

Serena Massimo

Training the “intranquillity” Contemporary dance between discomfort and playfulness

Abstract

Drawing on Erwin Straus’ notion of pathicity, as well as an atmospherological perspectives, this article explores the role of the pathic and felt-bodily dimension in the acquisition of the expressive and interpretive capacities required of contemporary dancers. Through the analysis of case studies emerging from interviews conducted with professional dancers, and in dialogue with the somaesthetics of discomfort developed by Mark Tschaepé (2024), the article argues that dancers grow artistically by diversifying their responses to their surroundings through discomfort and playful complicity.

Keywords

Pathicity, Discomfort, Playfulness

Received: 01/04/2026

Approved: 30/04/2026

Editing by: Germana Alberti

© 2026 The Author. Open Access published under the terms of the CC-BY-4.0.
massimoserenak@gmail.com (Università di Ferrara)

1. *Motor expertise and artistic competence*

The debate on motor expertise is not limited to the skills required of dancers; it also concerns athletes and extends to the motor competences involved in everyday activities (such as riding a bicycle or typing on a computer, for instance). Depending on the theoretical perspective adopted, different components of motor expertise are emphasized, often intersecting with broader debates – for example, on the role of habits in skilled motor activities or, more generally, on the presence or absence of conscious awareness¹. For our purposes, we will limit ourselves to outlining, in broad terms, the two main positions that confront one another and that focus on the role – or absence – of thought and conscious awareness in the execution of highly skilled motor activities. The first position we will present is the one that posits a minimal, if not entirely absent, role for thought and conscious awareness. This is the position represented by the three-stage model proposed in the field of psychology by Paul Fitts and Michael Posner in 1967. According to this model, a motor skill is initially acquired through a “cognitive stage”, in which the learner reflects on the nature, goals, and means required to perform the action being learned; here, they attend “to cues, events, and responses that later go unnoticed. In learning a dance step, one attends to kinesthetic and visual information about the feet information which is later ignored” (Fitts, Posner 1967: 12). In the second phase (associative phase), a certain degree of familiarity with the movements is acquired, whereas in the third phase (autonomous phase), movements are performed without conscious focus on them, thereby ignoring the related kinesthetic and visual information.

Rita Spalva, a teacher at the training and educational management academy of Riga, presents a case study concerning the teaching of dance composition within the aforementioned academy, arguing for the effectiveness of this model “in any field related to motor skills” (Spalva 2016: 51). Spalva emphasizes that, in the dance composition class in which this model was tested, the first phase already involved “methods such as film-

¹ The role of habits requires further exploration (see Cappuccio and Ilundáin-Agurruza in Caruana, Testa 2020). For more on the connection between motor expertise, habits, and aesthetic experience, see Portera, (2020: 27-35). For an overview of the debate on the role of conscious awareness in dance, consult at least Sheets-Johnstone (1981, 2011a), Fraleigh (1987), Legrand and Ravn (2009) and Buttingsrud (2021). To delve deeper into this topic with a focus on the experience of collective action in dance and music, refer to Deans and Pini (2022) and Salice, Høffding and Gallagher (2019) respectively.

ing the created movements followed by an analysis in order to develop an understanding of the proper placement of movements as well as the use of force in performances” (Spalva 2016: 53). From the very beginning, the embodied enactment of the movements being learned is marked by a reflective and analytical approach. Learners are encouraged to engage in reflection aimed at understanding the nature of the action, as well as any errors made, even before reaching a level of competence that would enable them to know how to correct them. At this stage, what is developed, is a “selective attention required for new tasks” (Spalva 2016: 53).

The second phase, by contrast, involves the acquisition of a mastery of movement through practice; thus, in the case study presented by Rita Spalva, the movements performed by students in space become “more purposefully organized” (Spalva 2016: 53). Students even begin to diversify and vary their movements, also by resorting to improvisation, while errors decrease because students have learned to identify them independently” (Spalva 2016: 53). The third and final stage is that of “autonomy”, which students reach by performing movements automatically, “easily” (Spalva 2016: 53). The attainment of this stage of learning means that “students can achieve a high artistic level because of the ability to control the performed tasks independently” (Spalva 2016: 53). The acquisition of motor expertise thus involves a form of automatization, made possible by its emancipation from a kind of “cognitive grip”, in terms of reflection and “selective” attention – understood as attention directed toward the individual components of the task being performed. This is consistent with Hubert Dreyfus and Stuart Dreyfus’s claim (1988, 2004) that an expert is only considered such if their actions are unreflective and performed without reasoning, attention or awareness: “he sees intuitively what to do without applying rules or making judgements” (Dreyfus 2004: 253). However, this intuitive knowledge of what to do does not appear to be linked less to the absence of rule application than to the ability to apply rules “without thinking about it”, since the response is carried out exclusively at the motor level.

However, there is a problematic element already identifiable in Spalva’s analysis. She does not view the third phase of motor expertise learning as incompatible with an analytical-reflective dimension that presumably occurs after the execution of movements. Spalva speaks of the development of the student’s ability to independently carry out not only the movements, but also “the analysis and self-assessment of their practices” (Spalva 2016: 53), which was previously primarily managed by the teacher. The latter now encourages students to acquire an understanding

of the effectiveness of each performance [...] The teacher must be able to organize the work so that the highest-level skills grow and develop through an interaction between theoretical knowledge and practical experience. [...] Mechanical movement learning is replaced with a comprehension of cognitive activation and determination throughout the process of movement learning [...] Composition as the art of creating a dance combines the author’s emotional impulses for artistic practice with the choice of various methods to create a perceptible and effective dance image. (Spalva 2016: 53)

The need to emphasize that performing a learned movement independently requires an analytical-reflective component highlights what appears to be a shortcoming in Fitts and Posner’s three-stage model, as well as in the related model proposed by Dreyfus and Dreyfus – a shortcoming that Spalva does not acknowledge. The issue is a contradiction of sorts: motor competence is learned through mechanical performance, yet for dance composition at least, its operational execution cannot be reduced to this. This appears to be connected to the problematic notion of motor competence in the aforementioned models. The issue is that the models assign two different temporalities to the conscious-reflective component and the practical component of automatic, mechanical execution. Just because motor competence, once required, allows one to move without needing to reflect on what one is doing, does not necessarily mean that reflection is detrimental to its proper execution. However, the models outlined above assume minimal, if not zero, involvement of the cognitive component.

In contrast, some argue that motor expertise requires “conscious and deliberate thought in action” (Montero 2010) or “critical reflection” (Shusterman 2012). This allows for continuous “monitoring”, ensuring the absence of, or immediate correction to, any errors in the execution of the learned movement. What seems to be overlooked by these positions – especially Montero’s, which we cannot analyze in detail here – is that the involvement of conscious thought does not imply that it is necessarily the fulcrum of motor expertise, nor that it is incompatible with moments of absent-mindedness, but above all, that these moments are crucial to the artistic creative process.

This position, in fact, does not seem to grasp the role that automatisms play in the latter. Their function is not simply to increase efficiency and enable movement to be performed as quickly as possible with the least possible effort. On the contrary, the absence of conscious attentiveness that characterizes the automatic execution of movements enables the dancer to shift their focus from the *what* to the *how*, i.e., the way the

movement is performed. It is in this way that one ceases to be a mere executor and develops an attentiveness to what is emerging from the interaction with the creative material (from the dancer's steps and poses, as well as those of any other dancers present, to the costumes and stage props, the characteristics of the performance space, and the quality of the audience's presence – whether attentive, bored, or engaged). This interaction has an ever-new manner of appearing, even within a non-improvised performance, which calls for a specific way of bringing it forth and developing it. This mode is carried out by the dancer not only through the expressive and interpretative skills required by that particular choreographic style and work, but also through the way in which the dancer is, so to speak, "addressed" by the emerging "choreographic situation", that is, by the specific configuration of the relationship with the choreographic material that arises in that particular moment. For example, one choreographic situation may lead the dancer to emphasize the melancholic qualities of a piece; another may encourage greater attention to its theatrical dimension, if present; yet another may prompt the dancers to accentuate subtle movement details, perhaps even the movements of the fingers.

These examples show that attention to the *how* is not simply a matter of focusing on the correctness of one's execution of an action – although this dimension always remains operative at varying degrees of awareness – nor is it limited to one's individual action considered in isolation. Rather, attention to the qualitative dimension of action concerns the mode of relationship that is being established with the artistic material: sequences of poses and movements, as well as all contextual elements, such as costumes, music, the interactions with partners, props, the spatial and scenic configuration, and the overall dynamics emerging within the performance situation. The shift from the *what* to the *how* concerns the quality of the action the dancer is performing insofar it's part of the quality of the relationship that is taking shape through that action: the specific qualitative, affective, configuration of the "choreographic situation" emerged.

Grasping this specific relational quality therefore appears to be a complex process that must be learned gradually, through the transition from a phase in which the dancer focuses on the quality of their own movement to a phase oriented toward the surrounding environment². The first

² Useful analytical tools for further investigating these two forms of attention are Ernst Gombrich's distinction between focused attention and peripheral attention (Gombrich 1979), and Undine Eberlein's distinction – in line with the neo-phenomenological approach adopted here – between "felt-bodily focalized experience" (which may itself

phase itself seems to contain further internal articulations: during the process of learning a movement, it involves primarily an attention to the correctness of the movement, including the search for the specific sensations said to be the “right” ones, initially for a single step or position – e.g., the sensation of tension in the core during moments of balance – and subsequently for an entire movement sequence, such as a sense of elevation during turns. As this process unfolds, the dancer develops a kind of familiarity with the way movements are “felt” learning to seek out those sensations and making small adjustments to reproduce the “correct” sensations associated with those positions. As the dancer gradually learns choreographies, however, they also learn to associate sensations with specific movement qualities, in accordance with the kind of expressivity required by the dance form in question. It is in this way that the dancer learns that directing one’s attention to the way one is moving is a means of understanding one’s engagement with the surrounding environment and, consequently, with the expressive qualities that the choreographic work being performed is acquiring at that moment. In fact, this engagement is not fixed; it varies from moment to moment, thereby continually opening up new possibilities for its reconfiguration.

For example, among the instructions for dance composition provided by choreographer Kate Flatt (2019) is the suggestion to enhance the compositional process by using choreographic material outside the dance studio and allowing oneself to be influenced by the surrounding environment:

make a careful observation of the features of the space [you find yourself in]. This might include doorways, niches, windows, cupboards or radiators. [...] For example: - use a piece of material you have already created with a dancer; - reconfigure this by exploring how to enrich the material in relation to the space; - observe what effects this has on the material; - bring this newly configured material with you when you return to a more conventional studio space; - observe how you can maintain the source of inspiration as it develops in the choreography. (Flatt 2019: 43)

We wish to emphasize the “work” that the choreographer undertakes in the dance studio after using the outdoor space to “enrich” their existing

be either passive or active) and “peripheral” (Eberlein 2013) or “unfocused” felt-bodily experience (Eberlein 2017). These distinctions do not, however, account for the internal articulation we have identified within the first phase of the learning process, which appears to be specific to the learning of artistic-expressive abilities such as those required of dancers.

artistic material. During both the exploration and choreographic composition phases, the dancer’s focus is not on their motor skills. It can be assumed that they execute these skills more or less automatically, which makes it possible to shift attention to how they perform them rather than hindering it. Motor skills are tools that serve what is primary in creative work: maintaining a heuristic attitude of exploration and experimentation in relation to the artistic material.

Therefore, it seems necessary in the artistic field, and particularly in dance, to adopt a conception of motor expertise that does not regard automatism and thought as mutually incompatible. Consequently, the distinction between the reflective and automatic components as belonging to two separate phases of learning becomes less significant. Although the acquisition of a high degree of automatism can still be identified as an important aspect of expertise, it must be acknowledged that such advanced motor skills become automatic through practice. The core of their acquisition, at least in the context of dance, lies in the way they enable and sustain engagement with the ever-changing relationship with the artistic material.

What seems to be at stake here is the simultaneous development of two kinds of skills, which we describe, following Giovanni Matteucci, as two forms of “know-how”:

the first form of know-how, the pragmatic one, is embodied in a technical competence: you have to learn certain rules that govern a practice – a method for playing a musical instrument, for solving a score, etc. [...] The second form of knowledge, the operative one, on the other hand, takes concrete form in what could be defined as “aesthetic know how”, where one has to orient oneself towards the material in order to find a way of also using what one incorporates into a practice in order to produce an expressive instance in the interweaving of objective and subjective elements. (Matteucci 2019: 94-5, my transl.)

Learning to dance or play an instrument involves more than just learning to read sheet music or execute the required dance steps correctly. It is also always a matter of harmonizing this “technical competence” with an “aesthetic-operational” one (Matteucci 2019: 94, my transl.). Technical competence must support, convey, and inspire a mode of orientation toward the artistic material. In our view, this involves an interrogative approach to the material – that is, a way of testing and questioning it through the expressive and artistic possibilities that emerge from interacting with it. This seems to occur in an almost playful interplay with the material, as it involves trial and error and experimentation, allowing one-

self to follow where the relationship with the material "leads". This approach to interrogating the material emerges from this engagement, revealing itself as a "modulation of feeling" (Matteucci 2019: 201, my transl.), which constitutes the core of artistic expressivity. This is the "performative unfolding" of the relationship between the dancer and their expressive medium, including their own and the other dancers' gestures and postures, the music, spatial elements and props. This configuration's peculiarity lies in its ability to operationalize these expressive elements, actualizing the specificity of the interpretation of the piece at that moment. In other words, there is a potential for operation that remains to be understood, which keeps the spectator "glued" to the configuration of things and the unprecedented perspective, whose effectiveness lies in remaining on the threshold between unfolding and openness.

When one is particularly struck by a choreographic work, it seems to be precisely because the work continues to operate tacitly in the spectator's way of feeling, making the spectator sense that what they have witnessed goes beyond what simply unfolded physically before them. The work has many things "to say" long after the spatiotemporal situation in which it took place. This is so because that interpretation – emerging from the choreographic situation, in which the spectator and the quality of their presence are also included – was able to reveal further developments of the interaction with the artistic material that had been created. What the spectator has been brought into contact with is precisely the experimental and heuristic nature of the relationship with their surroundings, and, with it, the possibility of transforming and reconfiguring that relationship. The spectator has not only felt themselves to be part of the emerging choreographic situation but has also sensed the potential further unfolding of that mode of experimentation within their own relational context.

This is possible because the dancer has been able to intuit and render manifest what is tacitly operative within a choreographic situation, namely a specific mode in which this relational dynamic unfolds. This mode can be carried forward not by actualizing something already given, but rather by appropriating that experimental, playful, and heuristic attitude of interaction with the context in which one finds oneself.

Motor skills serve precisely to make the potential meaning of this operatinality tangible. Learning such skills is therefore necessarily embedded in a broader learning process that leads to the acquisition of a creative aptitude. We conceive of this as the ability to express "a particular way of experiencing the object" (Matteucci 2019: 95, my transl.), under-

stood as the medium through which artistic action unfolds. The key element is experiencing *with* rather than “of” the world. This shift is central to the transition from learning motor skills to acquiring a creative aptitude. The latter is a “heuristic” aptitude, as it is characterized by the search for novel configurations in one’s relationship with one’s surroundings. This search seems to be marked by the ability to expose oneself to the effect of the material – that is, to trigger its destabilizing effect. It is from this experience that one finds a way to reorient the manner of interrogating the material. To interrogate means to experiment, drawing strength from one’s technical and motor skills, and to explore in a way where the subject of exploration cannot always be distinctly separated from the artistic material: “When one is engaged in an experience with it, one finds oneself colluding with the manifestation of a sensible texture [...] The organism does not assist, but participates in the appearance of sensible texture” (Matteucci 2019: 50-1, my transl.).

The experimental and playful components are inseparable, as are the attempts, successes, and failures involved in engaging with a material that comes into being through, and in relation to, one’s interaction with it. However, to achieve this, one must first learn to listen to one’s own sensibility and variations, and then to make use of them. Only then will it be possible to activate the destabilizing component of the artistic material – that is, the specific mode of destabilization that brings about a shift in the way we experience the world.

2. A *pathic*, *atmospherological* approach

These aspects are encompassed in the notion of *pathicity*. The latter was introduced by the physician and phenomenologist Erwin Straus (1891-1975) in reference to the “pathic” moment of experience – that is, the *how* an object is given to our perception, as distinct from the *what* of the perceived object (the gnostic moment). For Straus, our primordial communication with the world is essentially pathic: an “immediate communication [...] with things on the basis of their changing sensible mode of givenness” (Straus 1960: 151, my transl.). Everything we perceive presents itself in a particular manner that immediately sets the terms of the type of communication established between us and it, and that recurs whenever something affects us pre-reflectively.

When this happens, a space emerges: the space of communication between us and that which has affected us, in which no entity takes prec-

edence over the other. This is because the mode of appearing according to "determinate laws" of the perceived entity unfolds only with and through the way in which it resonates in our body and in the impulse to move that is inherent in perception itself. The mode of operation of the pathic is indeed that of *grasping* (*Ergriffenheit*), as exemplified by Straus through the example of music. More specifically, it is the tone of sound that "has an activity of its own; it rushes upon us, seizes us, affects us, takes possession of us" (Straus 1960: 155, my transl.). What takes place, however, is not a merely passive undergoing of the action of tone: it does not subjugate or oppress, but rather opens the body to movement, infusing it with a surplus of energy that allows the body to "take space" through movement.

This is what occurs in the example provided by Straus: the transformation in the gait of soldiers, whose dragging and weary step becomes "animated" as soon as marching music begins to accompany them. Through the notion of pathicity, it thus becomes evident that sensing is communicating – an entering into a dynamic communication with the world under the energizing, revitalizing impulse that conditions our mode of engagement with it. This engagement makes manifest the essential link between pathicity and space.

It should be emphasized that the distinction between the pathic and the gnostic is introduced by Erwin Straus in order to articulate a corresponding distinction between two modes in which space is given: "acoustic" space and "optical" space. This distinction emerges depending on the type of movement in which one is engaged: presentational movements – emblematically represented by those of dance – and goal-directed movements. The first mode of being of space is that of physics: Euclidean space, in which we move by relying on our senses – first and foremost vision – so as to orient ourselves toward goals to be achieved and the means that allow us to do so in the shortest possible time and with the least possible effort. By contrast, when we move without any external goal beyond the unfolding of movement itself, we enter acoustic space. This is "felt" space: the space that pervades us when we abandon ourselves to music and become participants in its diffusion through space, with and through the bodily movements we perform under the revitalizing influence of that by which we have been affected. This characterization of space, however, proves problematic for a fine-grained analysis of the affective-bodily relation between the dancer and the surrounding space in the development of expressive and interpretative capacities. Straus characterizes this "felt space" as homogeneous and devoid of di-

rections. Yet this does not seem to account for the presence, within dance movements, of very precise directions – directions that are themselves dictated by the “spatial orientations” inherent in the very features of the music³.

In order to account for such spatial orientations, we turn to the atmospherological approach developed by Tonino Griffero. Motivated by the idea of exploring precisely the “pathic dimension that guides the entirety of existence” (Griffero 2014: 162, my transl.), develops an approach that focuses on the qualitative dimension of experience, drawing on Hermann Schmitz’s theory of the “felt body” within his “new phenomenology”⁴. This perspective emphasizes the felt, rather than the physical dimension of our body: the living dimension of bodily experience, which functions as a sounding board of atmospheres. The latter are our affective states which, rather than being internal states projected

³ One might object that, in contexts of improvised dance, openness to the environment and its affordances is encouraged by a multidirectional space. But to speak of a “multidirectional” space implicitly means admitting that space presents multiple directions. Frédéric Pouillaude, who is likewise critical of Straus, describes dance space as an “archistriated, being constructed around contingent spatial discontinuities and fleeting motor distinctions, without which there could be no shared choreographic practices” (Pouillaude 2021: 32). By contrast, Pouillaude claims a historicity of space and, with it, the absence of an “originary dance” as well as of a “pure, unaltered body” (Pouillaude 2021: 33). In Pouillaude’s view, this is the conception of the dancing body conveyed by Straus because he adopts a historical-choreographic perspective, whereas Straus focuses on the experiential dimension of dancing: the coincidence of feeling and movement, and the sensation of being at one with the movement of a space. If we claim, as Pouillaude does, the historicity of lived space – in line with the recognition of a historicity of feeling, which manifests itself even simply in the kinesthetic memory that makes the transmission of dance possible – we do not believe that this is incompatible with Straus’s reflections on the nexus between body, space, and movement. Rather, the issue is to account for the ways in which this nexus is differently articulated by the choreographic practices under analysis. Furthermore, one should not forget that Straus’s space is an animated space, one that sets the body in motion through the inductive, motor, “dynamizing” force exemplified – though not exclusively – by music. There is therefore an implicit recognition of a directionality operating at the level of feeling on the basis of this spatializing motor dynamic. This is the directionality to which we refer with the notion of “atmospheric affordances”.

⁴ Developed with the intention to contrast the increasing tendency to “live and think in terms of abstractions provided by specialists”, following “environmental and social systems constructed by technologists” (Schmitz 2002: 491), new phenomenology aims to restore experience as the point of orientation of our lives by focusing on the “felt-bodily” dimension of our experience.

outward, are diffused entities in space that invite us to enter into resonance with them.

This resonance becomes possible through atmospheric affordances, what Schmitz calls motor suggestions and synaesthetic qualities: “bridging qualities that can be noticed in one’s own felt body but also be perceived in encounters with others, whether at rest or in motion” (Schmitz 2019: 68). Motor suggestions are “vivid sketches of motion without being fully enacted” – music, for example, constitutes a domain of such suggestions – while synaesthetic qualities include sharpness, brightness, warmth, coldness, smoothness, and so forth.

The notion of atmospheric affordance is borrowed from James J. Gibson (1979), who introduced the concept of affordance within his ecological theory of perception. According to Gibson, what we perceive are not the physical properties of an object as such, but rather properties that emerge from the encounter between the characteristics of the subject and those of the environment. These characteristics are perceived by the subject as invitations to act in a certain way (for a crawling child, a floor is crawlable; for a non-disabled adult, a chair is sittable; for an insect, water is walkable). Griffero’s interpretation of Gibsonian affordances makes it possible to emphasize that action is always subordinated to feeling, while preserving the emergent and relational dimension highlighted by Gibson.

We argue that the artistic competencies developed by dancers depend not only on their ability to grasp the atmospheric affordances that make up a choreographic piece and the evolving choreographic situation, but also on their capacity to vary their responses to these. Only through variation, in fact, can they make perceptible – without fully actualizing them – modes of unfolding of the relational field in which one is engaged. These affordances for variation function as a solicitation, first and foremost, toward the possibility of uncovering such modes, insofar as variation encourages the sustaining of a playful, experimental, and heuristic attitude.

3. The principle of diversification

The first step towards acquiring this ability is to learn what are known as “open skills”. Regarding dance composition students, Spalva states, referring to the distinction between “closed skills” and “open skills” introduced by Anna Krasnow and Mary V. Wilmerding:

Students look for solutions to one of the most complicated tasks in dance composition – creation of a conflict and its resolution in motion. In order to accomplish this task, students must be able to use high-level movement skills associated with new, unusual solutions [...] The term “closed skills” implies movements that are learned by accurate acquisition and imitation like a ballet pirouette or any other movement, which requires the initial state and the final movement closure [...] Such a motion acquisition requires regular training and time from the performer. The aim of the “closed skills” is the accuracy of execution [...] by contrast “open skills” are related to the operational variability and movement diversification in time and space. (Spalva 2016: 52)

The distinction outlined here seems to reflect the difference between pragmatic and aesthetic know-how perfectly. Once acquired, closed skills require only “regular training” to maintain their accuracy. In contrast, “operational variability and movement diversification in time and space” is a skill that must underpin individual motor skills. Thanks to the principle of diversification, physical abilities – the increased endurance, strength, flexibility and balance that technical skills enable one to acquire, maintain and perfect – prove to be tools with which to explore every possible effect of creative material on one’s ability to interrogate it in a novel way each time. The task set for dance composition students is seemingly a matter of problem solving. Creating conflicts to be resolved through movement provides an opportunity to find “unusual solutions”, i.e. to diversify responses and constantly test new perspectives from which to analyze the spatio-temporal orientations of movements and, with them, the entire dynamics of dance.

Learning the principle of diversification thus appears to go hand in hand with the development of a form of attention oriented toward kin-aesthetic dynamic, using the words of the dancer and philosopher Maxine Sheets-Johnstone. Criticizing the exclusive characterization of the latter in neuroscientific terms, Sheets-Johnstone – who takes a phenomenological approach – traces it back to the experience of movement dynamics. These give rise to different qualities (tensional, linear, areal and projectional), which form dynamically and therefore fall within a more general “qualitative felt dynamic”, whose variables are consequently “kinesthetically felt by the individual who is moving” (Sheets-Johnstone 2011b: 36). The qualitative dynamics of dance movements are characterized not merely by greater complexity compared to everyday movements, but by the fact that, as Sheets-Johnstone puts it, dance is “not a matter of doing or accomplishing something” (Sheets-Johnstone 2011b: 46). Rather, dance can bring about the development of the “degrees of freedom”

(Sheets-Johnstone 2011b: 46) of movements precisely because it plays on the ongoing discovery of the infinite variability of movements and their kinesthetic dynamic quality: “Dance is creatively open-ended because the ‘parameters’ of movement – the qualitative dynamic structure of movement – are endlessly variable” (Sheets-Johnstone 2011b: 46).

The heuristic, exploratory and experimental approach that characterizes aesthetic expertise seems inseparable from the development of sensitivity to the “felt” nuances of the kinaesthetic dynamics inherent in dance. Only through this approach can one grasp the principle of diversification and learn to use motor skills as operational tools – that is, instruments for creatively interrogating artistic material. This is the result of a learning process. Along with Igor Pelgreffi, we characterize this as “critical learning”. Pelgreffi coined the term to describe the process of acquiring automatisms related to artistic improvisational practices, particularly in dance. Indeed, dance makes manifest the decisive role played by corporeality in developing sensitivity to the variations arising with each gestural repetition:

the body is resistance, just as it contains the effort in the modification of our learned automatism, that is, the effort associated with a new corporeal learning [...] In the future of our next gesture, we can [...] interrupt the automatic repetition, and this precisely because of this constitutive complexity that is determined by the past of the gesture, that is, in the time and space of its existing learning. It is thus in the bodily learning mode of automatism [...] that the key to the divergence from the self in repetition [...] must be sought. (Pelgreffi 2018: 142)

The ability to break a habit and reinvent it stems from the very thing that made it possible to acquire it in the first place: physical repetition. The body, in fact, is like a mobile and dynamic archive of the time and space in which a motor pattern was acquired. It is within this context that intervention becomes possible, drawing on the variations that repetition produces in both the person performing the action and those observing it. Repeating the same gesture is the most effective way to shift attention from what is being done to pathicity, that is, to *how* it is being done – to the experiential, qualitative, felt dimension of movement, namely the atmospheric affordances emerging from and responding to it. It is at this level that one perceives not only the differences produced through repetition, but also how each variation offers clues about the qualitative direction in which the movement is heading. This provides insight into the

spatial and temporal changes that either support or completely counter this orientation, thereby giving rise to a different quality of movement⁵.

The type of verbal cues provided by the teacher or choreographer plays a key role here. Although we cannot explore the related debate about the importance of mental imagery in dance in depth, we can observe that this strategy emerged in the early 20th century and was adopted in dance in the second half of the century. The aim was “to improve the quality of movement and enhance artistry and expressiveness” (Krasnow, Wilmerding 2024: 24). It involves evoking the “physical characteristics of an absent object or event” (Krasnow, Wilmerding 2024: 24) through verbally expressed images and sounds. The dancer may be encouraged to imagine these characteristics as if they were seeing them outside of themselves or experiencing them firsthand. Especially used in contemporary dance, this aspect plays a key role in dancers’ expressive and interpretative works since it affects the quality of their movement.

This is one of the main aspects that emerged from the interviews I conducted during the DAAD-funded postdoctoral research project *How does one learn to dance? A neophenomenological approach to the development of the dancer’s “aesthetic” attitude*, which I carried out at Goethe University Frankfurt under the supervision of Robert Gugutzer. The choreographers and professional dancers I interviewed all primarily involved in contemporary dance productions but have also been trained in other dance techniques, which always include classical ballet. Therefore, the voices of the interviewees will be integrated into the following section of the article⁶. This reflects the intention to acknowledge dancers’ experiential knowledge and demonstrate how direct engagement with them informs the questions that drive my inquiry. This also has methodological implications, as the research opens itself to situated and qualitative research methodologies, especially drawing on the tradition of qualitative sociological research⁷. Specifically, it involves intertwining theoretical re-

⁵ For more on the link between automatism and creativity in dance, particularly contact improvisation, see Massimo (2025a).

⁶ The interviews were conducted between May 4th, 2025 and July 31st, 2025, and all participants gave informed consent for their contributions to be used for research purpose. All participants have been anonymized in order to protect their privacy and are referred to using pseudonyms or numerical identifiers.

⁷ Therefore, the interview itself is considered an integral part of the research process. Thus, the decision was made to leave the features characteristic of spoken language almost entirely unchanged, including repetitions, hesitations, and colloquial expressions. The oral tone has been preserved in the written quotations because it reflects

flection with investigative practices, such as participant observation and semi-structured interviews (Helffferich 2009; Bergold, Thomas 2012; Ploder, Stadlbauer 2013; Kruse 2015; Girtler 2021; Przyborski, Wohlrab-Sahr 2021; Strübing 2024).

Like the other dancers interviewed, when asked about the role of feeling in her training and daily practice, Sofia immediately thinks about how mental imagery affects her way of feeling and her quality of movement. She states that, especially in contemporary dance, images related to modes of movement are evoked: “The waves of the sea or other things we see every day, for example melting ice cream... If you’re looking for a very fluid movement, you might think of a body made of a more liquid material”. The most effective images seem to be those related to how one conceives the consistency of one’s own body. For example, imagining one’s body as a liquid or a dense material, such as peanut butter, can entirely condition the way one moves.

The most significant aspect is that these images are not just used to interpret a specific choreography. Rather, they permeate the dancer’s daily training. It is as if the dancer must develop the habit of perceiving their body differently each time. This concept emerges from an interview with Alessia, who is a dancer, choreographer and contemporary dance instructor:

imagine me doing the classic warm-up movement this is the plié imagining there’s a mattress under my feet so every time I lower myself, that softness of the mattress – which you imagine is under your feet instead of a hard floor – seeps in; you let it seep into your joints, into your shoulders [...] Move as if the air were honey or use your back like a snake [...] we are used to seeing the body as the arm, the wrist, the elbow, which is a very medical view. But what happens if you imagine and move thinking that your spine starts here and ends at your toe? [...] That all of this is your spine. It is actually a line of the body that you connect, and the bones are now connected if you divide the pelvis, but it is all one line [...] Then

the dynamics of the exchange that shaped the interview. See Guisgand, Schiller (2017) for a further discussion of the need, in accounting for dancers’ embodied knowledge, to take embodiment as the starting point for dance research, thereby integrating practice into the process of knowledge production. For more on the need for a “porous” perspective on choreographic works, shaped by the “kinaesthetic empathy”, and for an “undisciplined” aesthetic approach that follows sensible experience as a “(anti)method”, see respectively Mayen (2006) and Montaignac (2014). For more on these methodological issues concerning philosophical-aesthetics inquiry and dance research Massimo (2025b). For more on the embodied nature of research, specifically in aesthetics, see Formis (2022). For more on the key role of embodiment in qualitative research, see Ellingson (2007).

you can also develop this into partner exercises where you use another person’s body to feel this dynamic of resistance. And this, in fact, also helps with larger movements in space – something that’s quite common in contemporary dance, where dancers move in a “big” way – so this is especially helpful for students.

This excerpt from the interview with Alessia helps us to understand how the principle of diversification is learned by developing the habit of perceiving oneself differently. Getting used to perceive one’s body differently every day means that an essential part of training consists of testing and shaping one’s way of feeling within one’s own body and use it for expressive and interpretive purposes. Repeating this exercise daily, together with physical exercise, develops not a single specific ability, but something more general and irreversible: the ability to perceive oneself and one’s surroundings differently. This exercise fosters an attitude of openness towards feeling “other” every day, and toward seeking, within everyday “new” perceptions, whatever can inspire and creative develop this sensation. This becomes apparent as soon as the sensations explored on in the warm-up are transferred into partner work.

The resistance experienced in the warm-up enable one to question one’s own way of relating to the atmospheric affordances emerging from the artistic material (movements, poses, interaction with the partner and with the space), assuming a hypothetical, exploratory mode towards it, and discovering where this leads on the expressive and interpretive level. This is the experimental and exploratory attitude fostered by critical learning with and through feeling. In practical terms, exploring “where it leads” when working with affordances, such as reduced resistance or softness – cultivated during the warm-up and developed in partner work – means using that sensation as a starting point for reconfiguring our relationship with space and with others. This transforms not only the way we touch the floor or our partner, but also the way we orient our body, as though it were resting on a mattress of varying firmness.

This is how movements shared with a partner become fluid and continuous in a way that is unique to the specific manner in which they develop that sensation. Here, motor skills – physical endurance, muscular elasticity and the ability to maintain balance in complex poses – serve as tools that make possible, for example, to experience fluidity across different positions. The body develops a quality of contact with the floor, the partner’s body and the air that becomes an inexhaustible source of expressive and interpretive discoveries. This choice is not simply guided by the first idea that comes to mind. Rather, the decisive factor is the aspect

of that sensation that most sharply contrasts with another way of being – that is, a way of being that operates in a destabilizing manner, forcing a complete reorientation of the dancer’s relationship with themselves and with their surroundings. Examples of verbal cues include the following:

imagine that your flesh is turning out and your bones are turning in [...] or [...] you’re doing something very fast. But then they say, imagine like that. You are dancing with a sense of plenty of time, so you’re doing something very fast. But how can you do it with the sense that you have plenty of time.

Note that these descriptions do not merely evoke a physical characteristic of an object or event. Rather, they are images that convey paradoxical events that are physically impossible: bones cannot turn inward, and when one is in a hurry, one does not move as though one had “plenty of time”. These images stimulate creativity because they incorporate into the sensation of turning or slowing down the destabilizing, almost paralyzing dimension inherent in the paradox they depict. This work refines the ability to vary one’s response to affordances – that is, to respond to affordances in a counterintuitive way. The affordances of skin and bones, for example, shift from being surfaces of contact to forms of support, generating sensations of extension and sinking. Meanwhile, the affordances of speed are countered by an affordance of slowness, resulting in fluidity, precision, and roundness of movement.

Therefore, in order to develop a creative and fundamentally heuristic approach, it is as though the dancer must accustom themselves to responding to the atmospheric affordances that generate the greatest sense of discomfort. The affordances that constrain and challenge us most intensely are precisely those that make it possible to develop new ways of expressing and interpreting movement, while our disposition toward variation and diversification is continuously tested, expanded, and refined. The connection between discomfort and expressive-interpretive growth emerged during a composition class taught by Alessia, in which I conducted a participant observation.

Alessia highlights this operative dimension of discomfort by recounting a composition exercise in which students worked in pairs, with one acting as choreographer and the other as performer. The choreographer was asked to create a composition, identify its distinctive feature (for example, musicality, the movement of a particular body part, or specific combinations), and further develop it. One student failed to carry out the task successfully because his composition reproduced the habitual traits

of his previous improvisations. As Alessia remarked, the composition was therefore “a confirmation of who you are now, nothing new”. What he should have done instead was open himself to aspects of those habitual movements that he had not yet explored, using them as a source of variation and developing new choreographic material from them.

The student is confronted with an extremely difficult task: questioning what feels comfortable and familiar in order to move beyond who he “is” at present. The problem is that the “not-yet-self” remains unknown until one steps outside of “what is now”. He must therefore develop what Alessandro Bertinetto calls the “habit of questioning habits”, which constitutes “[a] habit that underpins a broad stylistic framework for artistic creativity, extending from the avant-garde movement of the 20th century to the present” (Bertinetto 2025: 3). In our view, in the field of dance this involves more than merely challenging artistic conventions and codes. It also concerns the perceptual and motor habits embedded in a given choreography, as well as the interpretive style of both the choreographer and the individual performer.

4. Somaesthetics of discomfort

The somaesthetics of discomfort offers a perspective through which to highlight the role of discomfort in the dancer’s development of the habit of questioning perceptual, motor, and relational habits, and, more generally, of adopting a heuristic attitude. Somaesthetics of discomfort draws on Richard Shusterman’s somaesthetics⁸, particularly on the thesis that the soma, namely, “the living, feeling, perceptive, purposive, culturally informed body [...], a unified body-mind” (Shusterman 2020: 246), can be cultivated and placed at the center of the improvement of life. Mark Tschaepe’s somaesthetics of discomfort aims identifies discomfort as a key somatic experience in initiating such improvement, insofar as it constitutes the somatic basis of the both process of discrimination and its defeat. By intertwining somaesthetics with and feminist and queer theories, Tschaepe aims to provide “an overarching framework or collection of concepts that can be used to address issues concerning identity, normativity and alienation” (Tschaepe 2025: 25). Beginning from an analysis of situations of discomfort experienced by individuals discriminated against due to their gender identity, ethnicity, or physical characteristics (such as

⁸ See, at least, Shusterman 2008, 2012.

fatness or disability), Tschaepe shows how discomfort can serve as a lens through which to understand the origins of such mechanisms – namely, the discomfort experienced by those who conceive identity as fixed and unitary – while also offering the conceptual and linguistic tools necessary to dismantle them.

This is entirely consistent with the notion that discomfort plays a key role in enhancing somaesthetic awareness. This is in line with the idea that the “living body (or soma)” is the site of sensory appreciation (*aisthesis*) and creative self-fashioning, and that somaesthetics contributes to “educating and fostering a better experience” by guiding us towards reconstructing our own soma in relation to how we engage with the world. However, the concept of the soma as a “unified body-mind” does not entirely align with Schmitz’s concept of the “felt body”, which exclusively considers the “felt” aspect of bodily experience. In contrast, the notion of soma includes both the physical dimension, which plays a key role in improvement, and the mind. For the new phenomenology, the mind is considered in terms of “artificial (post-Platonic) constructs, whose only purpose is a better scientific-pedagogic prognostic (rationalistic) control of involuntary bodily-affective life” (Griffero 2021: 18)⁹.

The somaesthetics of discomfort contributes to the dialogue between these approaches by virtue of the central role it assigns to the bodily dimension of this state, an aspect further illuminated by references to queer and feminist theories contributes. This centrality is evident in the very characterization of discomfort as an experience of “being at odds with the world” (Tschaepe 2024a: 28), an experience that Tschaepe associates with what Fredrik Svenaeus describes as an illness: “an unhome-like being-in-the-world in which the embodied ways of being-in of the person have been thwarted” (Svenaeus 2019, in Tschaepe 2021). The sense of unfamiliarity evoked here is precisely what makes this characterization of discomfort crucial for our purposes. It allows us to view misalignment with certain standards – such as those of normative categories tied to a conception of identity as fixed and unitary – as part of a broader experience of otherness. In other words, it allows us to understand such misalignment an openness to different ways of being and acting, independent of established norms.

⁹ For a more detailed discussion of the comparisons between somaesthetics and both new phenomenology and atmospheric studies, see Griffero (2021) and (2022), respectively. For a deeper discussion of somaesthetics’ position on the mind-body relationship, see Shusterman (2010).

In fact, what seems crucial for developing the habit of questioning habits is avoiding to view discomfort as a means of returning to a state of comfort, thereby establishing new standards that inevitably exclude whatever fails to conform to them. Rather, the dancer must strive to maintain this sensation in relation to codes, techniques and, more generally, their creative material. The ability to cultivate the habit of perceiving the possibility of responding differently to one’s routines and habitual creative responses to atmospheric affordances is what enables the dancer to discover and actualize what lies “beyond” their “artistic identity” at that moment. This means asking which affordances are operating in less obvious ways and which are more closely aligned with the dancer’s creative exploration within a particular choreography or at a specific stage of their artistic journey.

This is evident in the way Alessia encourages a departure from habitual responses to affordances. She asks the students to perform two different compositions simultaneously – which later become three – in order to “bring together different physicalities and see if it works; if not...”. Students often spontaneously introduce variations in this process, emphasizing differences and reciprocal influences. This is especially the case when a couple performs a choreography that differs significantly from the others in terms of physicality and expression, thereby becoming a source of compositional material. The ability to reconfigure one’s attitude towards one’s compositional material is something dancers must practice and integrate into their training. What dancers need to become aware of and practice daily is the transition from discomfort to inquiry. This is understood as a process of questioning and cultivating doubt regarding their way of engaging with artistic material.

Traced by Tschaepé to the “feeling of perplexity and puzzlement” (Tschaepé 2024b: 28) characteristic of the state of aporia into which Socrates led his interlocutor in order to initiate philosophical inquiry, this connection is emphasized by the early American pragmatists. In Charles S. Peirce and John Dewey, for example, inquiry is linked to the discomfort inherent in doubt, that form of irritation that “causes a struggle to attain a state of conviction” (Peirce 1931-1958, V: 373-4). It is above all Dewey who explicitly connects discomfort and doubt, emphasizing that discomfort emerges as a unifying and pervasive tone through which a situation is experienced as difficult.

The difficulty stems from the sense of failure of habitual patterns of thought when they are challenged, disrupting their automatic function-

ing¹⁰. This disruption generates doubt and the need for inquiry. Yet, when this occurs in an ordinary context, the ultimate goal is to restore a state in which the situation is once again perceived as manageable, thereby re-establishing a sense of comfort “being-at-one with the immediate environment” (Bissell 2008: 1700, in Tschaepe 2021). By contrast, in artistic research, discomfort must be experienced in order to continue experiencing it – that is, to cultivate and sustain the ability to interrogate artistic material from ever-changing perspectives. This is why discomfort is structurally linked to the principle of diversification.

Somaesthetics provides tools for understanding this transition, by showing how one can move from discomfort to inquiry. At the root of the mechanism of alienation, Tschaepe identifies the refusal to acknowledge discomfort in the face of experiences that do not fit one’s idea of identity, rather than taking such discomfort as the starting point for questioning that very notion. For a variety of reasons tied to their background, those who engage in alienation reject enquiry. They respond to the discomfort they feel when the idea of identity – to which they must cling firmly – begins to waver by imposing their own categories and dismissing those who do not conform to them.

To defuse this mechanism and restore the link between discomfort and inquiry, the alienator should adopt an attitude of self-questioning – or self-reflection as Dewey would describe it – characterized by a willingness to transform one’s own position. The challenge, therefore, is to find tools capable of “un-sutur[ing] one’s somatic habits to create a critical space for questioning” (Tschaepe 2024b: 147). This both presupposes and entails a willingness to reveal and expose oneself, insofar as it requires transforming one’s habitual way of perceiving, thinking and behaving into the following counter-hegemonic habits: open-mindedness, wholeheartedness, responsibility, and readiness.

In the artistic realm, these habits form the habit of questioning one’s own habits. This habit develops through the acquisition of the principle of diversification – that is, the ability to vary one’s responses to atmospheric affordances. Such a capacity enables one to be guided not only by what produces general discomfort, but also by what destabilizes one’s habitual creative responses, thereby forcing them to be reconfigured anew. From an atmospheric perspective, discomfort does not pertain to a single, specific atmosphere. Rather, it functions as an indicator of a gen-

¹⁰ We do not have the space here to explore the ethical and political implications of this approach, which fully deserve further investigation.

eral atmosphere of unease, understood here not in a physical sense, but as a loss of control.

Our thesis is that this sense of loss of control is an integral part of pathicity itself, understood as surrender to the qualitative dimension of experience. The dynamics of grasping described by Straus, as well as the sudden irruption of the new to which Schmitz refers in relation to experiences of being affected in an intense way, are characterized by this sense of destabilization and loss of control over what is happening. This fundamentally affects one's feelings and, consequently, one's mode of engagement with the surrounding context. In our view, the dancer succeeds in remaining receptive to the destabilizing component inherent in whatever most unsettles them within those particular circumstances in relation to that artistic material. They attune themselves to what overwhelms them most, using it as a guide in selecting, through their engagement with the material, what enables them to fully explore this destabilizing and disorientating dimension in terms of affective-motor responses, compelling them to completely reinvent their points of reference.

One's artistic growth depends on the ability to grasp, embrace, and make use of this sense of destabilization in order to engage creatively with artistic material and thereby enrich one's expressive and interpretive capacities, as concrete examples demonstrate. For instance, when dancer Olivia says she prefers performing in a theatre to performing outdoors because, in the theater, she cannot see the audience's faces, this clearly illustrates a refusal to use the discomfort produced by seeing – and potentially recognizing – the audience as a means of developing her stage presence and expressiveness. Here, refusal to inquire prevails: a shielding of oneself from vulnerability, a feeling of discomfort that carries with it affordances for inquiry and, with them, resources for discovering, shaping, and unfolding expressive and interpretive potentialities. Olivia's rejection of discomfort reflects a kind of blockage in the formation of feelings throughout her artistic journey. The atmospheric affordances emanating from the audience's faces are associated with the possibility of judgment and criticism regarding her technical and interpretive skills. These affordances evoke in the dancer a counter-atmosphere of fear, insecurity, and rejection, together with a need for protection. This reaction leads her to perceive the atmospheric affordances emanating from the theatre's dim lighting – particularly those associated with concealment and protection – as a form of refuge and reassurance.

Silvia, too, refers to these affordances, contrasting them with those experienced in an improvised performance held entirely outdoors, and that directly involve the audience:

[we were] very, very, very close to the people [...] in a way its more challenging. Yes. To have, I would say less people closer to you than 100 people because I don't see them. Yes. And you also get immediate feedback, uh, which you see. But in a way, this proximity also makes me feel like *I know what why I'm doing what I'm doing. Because I see the people* [...] And also because we were so close to the audience in this performance. In the beginning, we also take the audience onto stage. [...] Sometimes we don't touch them [...] So it was it's a different it's just a completely different relationship to the audience. Uh, *I think it's very challenging for the performer, to be honest, because on stage, when I'm so far and it's 800 people, yes, it's 800 people, but I don't see them because we have lights* and they don't [...] it feels like whatever I do, *I can hide somehow much more* [...] you cannot turn around and they see you like you turn around and there's people. *And with this proximity you cannot hide. So it's very vulnerable*¹¹.

Here, Silvia goes through all the stages described above in relation to discomfort. Like Olivia, she recognizes this when she says "You also get immediate feedback... it's very challenging". However, rather than attempting to minimize its destabilizing effect by relying on the comfort and reassurance afforded by the theater's dim lighting and the invisibility of the audience it creates, she discovers that her performance can actually benefit from the absence of those affordances. Importantly, she still experiences the invisibility afforded by the theater's darkness as reassuring. Indeed, this effect is so powerful that she finds it more challenging to perform before one hundred visible spectators than before eight hundred spectators concealed by darkness.

What is at stake here is the atmospheric power of concealment, protection, refuge, and comfort afforded by darkness and dim lighting, as well as the power of exposure and vulnerability involved in performing not only before visible spectators, but also outdoors, in a setting that does not architecturally sustain the illusionistic effect characteristic of the stage box. It must be emphasized that such a context can be profoundly unsettling for those accustomed to performing in a theater.

The affordances of light and dark depend on an architectural configuration centered on the stage. This configuration encourages an almost exclusively frontal mode of viewing, with the theatre backdrop positioned behind the dancers. It is designed to create a clear separation between

¹¹ Our emphasis.

the seated audience and the performers, thereby producing an experience more closely tied to visual perception. There are wings that allow dancers to withdraw when it is not their turn to perform, enabling them to take brief pauses – to catch their breath, drink, stretch or change costumes. However, the comfort derived from familiarity with this stage atmosphere is destabilized when a performance takes place outdoors, without a physical stage, and with spectators surrounding the performers in a 360-degree configuration. These spectators may move freely and may even consist of passers-by exposed to daylight. In such setting, there are no wings or backdrops.

The atmospheric affordances have not only changed, but have also become more destabilizing, since those that could have previously mitigated by the theater's structure can no longer be contained and are instead intensified through direct interaction with the audience, including physical contact. The audience's experience cannot be mitigated by the theatre's structure cannot be mitigated here and are instead heightened by direct interaction with the audience, including physical contact. The spectators' experience is not merely visual, static and frontal, but also kinesthetic. Therefore, Silvia appears to be in an intermediate stage in which her perception of the affordances of darkness has not yet evolved. She continues to view them primarily as a form of protection, without recognizing other potential functions, such as audience expressions that might encourage her or opportunities for direct interaction with the audience, including physical contact enabled by certain choreographic choices¹².

However, when confronted with an unfamiliar setting, Silvia is no longer able to rely on the atmospheric cues that provide her with a sense of reassurance and seclusion, which she associates with the environment she knows best. For example, she could minimize interaction with the audience or become more receptive to the atmospheric affordances emerging from the section of the audience that most closely replicates the frontal and predominantly visual mode of spectatorship typical of a theatre. Alternatively, she might mentally simulate performing on a traditional theatre stage.

Conversely, Silvia recognizes that the vulnerability-inducing and uncomfortable conditions under which the performance takes place paradoxically become vectors of security and self-assurance regarding her

¹² Moreover, in contemporary choreography, spectators are often deliberately made feel uncomfortable using unsettling lighting effects.

role: “the proximity also makes me feel like I know what, why I’m doing what I’m doing”. It is no coincidence that Silvia refers to proximity; this is precisely what unsettles her, confirming her lack of control over the experience. In the theatre, this sense of exposure was mitigated by the protective qualities of the dim lighting. Here, however, she cannot escape the absence of theatrical dim lighting; proximity – the very element that destabilizes her most – prevents her from hiding, something the theatre environment ordinarily allows her to do. This discomfort therefore becomes an opportunity for reflection, prompting her to question her role as a dancer. It encourages her to be more confident in her movements and interactions with the audience, as though reinforcing her capacity to further develop her expressive and interpretive skills – hence Silvia’s sense of satisfaction:

I really liked it because it was like I felt like I was trying to connect with this space a lot [...] it was an improvised performance. So, I had to improvise a solo. And I felt like *I was, like, very aware of where I was and, like, really looking and seeing what is next to me and also using this for my dance to look and, yeah, to look at my surroundings*. Look at the people. And [...] this proximity to the people is also very nice¹³.

Here, we can see what lies at the core of questioning one’s own perceptual and motor habits. Even though circumstances prevent her from responding to her need for a comfortable place of concealment, the affordances of challenge and vulnerability conveyed by the audience’s proximity nourish her improvisational practice. Silvia dares to look at the people around her and at her surroundings, drawing inspiration from them and putting her technical, interpretive and improvisational skills at the service of her experience.

Importantly, Silvia associates with this experience – “I really like it” and “this proximity to the people is also very nice” – do not simply indicate a return to a state of comfort. On the contrary, they reflect Silvia’s awareness that what initially plunged her into a profound crisis also enabled her artistic growth. This became possible through inhabiting the discomfort rather than retreating from it, and finding a way to “work” with her own sensations so that they could contribute to the unfolding of the performance. This “work” with one’s own sensations is another way of describing an interrogative engagement with the creative material. Such an attitude is characterized by a questioning approach that uses the sensation

¹³ Our emphasis.

of losing control over one’s own experience – vulnerability – as a means of probing the creative material in ways that enable the reinvention of what had previously functioned as support and orientation.

In a contemporary context, where the aim is not to create the illusion of effortlessness or the uniform execution of movement, but rather to affect the audience through the interpretation and presence of individual personalities on stage, this questioning engagement with the creative material is a key aspect:

you notice it when you see them thinking, when you see that they have a problem and that they have to solve it. In my opinion, this is a choreographic tool that I use, for example, when the group is running and has to be in the same place at the same time, and you see them all with your eyes, where you can see the tension, where you can see: “Can we do it or can’t we?” So, *push them into moments where the question: “Can I do it or can’t I?” is real, it’s not staged, it’s real*, so put them in moments where: “Ok, I have to do this”, the dancer who sings a text, so there are things where you realize that there is a certain vulnerability, then comes the repetition... *So you have to try as a performer to maintain that feeling that you remember*. For example, in [one of my last show when I was a performer, the choreographer] doesn’t fix anything, it has to be all improvised, and her way of working with physicality is a personal archive, while you [...] there’s a lot of text where we tell a very private, very personal story, which already requires [...] and then [you] think: “*Is my story interesting?* Now I’m going to tell it, *there are 100 people sitting there, so this [is] discomfort[ful]: “Do you really want to hear it?”*”¹⁴.

These two experiences – one as a choreographer and the other as a dancer – allow us to understand the artistic potential inherent in the relationship between discomfort and exploration. It is precisely in moment of genuine doubt about one’s ability to succeed, even after extensive rehearsals, that the performance reveals its power by throwing the dancers into crisis.

This does not mean placing them in a “problem-solving” attitude, but rather in a “problem-finding” (Bertinetto 2022a: 133) attitude: a questioning, experimental, and heuristic attitude that leads them to shift their perspective and, consequently, to discover ever new and unexpected ways of interrogating and creatively engaging with the artistic material. They themselves, along with their abilities, become “problematic” because, once on stage, all the material presents itself in a new guise. This compels them to confront what they truly have to offer in terms of expression and interpretation. The uncertainty surrounding whether they

¹⁴ Our emphasis.

will “make it”, or whether the audience will connect with their personal story, becomes a means through which discomfort is shared.

Once the audience perceives this, it not only “humanizes” the dancers, but also reveals their artistic maturity, since it is precisely at that moment that a connection with the audience is established. The audience can then function as an affordance not of discomfort itself, but of inhabiting the discomfort being experienced. Within this state of vulnerability, dancers may discover a new point of support, as suggested by the audience’s held breath and attentive, concentrated silence. However, for this to occur, dancers must become accustomed to sharing their discomfort and using it – together with the discomfort of others – as an artistic medium through which to explore their individual and collective expressive and artistic capacities. This is where the collective dimension of such training plays a crucial role in cultivating a sense of feeling.

5. Playfulness: pathicity and complicity

A key factor is that this process takes place within a context in which un-learning one’s somatic habits is a collective endeavor, carried out in an atmosphere of complicity with the other dancers and with the space itself. It is through this atmosphere that the transition occurs from a “problem-solving” attitude to one of “problem-finding”. For this reason, we propose characterizing the latter as an attitude of “play”. As we shall see through the work of Anne Boissière on the experience of playing (Boissière 2018, 2023a, 2023b), this expression makes it possible to emphasize the close connection between such an attitude and the pathic dimension.

This prevents the heuristic and experimental dimension from being reduced to a controlling and reifying stance. The attitude of play is an attitude of openness to exploration, animated by curiosity and by the pleasure of discovery. This is what creates an atmosphere of complicity with the space itself – an atmosphere imbued with the confidence that something will emerge, that a fruitful relationship with the surrounding environment will indeed take shape. It is precisely this attitude that creates the conditions of possibility for a transformation in the dancers’ relation to what is experienced as a source of discomfort, thereby fostering their artistic growth.

As soon as dancers feel that they are moving within a “space of play”, an atmosphere of complicity and shared joy in interrogating the artistic material emerges. This gives them confidence in the supportive and non-

judgmental attitude of the other dancers, especially when they are confronted with what provokes discomfort in them. Within such a context, discomfort itself becomes an affordance for inquiry, an integral part of the collective, exploratory, and playful interrogation of the artistic material.

Alessia’s words regarding her improvisation training experience in a classical dance company are particularly emblematic:

for most actors and dancers, improvisation is always *an act of courage* when performed in front of a group, and an even greater *act of generosity* when performed in front of a choreographer. First and foremost, therefore, *the group must be taught to be open-minded and supportive*, as this is essential. This must be taught and learned, of course. One thing I’ve learned is that a lot comes from the group. I’ve learned that *when you see a colleague pushing it to nine, you go to nine and a half*. You encourage each other, realize what you’re capable of and learn how far you can go with improvisation. *You understand the vibe and the mood, and it’s something that, like all techniques, needs to be studied and practiced daily*. You have to train yourself in this, and the more you do it, the more you add to your toolbox¹⁵.

The attitude of play is characterized by a willingness to question oneself, which leads dancers to perceive the sharing of their own discomfort as an artistic resource rather than as an obstacle to creativity or an impediment to their relationship with the artistic material. The supportive, non-judgmental atmosphere thus created is not simply a collaborative experience of the kind that might emerge in situations of problem-solving. Here, this atmosphere fosters a problem-finding attitude, forming part of a process of artistic growth that is significantly enhanced by being shared.

The fact that this process is shared does not mean that it is comfortable¹⁶. The collective sharing of the discomfort experienced by each dancer for different reasons, and its use in collectively interrogating – though each in their own way¹⁷ – the creative material, is not aimed at achieving a state of comfort. Rather, it creates a sufficient degree of comfort for each person to feel able to express themselves without being judged, and to feel supported not in eliminating their discomfort, but in working with

¹⁵ Our emphasis.

¹⁶ This process is not strictly therapeutic. The therapeutic role of sharing a creative exploration of artistic material requires further investigation.

¹⁷ Léa, for example, speaks of the discomfort she experienced when a choreographer attempted to significantly alter one of her choreographic compositions, which consequently became unrecognizable to her and therefore no longer felt “hers”. This, too, is an aspect that deserves to be further explored.

it, and therefore in continuing to experience it. The discomfort implicit in any confrontation with the other – despite the other’s benevolent attitude – serves precisely to preserve a sense of alterity. This prevents identification between self and other, which in turn functions as an affordance for intensifying and diversifying inquiry.

This shared discomfort itself becomes creative material from which everyone may draw. It consists of a constellation of uncomfortable elements whose destabilizing effects on each dancer are as unpredictable as their potential effectiveness in generating expressive and interpretive inspiration. Such a process refines heuristic thinking and variation. For this to occur, however, it is necessary to become comfortable with being uncomfortable. In other words, each participant must feel at ease involving others in their own process of destabilization and in the unpredictable effects that this process entails.

The supportive atmosphere described by Alessia appears to be an expression of a broader atmosphere of complicity with the dancers’ surroundings, one that emerges as soon as vulnerability toward one’s own experience is embraced. This intensifies the attitude of play and, with it, the exploratory disposition that drives artistic growth, since it allows dancers to feel authorized to venture further in their engagement with the creative material¹⁸. This is possible only insofar as dancers continue to experience the discomforting sense of destabilization and the consequent need to shift their perspective on the creative material. The atmosphere of complicity conveyed by the attitude of play is therefore both the presupposition and the outcome of this process, in which frictions and misunderstandings are not merely “obstacles along the way”, but rather new sources of discomfort and, with them – opportunities to discover ever new possibilities for applying the principle of variation.

The importance of the attitude of play in this process derives from the relationship it maintains with pathicity and with space, as emerges from the studies of Anne Boissière. As a “primitive form” (Boissière 2018: 11)

¹⁸ This should not be interpreted in a competitive sense. When Alessia says, “when you see a colleague pushing it to nine, you go to nine and a half”, the point is not to “do more” or “do better” than the colleague. Rather, the point is to collectively further develop a proposition for interrogating the artistic material, since each person’s action affects the others as well, thereby generating new material and new affordances for inquiry. In this sense, she becomes for the other, and the other for her, a “device of diversification” for modes of inquiry. What emerges is therefore not the result of a single author, but of a collective process of creation. The question of (co-)authorship in dance is itself an issue that deserves further exploration.

of spontaneous movement, play appears as an expression of Strausian pathicity, that is, of the livingness (*vivant*) of experience. This experience is not about playing a game, nor about the codified and normative dimensions of gaming, but rather about playing in the absolute sense: it is the very experience of being “gripped” by that with which one is playing, which, in a certain sense, is itself playing with us.

This does not imply passive receptivity. On the contrary, the movements of the child absorbed in play, immersed in what captivates them, are marked by an extraordinary sense of assurance, a feeling of “rightness” that derives from the fact that the play-space is a space of trust, one that allows the person to feel sufficiently supported to exercise autonomy. In this regard, Boissière draws on the thought of the psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott, according to whom “the creative impulse or spontaneous gesture that manifests the capacity to play has nothing to do with the innate or with instinct [...] it is situated from the outset within a highly complex relational logic, implying an environment that has itself experienced holding and confidence in order to be able to guarantee them” (Boissière 2023a: 136, our transl.).

Potential space is conceived as the play-space created through the child’s back-and-forth movement toward the mother, who guarantees the experience of holding that generates a “state of confidence”, a confidence that “makes an intermediate playground [...] where the idea of magic originates, since the baby does to some extent experience omnipotence” (Winnicott 2025: 66). It is through this experience that the child encounters a “soutien vivant” (Boissière 2023a: 137, out transl.): a “living support” that sustains creative and free action, leading the child to experience play as something that fosters growth, understood as the development of relational capacities.

Artistic growth appears, to some extent, to reproduce this kind of dynamic. The atmosphere of complicity and support that gradually develops among dancers as they cultivate the attitude of play seems to replicate the experience of holding and to provide that living support which enables the artist to exercise a kind of “magical control” over a space that feels safe because it is non-judgmental. Unlike the child’s space, however, this is a space in which the artist consciously – and increasingly so as their artistic maturation progresses – seeks out what generates discomfort, that is, what disrupts such control and forces them to change their points of support, thereby reorienting the terms of the relationship between self and world.

What the artist retains from the child is the non-reifying gaze upon the world, which leads them to “animate the surrounding world, imparting to it that *vivant* which is lacking in the adult” (Boissière 2023a: 155, our transl.), thereby endowing interaction with the promise of joyful discovery. A child’s joy in play does not lie in succeeding at something or solving a problem, but rather in the fact that, with every action, the living “space of confidence” grounding their movements compels them to test different ways of interrogating the creative material. This movement leads the child toward ever new ways of testing their relationship with the “animated”, living world, which engages the child by responding to their interactions and reacting differently each time, thereby inspiring an ever-renewed, potentially inexhaustible way of engaging with it.

The world’s reactions do not instil fear in the child, nor do they prompt a retreat into comfort. On the contrary, the discomfort experienced becomes part of a process of growth grounded in inquiry, one that the child seems naturally inclined to pursue because it is driven by the very dynamics of play: continually seeking new footholds, discovering new ways of questioning, and therefore reconfiguring their relationship with a living, moving space.

This relationship is marked by complicity. The world’s unexpected reactions are not experienced by the child as mere surprises, but as part of a dynamic process devoid of fixed rules, yet always tied to a way of shaping the relationship that every interaction initiates and calls upon to unfold. Art, by virtue of its capacity to attend to the affective and to its destabilizing dimension, draws precisely upon this complicity. Such complicity does not eliminate the sense of vulnerability generated by discomfort, nor does it restore a state of comfort. Rather, it helps one inhabit discomfort and make it part of a process of growth that can unfold only with and through otherness.

In this regard, Silvia recalls:

I had a teacher, I always said, like, don’t take what you’re doing seriously, but don’t take yourself too seriously. And *I really like it because it’s like a game. But we are serious about the game.* I’m serious about my five movements. I’m serious about, you know, uh, yes, it is playful, but [...] *we are together in this* and it also has a sense of seriousness, um, this playfulness, I don’t know, it sounds very like contrasting, but it’s not somehow...¹⁹

¹⁹ Our emphasis.

The teacher’s suggestion that students should take the game seriously, but not themselves, encourages an attitude open to self-reflection. Such reflection is understood as part of a broader process in which the constant re-examination of previously held assumptions becomes a source of creative inspiration and artistic growth. The fact of sharing such an attitude of play makes this activity something to be taken seriously: each participant adopts an attitude of openness, support, and non-judgment in mutually exposing themselves to one another.

In this way, a sense of being welcomed and supported is created and reinforced, particularly in transforming what emerges as discomforting into a resource for the shared exploration and diversification of one’s ways of interrogating the artistic material. Although an element of comfort may exist within this “protected” space – where one can expose oneself to others without fear of judgment or misuse of what is shared – the spirit in which such material is exchanged is one of helping one another inhabit discomfort differently and use it as a heuristic resource.

One way in which a playful attitude is encouraged in improvisation is, as Alessia explains, by “stealing” movements from others and then varying and developing them – that is, building upon the variations introduced through one’s own repetition of those movements. Another approach consists in engaging directly in games²⁰. Silvia, for instance, describes a game in which each participant had to invent a sequence based on five given movements and perform it. Ultimately, each sequence differed from the others, thereby contributing to compositional, expressive, and interpretive choices.

Such a game not only trains the habit of questioning one’s own point of view, but also encourages the continual shifting of interrogative perspectives. It is only through this process that dancers learn to experience discomfort – or “intranquillity”²¹ – as a fluid point of departure for inter-

²⁰ Particularly significant in this regard is Alice Godfroy’s reflection on experimental improvisational practices such as Contact Improvisation, Lisa Nelson’s *Tuning Scores*, and João Fiadeiro’s *Composition en Temps Réel*. These practices conceive the self as “study field” (Godfroy 2024: 44, our transl.) as the body is “a site of possible alterations aimed at transforming one’s being-in-the-world, one’s relation to others, and to oneself, rather than a body lived in the self-evidence of its givenness, seeking through improvisation merely to express or expose itself” (Godfroy 2024: 42, our transl.). On the emergent and relational nature of improvisation, see Bertinetto (2022) and, more specifically with regard to dance improvisation, Randazzo (2026). Other noteworthy studies on improvisation include Ravn, Høffding, McGuirk (eds.) (2021).

²¹ The contemporary dancer, choreographer, and acrobat Chloé Moglia speaks about the right to “intranquillity” and its training in relation to her practice of “suspended

rogating their relationship to creative material. Each time anew, each time in a more radical, destabilizing way.

Bibliography

Bergold, J., Thomas, S., *Partizipative Forschungsmethoden: ein methodischer Ansatz in Bewegung*, “Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research”, 13/1 (2012), <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs1201302> (accessed 13 July 2026).

Bertinetto, A., *Aesthetic habits in performing arts*, “Philosophies”, n. 10/11 (2025).

Bertinetto, A., *Aesthetics of improvisation*, Engl. transl. R.T. Valgenti, Paderborn, Brill Fink, 2022a.

Bertinetto, A., *Improvvisazione ed emergenza. Risonanza espressiva e making sense dell'imprevisto*, “Studi di estetica”, n. 2 (2022b), pp. 37-53.

Boissière, A., *L'Art et le vivant du jeu*, Liège, Presses Universitaires de Liège, 2023a.

Boissière, A., *Filosofia del sentire*, ed. S. Massimo, Sesto San Giovanni, Mimesis, 2023b.

Boissière, A., *Le mouvement à l'œuvre : entre jeu et arts*, Sesto San Giovanni, Mimesis, 2018.

Buttingsrud, C., *Bodies in skilled performance: how dancers reflect through the living body*, “Synthese”, n. 199 (2021), pp. 7535-54.

Camilleri, F., *Performer training for actors and athletes*, London, Meuthen Drama, 2023.

Cappuccio, M.L., Ilundáin-Agurruza, J., *Swim or sink: habit and skillful control in sport performance*, in F. Caruana, I. Testa (eds.), *Habits: pragmatist approaches from cognitive science, neuroscience, and social theory*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2020, pp. 137-61.

Deans, C., Pini, A., *Skilled performance in contact improvisation: the importance of interkinaesthetic sense of agency*, “Synthese”, n. 139 (2022).

Dreyfus, H.L., Dreyfus, S.E., *The ethical implications of the five-stage skill-acquisition model*, “Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society”, n. 24 (2004), pp. 251-64.

Eberlein, U., *Leib erfahrung in kulturellen Praktiken*, in W. Soth (hrsg.), *Die Globalisierung der Affekte*, Berlin, Xenomoi Verlag, 2013, pp. 89-110.

Eberlein, U., *Aspekte leiblicher Intersubjektivität*, in S. Volke, S. Kluck (hrsg.), *Körperskandale. Zum Konzept der gespürten Leiblichkeit*, Freiburg-München, Karl Alber, 2017, pp. 39-57.

Ellingson, L., *Embodiment in qualitative research*, New York-London, Routledge, 2017.

dance”: Chloé Moglia réinvente le trapeze, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jOtGCoWM_B8 (accessed 13 July 2026).

- Fitts, P.M., Posner, M.I., *Learning and skilled performance in human performance*, Belmont, Brock-Cole, 1967.
- Flatt, K., *Choreography: creating and developing dance for performance*, Ramsbury, The Crowood Press, 2019.
- Formis, B., *La recherche comme geste : une forme de résurgence*, in M. Badiou, C. Déchery (dir.), *Artistes-chercheur-es, chercheur-es artistes. Performer les savoirs*, Dijon, Les presses du réel, 2022, p. 67-81.
- Fraleigh, S.H., *Dance and the lived body. A descriptive aesthetics* (1987), Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1996.
- Gibson, J.J., *The ecological approach to visual perception* (1979), New York, Taylor & Francis, 2015.
- Girtler, R., *Methoden der Feldforschung* (2001), Wien-Köln-Weimar, Böhlau Verlag, 2021.
- Godfroy, A., *Connaissance par le vide. De quoi les improvisateurs sont-ils savants?*, in I. Pérez-Wilke, P. Kuypers, R. Costa (dir.), *Autour de l'improvisation. Essais*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2024, pp. 41-54.
- Gombrich, E., *The sense of order: a study on the psychology of decorative art*, Oxford, UK, Phaidon, 1979.
- Griffero, T., *Atmospheres. Aesthetics of emotional spaces* (2010), London, Routledge, 2014.
- Griffero, T., *Quasi-things. The paradigm of atmospheres* (2013), Albany, Suny Press, 2017.
- Griffero, T., *Places, affordances, and atmospheres. A pathic aesthetics*, London-New York, Routledge, 2019.
- Griffero, T., *Better to be in tune. Between resonance and responsivity*, “Studi di estetica”, n. 2 (2020b), pp. 9-18.
- Griffero, T., *Corporeal landscapes: can somaesthetics and new phenomenology come together?*, “The Journal of Somaesthetics”, n. 1/7 (2021b), pp. 15-28.
- Griffero, T., *Somaesthetics and pathic aesthetics*, in J.J. Abrams (ed.), *Shusterman's somaesthetics. From hip hop philosophy to politics and performance art*, Leiden-Boston, Brill, 2022.
- Guisgand, P., Schiller, G. (dir.), *La place des pratiques dans la recherche en danse*, “Recherches en Danse”, n. 6 (2017).
- Helfferich, C., *Die Qualität qualitativer Daten. Manual für die Durchführung qualitativer Interviews*, 3: *Überarbeitete Auflage*, Wiesbaden, VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2009.
- Kruse, J., *Qualitative Interviewforschung: ein integrativer Ansatz* (2014), 2: *Auflage*, Weinheim-Basel, Beltz Juventa, 2015.
- Krasnow, D., Wilmerding, V., *Motor learning for dance: teachers and performers*, Toronto, “Healthy Dance Canada. The Dance Health Alliance of Canada”, (2024): http://www.healthydancercanada.org/uploads/4/7/1/3/47130231/hdc_motor-learningfordanceteachersandperformers_rp_2024.pdf (accessed 13 July 2026).

Legrand, D., Ravn, S., *Perceiving subjectivity in bodily movement: the case of dancers*, "Phenomenology and Cognitive Sciences", n. 8 (2009), pp. 389-408.

Mayen, G., *Relation (auto)critiques*, "Quant à la danse", n. 4 (2006), pp. 46-8.

Massimo, S., *Automatism and creativity in contact improvisation: re-inventing habit and opening up to change*, "Philosophies", n. 10/39 (2025a).

Massimo, S., *Apprendre par le corps, faire danser la pensée*, "Atelier des doctorants en danse au CND" (2025b).

McDowell, J., *Experience, norm, and nature*, Hoboken, John Wiley & Sons, 2008.

Montero, B.G., *Does bodily awareness interfere with highly skilled movement?*, "Inquiry", n. 53/2 (2010), pp. 105-22.

Montero, B.G., *Effortless bodily movement*, "Philosophical Topics", n. 39/1 (Spring 2011), pp. 67-79.

Montero, B.G., *Thought in action. Expertise and the conscious mind*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016.

Peirce, C.S., *Collected papers of Charles S. Peirce*, 8 voll., C. Hartshorne, P. Weiss, A. Burks (eds.), Cambridge (MA), Harvard University Press, 1931-1958.

Pelgreffi, I., *Filosofia dell'automatismo. Verso un'etica della corporeità*, Napoli-Salerno, Orthotes, 2018.

Ploder, A., Stadlbauer, J., *Autoethnographie und Volkskunde? Zur Relevanz wissenschaftlicher Selbsterzählungen für die volkskundlich-kulturanthropologische Forschungspraxis*, "Österreichische Zeitschrift für Volkskunde", n. 116/3-4 (2013), pp. 373-404.

Portera, M., *La bellezza è abitudine. Come si sviluppa l'estetico*, Roma, Carocci, 2020.

Poullaude, F., *Unworking choreography: the notion of the work in dance*, Engl. transl. A. Pakes, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2017.

Przyborski, A., Wohlrab-Sahr, M., *Qualitative Sozialforschung: ein Arbeitsbuch*, 5: *Überarbeitete und erweiterte Auflage*, Berlin-Boston, de Gruyter, 2021.

Randazzo, A., *Emergence: a parameter of the effectiveness of artistic creativity. A study of dance improvisation*, "Cultural Arts Research and Development", n. 6/1 (2026).

Ravn, S., Høffding, S., McGuirk, J. (eds.), *Philosophy of improvisation. Interdisciplinary perspectives on theory and practice*, London-New York, Routledge, 2021.

Salice, A., Høffding, S., Gallagher, S., *Putting plural self-awareness into practice: the phenomenology of expert musicianship*, "Topoi", vol. 38/1 (2019), pp. 197-209.

Schmitz, H., *Hermann Schmitz, "the new phenomenology"*, in A.T. Tymieniecka, (ed.), *Phenomenology world-wide. Foundations – Expanding dynamics – Life – Engagements. A guide for research and study*, Dordrecht, Springer, 2002, pp. 491-3.

Schmitz, H., *New phenomenology. A brief introduction* (2009), Engl. transl. R. Owen Müllan, Milano, Mimesis International, 2019.

Sheets-Johnstone, M., *The primacy of movement*, Philadelphia, John Benjamins Publishing Company, Amsterdam-Philadelphia, 2011a.

Sheets-Johnstone, M., *From movement to dance*, "Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences", n. 1/11 (2011b), pp. 39-57.

Shusterman, R., *Body consciousness. A philosophy of mindfulness and somaesthetics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008.

Shusterman, R., *Soma and psyche*, "Journal of Speculative Philosophy", n. 24/3 (2010), pp. 205-23.

Shusterman, R., *Thinking through the body. Essays in somaesthetics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012.

Shusterman, R., *Somaesthetics in context*, "Kinesiology Review", n. 9/3(2020), pp. 245-53.

Straus, E., *Die Formen des Räumlichen. Ihre Bedeutungen für die Motorik und die Wahrnehmung* (1930), in Id., *Psychologie der menschlichen Welt. Gesammelte Schriften*, Berlin-Heidelberg, Springer Verlag, 1960, pp. 141-78.

Spalva, R., *Improvement of dance composition skills during the study process in the perspective of the newest motor learning models*, "Sigtem", n. 8/1 (2016), pp. 51-6.

Strübing, J., *Qualitative Sozialforschung: eine komprimierte Einführung* (3., überarbeitete und erweiterte Auflage), Berlin-Boston, de Gruyter, 2024.

Tschaepe, M., *Somaesthetics of discomfort*, "European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy", n. 13/1 (2021).

Tschaepe, M., *Misfit mutiny: Somaesthetic discomfort against abjection, oppression, and exclusion of normativity*, in L. Koczanowicz (ed.), *Somapower: Somaesthetics reads politics*, Boston, Brill, 2024a, pp. 26-41.

Tschaepe, M., *Somaesthetics of discomfort: Addressing identity, normativity, and alienation*, London-Leiden, Brill, 2024b.

Winnicott, D., *Playing and reality* (1971), 2nd ed., Abingdon, Routledge Classics, 2025.

Web Resources

Chloé Moglia réinvente le trapèze: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jOtGCoWM_B8 (accessed 13 July 2026).