dance. Part of this excavation was being able to scrape away what was getting in the way like training for example and being involved in the present moment. What excites me in performance is to feel like I am seeing behaviour, which involves attention, decision-making, reacting responding, whether that's set material or improvised, instead of seeing masks of reflection. So that's going a little bit away of modes of reflection but it's almost like they become motivators for reflection and where the reflection happens.

Catherine Bennett-

It makes me think about the Deborah Hay piece I watched last night... I was seeing the performer noticing what was happening rather than doing what they were doing.

Gill Clark-

Yes and tuning, what is interesting about that tuning is that it brings to our awareness what is happening automatically or unconsciously. So that a little bit more of that can be revealed in a way. In Coventry yesterday it was interesting there was somebody who was a relative beginner and seemed to me to be coming from a background that was over regimented and so was resisting anything that had any limitations attached. She was criticising her own ability to concentrate and I was explaining those tools of attending are something that need practice and refinement and she shouldn't expect them to be there straight away. That you can learn to switch the lens and pay more attention to this and then to that... sometimes you can do some of those things together. [...]

I think I am trying to say in relation to your question that the attending to moving is also part of your reflection, its not separate. I was thinking about my teaching practice and how that's changed and evolved and it feels to me completely integral to the rest of my practice, it feels like the laboratory a lot of the time. And so there is a lot of experimenting if you like and noticing what seems to be effective. And more and more consciously I suppose is to evolve moments and layers and levels of reflection within a workshop situation. And why that feels important woven into the practice is so that some of those modes of reflection can stay as close as possible to the doing. And even that moment of time gap that brings us so quickly to a default position of analysis... so those wonderful conversations that happen immediately after having ones eyes closed and really immersed in a touch experience they are so lively where one isn't judging the language or having to pre thought the thought but just allowing feeling sensations to come through language in some way. Those feel very rich and what I had to learn is to give those time and trust them. In detriment to me I would reap the reward if we had a group discussion but then that immediately distances one and becomes a different kind of conversation. I also found I wanted to encourage automatic writing that would happen immediately after the experience. Even down to ensuring the pen and paper were there ready before hand. Trying to keep a bubble around the immersion and experience in a way but allowing the reflection to be casted... Then harvesting that at a later point or at the end of the session... then about

sharing ideas even if they had only been grazed on. So allowing a seem-less flow between different modes of reflection. [...]

I really notice the automatic writing, which I feel like something I would like to encourage myself to do more often because I feel the written language that comes to me is more analytical or descriptive, but my writing close to moving is of a very different nature. And interestingly if I do that say at the end of a session, if for a latter part of the session I have been directing from the outside the nature of the writing is very different. I find I am much more having a view on what has happened. Its really not in the motion. [...]

Something I have enjoyed reading about in architecture is the notion that very clear visual attention actually distances us in space. And that notion we are often working on about opening the peripheral vision immerses us in the space. And how we use that in all our senses. We home in on the detail of the touch here, we are able to form relationships and something happens in my mental attention in relation to that writing. Like I have stopped to look and now I am distancing myself, I am not in the middle of it... I feel a real desire to do more writing but I feel that the mode of it wants to move a bit closer to that moving- writing place but be able to draw on all these readings in different disciplines and how do these two things go together we have this very academic reference... I am really curious about this at the moment...

This is a huge area about my reflection. The reading that I do that's in other areas, and I read very little about dance... that is stimulated by finding appealing language or metaphor for things that we know already, but becoming more aware of knowing them... and also having a sense of oh maybe those are languages that could be used to make bridges, to be better understood by people. But I realise then the process of reading the experience is a process of time to reflect because reflecting back is helping me become clearer about what it is I know, or the nature of what we do...so it doesn't feel like its only about getting information, its actually a process of reading that is one about allowing me to reflect, to open the frame, shift the lens or take a different angle... My mind is not only attentive to the context of that discipline, its conscious of making a translation... It's interesting to me in order for me to

understand this that I very rarely go to dance language...I don't think its only about my own view of dance writing, its something about the distance, the gap is valuable... so it's the other perspective that is useful rather than something that is more familiar and I think 'oh yes'.

Catherine Bennett-

I do think that cross fertilisation between disciplines has grown, and of course it is in our interest that these disciplines are now looking towards the body less as an object and more as a subject.

Gill Clark-

Yes, but its interesting to me as well that because historically we have had to battle to be accepted as an academic subject and all of that is relatively recent we have had to try harder than anything to be objective and rational and logical. While all these other disciplines ¹⁵are saying everything, is relational its complex, so we are having to learn back from them the validity of another way of thinking. Where as we should be saying we know because we know that we said that all along.

Catherine Bennett-

We understand the transformation of time, space and motion through the flesh of the experience. The extension of lived experience happens not only by extending our human senses but also by exploring the depths of our relationship with others. Have you experienced a particular time when working with fellow practitioners, either in rehearsal or in performance, that a shared knowledge through exploration, extended your practice.

Gill Clark-

What is interesting about my work with Lisa Nelson¹ is that what I most loved about working with her was really a lot to do with simply closing ones eyes and leaving time

¹⁵ Lisa Nelson invented the Tuning Score in the 1990's exploring how we compose perception through action.

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to... so I have always enjoyed moving with my eyes shut as it has opened up imaginary spaces as well as perceptual spaces. In the tuning score I enjoyed the simplicity of images in the space and how long they resonate for. In the single images score in a sense the players would see the space and imagine what was needed in it so the perceiving was always relational and compositional... and then having made that decision you would then close your eyes and enter the space. And of course immediately then you go with where you are now , you might not end up with where you thought you were going... and then you just be in that space and that might be that but then... somebody from the outside might sense the thing that was needed to compliment the space...so they join you. You might do the same thing or just sensing that one was going to arrive together or the composition was just forming together. I was really curious about how those sensory feelers in the space as a viewer and performer fill with such potency and how little one sees. What one is really seeing is about engagement and ones heightened engagement to ones own movement and all the space around it... I could watch that all day and not need anything else to happen. So it was interesting last time Lisa was here in Winlab we got onto much more complex dancing and to me it wasn't so tuning full partly perhaps because I wasn't so tuned but as a viewer how we think of relationships as visual relationships and look for composition but this is really about attention. How attention holds the space.

Catherine Bennett-

I am interested in how the audience feels part of the action in order to recognise this attentional practice and its origins.

Gill Clark-

That is the great thing, when I first saw this score it was a group of dancers in the States that went round these observatories and to make the score more complex the compositional decisions are made from inside or outside and they are called. I loved that I was immediately part of the action, part of a game, I was enjoying the decisions that were being made or that were being made and then not followed through. [...]

Working with shared knowledge from fellow practitioners... feels like that is happening in every role. I am intrigued by something like a Siobhan Davies process where you will all be making your own material from your own movement resources in the same space. The ensemble effect of working in the same space...that there is an embracing of difference of response but there is something also that happens through osmosis... In different stages of Siobhans process there has been elements of sharing material so of course there are things that hone a kind of look but part of that is about living and breathing, working and sharing an experience together. I was curious about my project to make an installation with the filmmaker Becky Edmonds and the composer Scott Clark... what was great about that was it happened over a long time period so therefore it began as myself working in a research frame thinking about might there be a way using the cameras eye and Becky's wonderful attention to detail, to help bring attention to what fascinates me in movement which is often about attention to detail. Which gets lost when you put it in the big frame, and might there be something about that that actually conveys information but in a layered way that was to be experienced. What emerged through time in the editing process was that what was in-between came the most important thing rather than the dancing. Then it was great to have the opportunity in Northampton to be in a space for a week, put all these monitors up and spend hours being completely hypnotised by just allowing these relationships being set up between one thing and another. This gave us the idea to set up several screens, it was so rhythmic... it didn't work when the screens were flat it had to be about depth and field. Bringing the sound in it became important that the sound came from different places and this informed an environment of attention. It became a natural place of collaboration where you are learning together and trying things out, letting things shift. [...] It felt completely that we were all making choreographic compositional decisions... so often dance films don't work because the choreography happens and then it is filmed whereas this was about how the choreography sits in the space and in time and all this process became completely fluid. It was unusual in this collaboration that the form would be so emergent through the process and this I enjoyed. [...] So this is what I am learning from other people and we are tuned to do that in a way. And this is why some people are really envious of our process.

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