THE PATH TO OPPOSITIONAL PRACTICE
FROM A DANCER’S PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Working from the context of contemporary dance, this research interrogates contemporary understandings of agency from the point of view of the dancer. Drawing on Sklar and Noland, and engaging in an oppositional improvisation practice in which I reject the embedded movements of my formal, codified dance training, I put forward the hypothesis that not only a more specific differentiation of kinesthesia into different modes is useful for articulating opposition, but that an emphasis on the role of agency in informing this articulation reveals more accurately the creativity of oppositional practice.

Following a contextualisation of oppositional practice within approaches to dance such as those of Rosemary Butcher, Anna Halprin and Contact Improvisation, the research enters the controversial debate over the existence of agency, so as to attend to the theoretical aspect of the research question ‘How is oppositional improvisation possible for a trained dancer?’ I answer through discursive and reflective practice-based methodologies articulating, from a first-person perspective, the dynamic interaction between agency and kinesthesia through improvisation.

The self-determination claimed by the oppositional body is contested by social constructivist theories negating individual agency. I critically engage with Judith Butler, as representative of this approach, and also draw from Jacques Rancière and Michel de Certeau, to indicate bodies capable of acting independently of conformity. In doing so, I appropriate agency from the context of social theories for use in dance discourse, encouraging hybrid forms of knowledge. I also draw upon Susan Leigh-Foster's and Merleau-Ponty's notion of embodied subjects, whose sense of agency is inherent to the self-givenness provided by the first-person perspective.

I argue that, in improvisation, opposition stems from the interaction between agency and kinesthetic awareness, activated by the dancers' lucid moment, the understanding not just of possessing kinesthesia, but that this makes of them agents able to oppose their embeddedness. This research articulates the importance of the dancer's perspective and agentic nature as a means to expand the knowledge and making of dance. In doing so, it reconfigures the trained body by expliciting its un-danced capabilities for agentic opposition; it reconfigures it as an intentionally abject body, evidencing potentials for further developments in dance.
STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

This thesis and the work to which it refers are the results of my own efforts. Any ideas, data, images or text resulting from the work of others (whether published or unpublished) are fully identified as such within the work and attributed to their originator in the text, bibliography or in footnotes. This thesis has not been submitted in whole or in part for any other academic degree or professional qualification. I agree that the University has the right to submit my work to the plagiarism detection service TurnitinUK for originality checks. Whether or not drafts have been so-assessed, the University reserves the right to require an electronic version of the final document (as submitted) for assessment as above.

Signed…..Eun Hi Kim…………………

Date……..03/11/2015………………………..
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INTRODUCTION

Oppositional improvisation: inception, methods and character

Trained dancers can create improvised movements that resist the conditioning of their formal genre-based training. This study adopts a first-person, practice-informed perspective to argue that opposing the embeddedness of the trained body demands the use of agency. Specifically, I contend that intentional agency variously deploys kinesthesia (the subject's conscious perception of her body in motion) as a tactic to deconstruct embedded movement habits and to insinuate itself in the somatic gaps of the trained body, through which the idiosyncratic or the social kinetic body might be intuited/visible, so as to expand from within the latent potentials for deliberate genre abjection.

In my practice I used as input memories and lived experiences of instances of non-normative artistic practices that questioned normativity. I improvised within a framework that I termed 'oppositional', which consists in rejecting the use of the techniques and movement vocabularies of my formal training. The aim was to investigate the mechanics of the oppositional creative process from a dancer's perspective.
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When confronted with the practical challenge of improvising without using the embedded movement habits of my codified dance training, I found myself – in most cases unknowingly – undertaking specific actions. Each of these actions was informed by agency and offered a different point of access to new movement possibilities. They were produced by a different kinaesthetic engagement with the old. I have termed these specific applications of kinesthesia ‘kinesthetic modes.’ Kinesthetic modes are tactics that I employed to counter the embedded movements of my normative training. In particular, I have identified four kinaesthetic modes which, according to their distinctive, targeted use of kinesthesia, I have labelled as preventive, iterative, mnemonic, and empathic kinaesthetic modes.

This research was inspired by my collaboration with Rosemary Butcher for the dance-film The Return (2005), which forced me to challenge my embeddedness. On that occasion, I was asked to improvise without using the dance techniques and vocabularies embedded in me through years of codified dance training and practice. For the first time, I found myself looking for kinetic alternatives to my habitual ways of moving, and I questioned my own understanding of dance.

I Delineating the scope of the challenge

Prior to collaborating with Butcher, my experience of training, performing and teaching dance in South Korea and abroad was of a different nature. After undertaking ballet training between the age of eight and thirteen, I focused on modern dance. I studied, among others, Limón, Graham and Cunningham technique as well as release improvisation classes. Over the time, these consolidated into
movement habits that became my instinctive kinetic responses when dancing. These kinds of responses are also identified by Legrand and Ravn (2009) in the verbal feedback provided by ballet dancers on their experience of dancing using the movement techniques and vocabularies they had trained in. The dancers are quoted as describing ballet techniques as something that feels "immediately natural… a second nature… 'built' into their body as a special habit" (Legrand and Ravn, 2009, p. 403).

My previous experience of improvisation, although quite extensive, had been geared towards exploring and challenging the embedded movement habits of my trained body, but did not expressly demand their rejection. In those circumstances, my movement habits acted as a framework of reference that grounded and managed the uncertainty of improvisation, whether I engaged in it solely as an exercise of kinetic exploration or as a response to a specific input, relating movement to input through meaning. The grounding role that movement habits have on improvisation explains the apparent paradox whereby the improviser is able to find movement: the act of finding something implies prior knowledge of what is being sought – although not necessarily at a conscious level. I suggest that this implied knowledge rests on the dancer's implicit kinesthetic expectations which, in turn, are based on the criteria perpetuated by the formal training embedded in the dancer's movement habits. Portuguese experimental choreographer Vera Mantero has described, from a dancer's perspective, the pejorative aspect of embedded movement habits:

> sometimes when people think they’re being very expressive, they’re actually just waving their arms all over the place.  
> Manero quoted in Almeida, 2010
In Mantero's statement, one’s recognition of their movement as expressive is rooted in a specific set of embedded criteria that identifies exaggerated movement with the communication of emotions. However, when the familiar kinesthetic habits are rejected, as it is the case in oppositional practice, the act of finding movement takes place within an improvisational framework devoid of kinesthetic expectations; further, expectations are actively negated. Oppositional movement comprises of two logically distinguishable but simultaneously occurring events, two complementary facets of the same process: the inhibition of the automaticity of my normative kinetic responses and the creation of non-normative ones, the former being an implied necessity for the latter. The dancer is then forced to use the trained body against its own normativity, effectively embodying opposition. The dancer, so to speak, has to customise her own individual movement, as opposed to choosing among a range of established and expected movement possibilities.

Butcher's invitation put into question my habitual movement-producing process and significantly inhibited my capacity to move. As Albright observes:

One can[not] simply erase years of physical and aesthetic training to become a blank slate onto which one's imagination can project anything.

Albright in Albright and Gere, 2003, p. 260

Questioning the habitual kinetic responses of my trained body requires, as Ellen Webb\textsuperscript{12} puts it, being "more open to what is going on around me and responsive in new ways not bound by my usual self-definition" (2003, p. 243). The independence from what Webb defined "my usual self-definition" does not solely require a re-definition of physical motor-coordination. At a deeper level, since movement habits are expressions of the criteria of the dance orthodoxy (by which, I refer to known and
established dance genres), refusing them entails not just the countering of my ingrained kinetic reflexes but also the countering of the dance sensibility\textsuperscript{13} that I have absorbed through my training, the countering of my institutionalised understanding of dance. Therefore, it could be argued that non-orthodox dance, in which the dancer avoids using the habitual ways of self-definition, requires that the dancer moves away from her understanding of what dance is. This moving away is what scholar André Lepecki refers to as he states:

\begin{quote}
A new configuration for the audience's eye is being shaped, a new writing on dance is being proposed, and a new definition of dancing is being called for, in every new work.

Lepecki, 1999, p. 4
\end{quote}

Lepecki's observes that new ways of relating and referring to dance are elicited by an approach that challenges the normativity of the discipline, the understanding of what dance is. Although Lepecki's statements addresses the development of what is controversially described 'conceptual dance', it is aptly applicable to oppositional practice. When I improvise oppositionally, changes in the way I move do happen, eliciting questions for a better understanding of a dancer's perspective of the practice.

It should be acknowledged that my oppositional improvisation is not strictly aimed at the absolute eradication of my embedded movement. It is meant primarily as a way to explore the process of new movement creation that this attempt elicits. Therefore, the disruption of my habitual genre-based movement does not necessarily extend to the totality of my improvisational movements; rather, it applies, in various degrees, to specific kinetic instances. It is within these instances that I have identified the oppositional tactics.
Stemming from my first-person experience of oppositional practice, the central question that this research endeavours to address is: How are new movement possibilities generated, by a technically trained body, within an oppositional improvisational framework? Or, more succinctly: How is oppositional improvisation possible for a trained dancer? When asking 'how' I am effectively posing two questions in one. The first question can be variously articulated as follows: What are the modalities through which new movement possibilities are realised in practice? What practical approaches to movement allow me to improvise without using my embeddedness? What are the kinetic dynamics involved? The second question can also be phrased in a number of ways: What is the nature of the new movement possibilities? What are the conditions of existence of oppositional movement? What makes opposition to normative systems possible? What are the elemental building blocks of opposition? Regardless of the wording that may express them, while the first of the two queries encompassed in the main research question has a direct kinetic connotation, the second one has strong theoretical implications.

II Methodological approaches

Given the twofold nature of the research question, the methodology of the thesis encompasses two parallel and complementary approaches, articulated, respectively on a theoretical and a practice-based level. The methodology employed to provide an answer to the practical element consists of a first-person, reflective analysis of my lived experience of solo oppositional improvisation. The parameters and strategies for initiating, documenting and reflecting upon the practice are articulated in chapter four. The methodology employed to address the theoretical component of the
research question consists in the situating of the question itself within the wider debate over whether individual subjects possess intentional agency. This is articulated in chapters two and three and, partly, in the final chapter, five.

As argued more extensively in the next section of this introduction, although requiring differentiated methodological approaches, theory and practice inform each other and are complementary in accounting for and shaping oppositional practice. For this reason, while each individual chapter relates to its subject matter from a specific perspective, be it the theoretical approach or practice-related one, the subject matter itself possesses the dual nature of the research question. As such it could be potentially interpellated in a different way. This is evident in chapter one, where the historical contextualisation of agency and kinesthesia within dance practice lends itself to interpellation by both the theoretical and practical methodological approaches of this research. The same could be argued for chapter four, where the considerations on the setting up, documentation and analysis of oppositional improvisation are seen to attend to practical demands but also imply and cater for theoretical concerns. Similarly, and finally, in chapter five, the theoretical and the practical approaches unify in the identification of the kinesthetic modes: theoretically explained but practically manifested tactical interactions between the trained dancer’s agency and kinesthesia.

In sum, the situating, reciprocal relations and development of the issues presented above have been articulated in three parts. In the first part, I situate the practice of oppositional improvisation within a historical context of oppositional approaches to dance. In the second part, informed by my experiential awareness of oppositional
movement, I articulate a theoretical approach for the research question, within the context of the controversial debate on agency. In the third part, I specify the terms of engagement in the practice; I then present the tactical modalities of interaction between agency and kinesthesia, through which oppositional movement was realised. These findings emerged from my first-person reflection on the practice documentation, available in the form of videoed sessions and post-practice note-taking.

III Relevant concepts: agency, kinesthesia and other concerns

As anticipated in the opening paragraphs, I argue that the dancer's intentional agency deploys kinesthesia as a tactic through which to counter the embedded movement habits of formal genre-based training.

Intentional agency is to be understood here as the subject's ability to think and act so as to accomplish specific aims, even if this should entail countering normativity – the set of rules and regulations reflected in the subject's habitual, embedded responses. In the context of this research, agency counters the normativity of the trained body, since the trained dancer's aim is to reject the use of the movement vocabularies and techniques that constituted her formal training. This rejection is what defines the oppositional nature of the practice and transforms the trained body into what can be described as an abject body.

The expressions 'abject body' and the related term 'abjection', already used when describing kinesthesia as an agentic tactic that facilitates the attainment of genre
abjection, are derived from a notion espoused in the gender theory of feminist scholar Judith Butler (2011). They indicate the state of exclusion in which social subjects find themselves when their behavioural patterns do not comply with the regulatory framework of normativity. The state of non-adherence to normativity, in which abject subjects find themselves, is also acknowledged by French philosopher Jacques Rancière (2001, 2006), who refers to it as ‘dissensus’. I therefore use the term ‘abject body,’ ‘abjection’ or ‘dissensus’ to refer to the subject’s opposition to the normative system. However, while Butler regards abjection as exclusively accidental, I argue that subjects have the potentials for choosing it deliberately, insofar as they possess agency. My choice to reject the movement techniques and vocabularies of the dance genres of my formal training, for instance, is a voluntary attempt to become an abject subject and is informed by agency.

However, as acknowledged above, a debate exists over whether or not subjects do possess agency. It is for this reason that, in part two of this research, I critically engage with the social and political theories of Butler, Rancière and de Certeau and, later, Foster and Merleau-Ponty. While Butler refuses the idea that subjects may possess intentional agency, I understand Rancière and de Certeau as supporting it. Since I identify agency as the enabler of opposition to normativity, my engagement with Butler's, Rancière's and de Certeau's theories aims to abstract agency out of the social or political contexts and into the medium of dance, and redeploy it at the level of individual agency, the agency of the practitioner.

Accordingly, I do not engage with Butler's political theory for its relevance to my trained body as representative of gender, but for denying its agency. Rancière's and
de Certeau's theories are relevant to my research for the opposite reason: their implicit support of the notion that subjects do possess agency; not for their social or political implications. In sum, while I value the significance of political and social readings of the body, in this study I do not relate to my dancing body as politically connoted. I relate to it in terms of my/its capacity to overcome embeddedness, the normativity of my training. Therefore, when stating that the body opposes normativity, it is not the normativity of gender, ethnicity or class that my agency is resisting but, to reiterate, the normativity of my formal, embedded training. Insofar as my trained body is the embodiment of that training, the notion of opposition to embeddedness can also be expressed by stating that I opposed my trained body.

As stated, in oppositional practice, intentional agency makes use of the dancer's kinesthesia as a tactic to seek abjection. While agency is the sole initiator of opposition, in its role as the guiding principle for the orientation of the improvisatory engagement it relies on the dancer's kinesthetic awareness. Kinesthesia is the enabler of agency. It provides the means for the implementation of oppositional agency, by enabling the dancer to recognise and exclude embeddedness, and to remain open to and shape oppositional solutions. I understand the agency-kinesthesia relation as a dynamic creative process; one in which agency and kinesthesia mutually inform each other through a real-time, two-way feedback loop, providing continuous re-evaluations of the kinetic situation and adjustments through the most suitable tactic. I also argue that kinesthesia provides agency not only with awareness of the body in movement but also of its implicit kinetic potentials. Further, both kinesthesia and agency can be active at a pre-reflective level, effectively providing the necessary awareness and capacity of intervention to prevent the emergence of embedded
movements – albeit not always successfully – and tapping into potential oppositional ones.

In my practice, the dynamic interaction between kinesthesia and agency takes place within an improvisational approach. Improvisation is, at the same time, the framework of engagement, the act of engaging, and the result of the engagement between agency and kinesthesia, namely the oppositional movement created; the modality, the process and the product. Insofar as tactics are actions that oppose normativity in the pursuit of the subject’s aims, improvisation can be regarded as a tactic. It is, however, a tactic that encompasses three aspects. Two are clearly visible from the outside, namely the role of improvisation as a framework and as the resulting oppositional movement. However, the third, improvisation as the process through which movement is created, conceals the nature of the relation between agency and kinesthesia to all but the dancer. The process can be revealed to the dancer as she elicits her privileged first-person perspective by self-reflecting upon her lived experience of improvising oppositionally. This is the reason why my chosen methodology for the practical component consists of the experiential reflective analysis of my improvised movement which, as anticipated, led to the individuation of the kinesthetic modes.

In the light of the specifications offered, the deconstruction of embedded movement habits and the kinesthetic eliciting of the social or idiosyncratic body from within the technically trained one can be re-explained as a kinesthetic tactic that the dancer employs in order to pursue the agentic decision to abandon dance normativity in favour of self-abjection, a condition of voluntary dissensus that opposes the kinetic
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criteria of her formal training.

IV Practical theorising and theorised practice: the practice-theory relation

While the need to look at the kinetic element of oppositional practice is immediately apparent, the reason for focusing on the theoretical aspect may be less obvious. In this section I clarify the reasons for addressing the theory and its relation to the practice. I will explain why I deemed important to identify a theoretical framework for oppositional practice, in spite of the fact that the latter is realised in and through my physical engagement with movement.

A reflection upon the character of oppositional practice suggested to me, perhaps paradoxically, that while this enquiry originated from my engagement with movement, which is where opposition is concretely realised, the starting point of oppositional practice is an intellectually originated concept. The reason for this is that the notion of opposition to embeddedness implies the implicit acceptance of a theoretical stance: that subjects possess individual agency. As my practice progressed, it became apparent to me that the realisation of the oppositional movement that emerged could only be explained by the existence of individual agency; in its absence, no movements other than embedded ones could be elicited. For this reason, the theoretical discussion over the existence of individual agency became the grounding for the practice. The theory articulates the notion and existence of individual agency; in doing so it details the conditions that have allowed for embeddedness to be questioned and oppositional movement to be approached.
This, it is important to remark, does not mean that my engagement with the theory has had the purpose of making the practice possible, as if oppositional practice could only occur once its existence had been theoretically proven by the discussion on individual agency; neither did the understanding of the theoretical grounding provide me with a solution to overcoming normativity, given that it did not prescribe the specific form of the oppositional movements that were to ensue as a result of my active kinetic engagement. Although it is my contention that individual agency is what allows for oppositional practice to develop, it has not been necessary for me, as a practitioner, to acquire prior theoretical knowledge of this link in order to engage in oppositional practice: my practice sessions were concurrent with the development of my understanding of the theoretical element of oppositional practice – and, in the beginning, the practice even occurred prior to any engagement with the theory.\(^\text{17}\) In relation to oppositional practice, the theory has an explanatory function, not a constitutive one.

A further reason to focus on the theoretical aspect of oppositional practice and, more specifically, on the existence and role of individual agency is that, not only does the implementation of the latter engender the former – which results in the tangible realisation of oppositional movement – but, prior to that, oppositional practice is also informed by the intellectual concept of individual agency: individual agency, as an abstract notion, implicitly informed both my decision to engage in oppositional practice and, even further removed, the intellectual inception of the oppositional challenge/invitation I embarked upon.

The first of the two claims emerges from the observation that I initially decided to
engage in oppositional practice because I perceived it as an achievable goal; in turn, it is reasonable to argue that this perception was based on an intuition of the existence of individual agency.\textsuperscript{18} It was an implicit intuition, in the sense that I did not possess conscious awareness of it at the time, but it explains why, paradoxically, I continued to experience oppositional practice as possible even in those instances in which I felt that I was failing to realise oppositional movement. It is in this respect that I identify individual agency, in its abstract form – as opposed to its tangible kinetic expression – as the implicit reason behind my initial decision to engage in oppositional practice.

The second claim suggested that, prior to becoming realised in movement and also prior to informing my decision to engage in the practice, the notion of individual agency also informs the intellectual inception of oppositional practice. The invitation to abandon embeddedness, be it on the request of a choreographer – as initially it had been, in my case, with Rosemary Butcher – or self-directed – as it is the case now – necessarily encapsulates within itself the assumption that it is possible to do so, which, in turn, implies the prior acceptance of the existence of individual agency.

Individual agency, therefore, can be regarded as existing not just, explicitly, in the realisation of oppositional practice but also, implicitly, in the intellectual formulation of the idea of oppositional practice and, following that, in my acceptance to engage in it. In other words, oppositional practice is realised in/as tangible movement and, as a practitioner, my research into it has an experiential – thus practice-based – motivation as well as development. However, a reflection upon the practice also suggests that the oppositional approach and my decision to engage in it have a
theorised inception: the implicit acceptance of individual agency. In this sense, oppositional practice is inextricably entwined with its theoretical background. The theory is embedded in the practice.

The engagement in the theory is also important for another reason. Despite the lack of a hierarchical relation between theory and practice, it is true to say that the awareness provided by the theoretical analysis has aided my engagement in the practice. It provided a convincing foundation for my intuitive perception that I do possess individual agency and I am therefore potentially able to oppose my own normative embeddedness. Although, as reiterated, this theoretical confirmation was not an indispensable condition to the realisation of oppositional movement, it was useful to enhance the confidence in my oppositional endeavour. The theoretical framework helped me dispel the potentials for self-doubting, to which I was exposed for two reasons. The first reason is that, because of the nature of oppositional practice, which requires the suspension of the normative understanding of dance, no assessment other than my first-person experience can be used in order to establish that my movement is oppositional. However, while first-person analysis is more reliable than exogenous value judgments, as I undoubtedly possess a higher awareness of my embedded habits than someone other than myself would, the lack of established and acknowledged parameters of reference creates the conditions for self-doubting. The potential for self-doubting is further compounded by a second reason: the existence of theoretical positions according to which opposition to normativity is unachievable because, far from possessing individual agency, subjects are only afforded the illusion of individual control. Judith Butler's deterministic contention, for instance, is that what subjects perceive as individual agency is in fact the norm-
compliant implementation of prescriptive patterns.

In this context, the awareness that a different theoretical framework also exists, according to which oppositional practice is feasible, has provided me with greater self-assurance in my kinetic exploration, and with the confidence to trust my first-person experience as a means to establish whether I managed to produce oppositional movement.

This is not to suggest a primacy of theory over practice: if the notion of individual agency engenders oppositional practice, the opposite could also be argued, that the existence of individual agency can only be theorised in relation to its application to oppositional practice as a kinetic reality. In terms of their existence, both theory and practice would be implausible without each other and are to be regarded as one. For this reason, in pursuit of an understanding of oppositional practice, my research is articulated through both.

In conclusion, the practical element of this research provided the opportunity to reflect on my own experience of oppositional practice in terms of the specific tactics I employ when creating oppositional movement (which is the topic of chapters four and five). However, it also engendered the theoretical discourse from which the notion of individual agency was elicited. This was articulated through the specific theoretical frameworks referenced in the research: the social theories of Jacques Rancière and Michel de Certeau, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological approach, Foster's analysis, and the countering of Butler's notion of agency. These offered an understanding of the agentic framework that enables the inception of the oppositional
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approach, my decision to engage in it and the confidence to do so. On the one hand, my engagement with oppositional practice indicated how to avoid normativity through concrete kinetic tactics; on the other hand, it also brought to light the complementary, multilayered role of the theory, as a means to offer explanations as to what makes it possible for me, as a practitioner, to disrupt normativity.

V Conclusion

The research originally posed the question 'How are new movement possibilities generated, by technically trained bodies, within an oppositional improvisational framework?' It was observed that the question has both practical and theoretical implications. Accordingly, the answers provided articulate contributions to different aspects of dance knowledge and practice and, crucially, they do so from a dancer's perspective.

In answer to the question, I have consolidated the notion that subjects possess agency, and identified four kinesthetic modes, four ways in which agency uses kinesthesia to realise itself as oppositional movement. The identification of the kinesthetic modes was made possible by the first-person perspective of my analysis, the dancer's perspective. In this respect, the kinesthetic modes are a development in the under-researched area of dancers' agency, and the recognition of oppositional improvisation as a method to unlock untapped agentic potentials and advance further the contribution of dancers to choreographic practices.

A better understanding of the role of agency within dance contributes both to practice
and knowledge insofar as, paraphrasing music scholar Fischlin (in Midgelow, 2012), as quoted in the next chapter, the significance of agency within artistic practices is in need of greater attention. Oppositional practice reinforces a contemporary understanding of the dancer as an agentic subject. This study has shown that, within oppositional practice, a determining role for the agency of the dancer is played by improvisation. As observed, the implication of improvisation in oppositional practice is threefold: it acts as a framework and as the process of creative opposition, and it is the resulting improvised movement. In doing so, improvisation operates according to the same modalities of the tactical actions defined by de Certeau (1988) and can thus be reconsidered as a tactic. Further, from the perspective of the dancer, improvisation, in its ontological role to oppositional practice, can be reconfigured as a detraining tactic.

A significant contribution to knowledge, beyond dance, is given by the notion of 'lucid moment.' The dancer's ability to apprehend herself as the agentic initiator of her movement, and to understand the enriching potentials of this for dance practice, are a consequence of the dancer's self-givenness. This, in turn, is directly linked with the human condition of embodiment, as described by Merleau-Ponty (2007). In relating oppositional practice to Merleau-Ponty's notion of the embodied subject as possessing self-givenness, the research has also shown the possibility of abstracting notions developed in relation to theories of collective agency and social determinism, and make use of them for understanding improvisational practice. This creates a direct link between dance and philosophical approaches.

The practice-theory link within oppositional improvisation was also reiterated by
situating the research question within the wider debate on the existence of agency. This brings together a form of dance practice, concerning the location of agency in movement through kinesthesia, with the debate about the existence of agency, in the context of post-modern thought about the arts and representation.

In sum, given the stated dual nature of the research question, the whole study is articulated along a parallel development of practice and theory. According to numerous scholars (Foster, 2011; Noland, 2009; Sklar, 2001) and practitioners (Bannerman et al. 2006) an imbalance exists between the credibility afforded to constructivist interpretations of bodily practices in comparison to experiential accounts of the lived body. Approaching this study from a dancer's perspective and interweaving practice with theory can contribute to redress that imbalance by reinforcing the credibility in the subject's bodily experience.
Introduction

ENDNOTES

1 The term 'intentional agency' refers here to agency as actively employed by the subject in the pursuit of a specific aim, as opposed to the generic reference to the abstract notion of agency as 'decision-making capacity.'

2 While also idiosyncratic movements can become part of the trained dancer's embeddedness, I am here referring, specifically, to instances of idiosyncratic movements that do not yet belong to the dancer's movement habits.

3 'Genre abjection' is here to be intended as the dancer's deliberate self-exclusion from the dance genres (which may also include specific schools or movement styles) that constituted her formal training background and have become part of her embedded movement habits. It is a self-exclusion that is actively elicited by the dancer, as if seeking to be disowned by genre for being kinetically objectionable.

4 The term 'normativity' identifies as the set of prescriptive criteria perpetuated by established dance genres, schools or movement styles, and through which the latter perpetuate themselves.

5 It is important to notice that the non-reliance of the body on known techniques and vocabularies as it creates movement within the framework I have established does not imply the absence of technique – loosely intended as kinetic modalities suited to a specific framework. The techniques rejected are only those that belong to the dancer's formal training and now constituted her embedded movement habits. In the search for oppositional movement, new techniques and vocabularies will be developed, born out of the specific kinetic research elicited by the particular nature of the input the dancer is engaging with, as opposed to pre-existing and borrowed movement techniques and vocabularies through which the input has to be forcibly expressed.

6 The use of the term 'tactic' is derived from de Certeau’s system-user theory, which will be presented in greater detail in chapter three. Tactics are to be intended as actions intentionally carried out with the aim of altering the rules and regulations of normativity, if this is deemed beneficial to the subject implementing them.

7 In describing the kinesthetic modes as 'tactics,' a notion derived from the theory of French scholar Michel de Certeau, I present them as the means though which agency implements opposition or, which is the same, through which agency realises itself.

8 By 'movement vocabulary' I refer to predetermined sets of fixed equivalences between a given movement and a related meaning.

9 Although I had created improvisational movements on many previous occasions and while, in doing so, the movements and sequences of movements that had emerged were unscripted and unrehearsed, they retained the familiar traits of the techniques I had acquired through years of dance training and that had become my habitual way of moving.

10 From 1993 to 2001, I was also working as a dance university lecturer. This also involved teaching to students the techniques described above, which had the unintended effect of further entrenching within me a normative understanding of dance.

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12 Ellen Webb is an improviser and performer who collaborated, among others, with American choreographer Anna Halprin. In her account of the similarities between Zen Buddhism and improvisation Webb (2003) observes that, when improvising, a state of attentiveness can be reached, in which movement possibilities are acknowledged as themselves, and the dancer does not identify herself with them. The concept is clarified by an example relating to thoughts and emotions rather than movements:

as I become more attentive… my thoughts become simply thoughts rather than the truth…
My feelings are just feelings, pain instead of my pain, anger rather than my anger.

Webb, 2003, p. 242, (original emphasis)

13 What is understood here by 'dance sensibility' is an individual's understanding of what dance is and the related expectations of what it should look like, which includes a value judgment on what movements are acceptable.

14 It should be noted that possessing agency does not automatically implies being oppositional. Despite possessing the capacity to make choices that are independent of normativity, the dancer may still decide to continue moving in accordance to the embedded criteria of her training, rather than oppositionally. However, since this research focuses on the manner in which a trained body can oppose normativity, it is generally assumed that the oppositional potential of the dancer's agency will be exploited.

15 Butler (2011 [1993]) Bodies that Matter.

16 A tactic could consist of physical actions, such as the repetition of a normative movement in order to deconstruct it and manipulate it into an oppositional one. However tactics could also be of a more abstract nature, such as the act of accessing areas of kinetic life that do not pertain to dance, from where to elicit kinesthetic memories, as a basis for the elaboration of suitable oppositional movement. Both these examples are instances of kinesthetic modes, specific tactics that resulted from my kinesthetic engagement with oppositional agency, and that I introduce in chapter five.

17 As further proof that the implementation of the practice is not subject to the understanding of the theory, when I was first introduced to oppositional practice as part of my collaboration with Rosemary Butcher, at no point was my engagement with the practice accompanied by the knowledge of its relation with the theory.

18 This is also true of my initial contact with oppositional practice, namely my first collaboration with Rosemary Butcher.


CHAPTER 1

Agents of dissensus: situating oppositional practice

1.1 Overview

In this chapter, I will contextualise my oppositional practice in relation to the approaches of other artists who rejected the use of established dance techniques and movement vocabularies. I argue that agency has guided these trained dancers and choreographers through a process of dis-embeddedness and oppositional movement creation.

As it is the case for my practice and for my first experience of an oppositional engagement with movement, namely my collaboration with Rosemary Butcher\(^1\) for the dance film *The Return*, also the approaches that I will consider in contextualising my practice make use of improvisation as one of the main tactics in the creation of oppositional movement. As anticipated, Butcher asked that I refrained from using the kinetic strategies of my formal training – which are embedded in me – when improvising. My only point of kinetic reference became the inarticulate and kinetically ungraspable notion of rejection of my formal training, rather than clearly defined, identifiable kinetic alternatives. I argue that the oppositional movement with
which that gap of indeterminacy was slowly filled emerged from manipulating my awareness of movement through a sense of positive resourcefulness, which I identify with agency. I propose this equivalence as a logical explanation to the fact that, albeit with great difficulty, I eventually began to move in ways that appeared devoid of recognisable links to my movement habits. But I also suggest that agency was at play because of my perceived sense of having the ability to create oppositional movement even prior to doing so, when still in a state that I could at best describe as kinetically confounded.

The importance of agency in constituting improvisation is implicitly highlighted by British scholar and practitioner Vida Midgelow when expressing the suitability of the notion of *nomadism* as a means to interpret the body of the improviser (Midgelow, 2012). Nomadism is a concept developed by feminist philosopher Braidotti, suggesting that, while socially and culturally marked, subjects are also able to resist established behavioural, and intellectual, norms. This implies that subjects possess agency. When applied to improvisation, the agency of the nomadic subject can similarly interpret the improviser's ability to "resist or resituate codified languages and established ways of dancing" (Midgelow, 2012, p. 6). The importance of agency in improvisation (whether in the social or artistic context) is further underlined by Midgelow's reference to the remark of music and literary scholar Daniel Fischlin: "Improvisatory agency has an especially pressing, unexamined, and under-explored reality that demands our attention" (Fischlin quoted in Midgelow, 2012, p.3).

Fischlin's statement resonates with my research both because it illustrates a lack of awareness about the role agency in improvisational practice, and because it
articulates the rationale for remedying this situation. As already acknowledged, however, there is not unanimous agreement on the fact that individuals possess agency. There are theoretical approaches, particularly in the social sciences, that understand the subjects as devoid of any real autonomy, and the body as exclusively constituted by inescapable cultural imperatives. This is a conception that I challenge, starting from the next chapter.

The practitioners to whom I will refer in this chapter did not expressly articulate the role of agency as part of their non-normative approach to dance. The use of agency in their work and approaches is a functional means to an end, a collateral and often unaware and unreported effect of their primary kinetic engagement, namely the creation of alternatives to normative movement. These practitioners focus on, and perceive themselves as, engaging in their practice rather than in the exercise of applying agency.

The attention of this research, on the other hand, is specifically directed towards agency as the catalyst for oppositional practice. Specifically, this chapter individuates the agency implied in the approaches presented, whether manifested in the form of choreographic solutions, in the relation between the choreographer and the dancer, in their training choices, or in the conundrum of the trained dancer's path to the creation of movements that resist the conditioning of formal training. I identify a range of tactics through which agency is activated both in the choreographer and in the performers. To evidence more clearly the way in which these practices situate my study, I will describe their engagement with movement in relation to the concepts that underpin the debate on agency as developed in the course of the research, and
the findings of the research. These concepts have already been anticipated in the introduction, namely the concepts of abject body, dissensus, tactics and kinesthesia.

Given that my interest in oppositional improvisation was initially elicited by my collaboration with Rosemary Butcher, in situating my practice within the framework of applications and manifestations of opposition in dance, I will especially focus on the role and effect of agency in Butcher's approach. I will further extend the reach of the contextualisation to the way in which agency can be understood to inform, respectively, the approach of American dancer and choreographer Anna Halprin, the practice of Contact Improvisation (CI) and, briefly, the training tactics of Judson Dance Theater member Elaine Summers. The relevance of these instances rests, on the one hand, in the fact that, while different from those that I have identified in my own practice, the agentic tactics they employed in the creation of oppositional movement were also of a non-technique based and improvisational nature. On the other hand, their approach was representative of a new understanding of dance that exerted a strong influence at the time Butcher was developing as a young artist; further, Butcher came into direct contact with the teachings of Halprin, CI's creator Steve Paxton and Summers. This is not to say that these are the only artists to have influenced Butcher; neither is the analysis of their approaches to be intended as an exhaustive account of all the practices and modalities in which agency informs opposition. On both counts, the contextualisation is meant as a targeted exploration of a limited number of representative instances aimed at framing my practice.

I argue that, in relation to the established normativity of formal dance training, oppositional approaches can be understood as an attempt to voluntarily place the
body in a condition of dissensus, to make it become an abject body. In doing this, these approaches employ different tactics which, irrespective of the rationale given by the practitioner as the reason for adopting them, constitute a detraining process: an agency-informed process of disruption of the normative use of kinesthesia in favour of an oppositional one. Agency is the intellectual foundation and practical enabler for detraining. It is the agency-informed engagement with the practice that allows for the identification and implementation of oppositional kinesthetic (or choreographic) tactics through which the normative body is recast as an abject one.

In turn, kinesthesia contributes to the shaping of those tactics by informing agency. The contribution of kinesthesia, however, is often not identifiable as it is more subtle than that of agency. Unlike agency, which is eventually overtly manifested in the choreographic or kinetic choices, kinesthesia, as a state of awareness, is not manifested in embodied form. Access to kinesthesia is gained through a first-person perspective, which is not available when, as I do in the chapter, I examine other practitioners' engagement from a third-person standpoint. For this reason, as described in the latter part of this study, in order to observe and unravel the modalities of the interaction between agency and kinesthesia, I have adopted a methodology that allows me to have first-person access to the oppositional process. This consists in experiencing directly the process by creating my own improvised oppositional movement.

Before considering how agency informs the improvisatory detraining tactics in the context of Butcher's, Summer's, Halprin's and CI's pursuit of artistic dissensus, the ensuing section provides a brief account of the character and emergence of British
New Dance, an oppositional approach to dance that developed at the time Butcher was forming as a young artist, and of which she is considered to be an exponent. However, this is not to be intended as a comprehensive account of British New Dance. It is functional to framing the subsequent analysis of the oppositional approaches anticipated above; as such, its focus will be limited to the aspects and connections relevant to those approaches.

1.2 Setting the scene: British New Dance's beginnings

During the sixties and seventies a new dance sensibility emerged both in Great Britain and the United States (Banes, 1987), respectively shaping American postmodern dance and British New Dance, introducing an experimental approach to dance and a new understanding of the notion of dance (Claid, 2006). New Dance practitioner Fergus Early warned of the impossibility of describing New Dance in terms of a homogeneous style, and understood it instead as an attitude that could be summed up in the idea of 'liberation' (Jordan, 1992). This is to be understood as the act of reclaiming the artistic and political freedom which is openly or implicitly denied by the strictures imposed by conventions. The growth of British New Dance was aided, on the one hand, by incidental events: by the time British contemporary dance began to develop, it became simultaneously exposed to American modern dance and to a contrasting approach to it that had already emerged in the United States, namely postmodern dance (Jordan, 1992). On the other hand, however, the development of New Dance was also fostered by London School of Contemporary Dance and Dartington College of Arts. These centres had a crucial influence on two of the most prominent New Dance groups, Strider and X6 Collective (Jordan, 1992).
While LSCD provided the initial conditions for an approach that would be conducive to New Dance in Britain, Dartington offered more explicit radical opportunities for its accomplishment.

Founded in 1966 by philanthropist Robin Howard and initially intended as a school for the teaching and practice of modern dance (Jordan, 1992), LSCD was also to play a crucial role in the emergence of British New Dance. Almost all the member of two of the most representative New Dance groups, Strider and X6 Collective had at one point, been students at LSCD. In the name of artistic openness, Robin Howard encouraged experimentation by means of "cultivating opposition" (Jordan, 1992, p. 14).

Prior to founding Strider, in 1972, Richard Alston was a student at LSCD, which he joined in 1967 despite his training as a visual artist and his very limited dance experience. According to Jordan (1992), Alston's initial attempt to take dance in a new direction was significantly informed by his reading of an interview with American choreographer Anna Halprin, who used improvisation, task-based movements and repetition, collaborated with visual artists, and whose early works were "a deliberate, spontaneous, joyous confusions of life and art" (Banes, 1987, p. 9). Significant, for Alston's orientation, was also his knowledge of the two composition workshops taught by Robert Dunn at Cunningham’s studio between 1960 and 1962, and of the approach employed by Judson Theater, which originated from them (Jordan, 1992).

Initially Alston rejected modern dance, in the form of Graham's emotional intensity,
in favour of Merce Cunningham's formal – but not conventional – approach (Jordan, 1992). Alston recognised the importance of Cunningham's influence on his understanding of dance, particularly with regard to the suitability for abstract movements, and independence from musical scores, emotional associations and theatricality. However, by 1972, when he left LSCD to found Strider, Alston favoured an approach that he described as "post-Cunningham" (Jordan, 1992, p. 36). Instrumental to Strider's focus on a post-Cunningham approach was the group's collaboration with American postmodern choreographer and head of dance at Dartington College of Arts, Mary Fulkerson, who had studied with Cunningham as well as Halprin (Novack, 1990). Already a centre for innovation in dance under Rudolf Laban's student Kurt Jooss (1934-1940), under Mary Fulkerson, in the 1960, Dartington saw the acceptance of non-technical movement as dance material and the introduction of release and contact improvisation in British dance (Mackrell, 1992; Claid, 2006).

Fulkerson focused on the importance of the dancers' individual qualities and of exploring the relation between movement and the mechanics of one's own body, as opposed to achieving technical perfection within a given dance style by learning to reproduce exactly pre-designed movements. Even more significantly, Fulkerson was opposed to the very notion that only certain movements would be considered dance (Mackrell, 1992). Fulkerson's sentiment found correspondence in the approach to dance offered by release and contact improvisation, taught by Jean Skinner and Steve Paxton. This led Fulkerson to explore improvisation and movement not based on technique (Mackrell, 1992).
In 1974 *Strider* members studied release and contact improvisation with Fulkerson. Commenting on the effect of *Strider*’s exposure to American postmodern movement solutions, Fulkerson remarked that the company "went from upright to horizontal" (Fulkerson in Jordan, 1992, p. 37), referring to the departure from a balletic verticality in favour of the introduction of floor-work and of the more pedestrian-orientated movement qualities of contact and release improvisation. An equivalent approach to movement was embraced by the other prominent New Dance group at that time, *X6 Collective*.

Founded in 1976, *X6 Collective* was both a group and a space available to the dance community as a whole for rehearsing, performing and teaching. Like *Strider* before them, *X6* established links with Dartington College of Arts and were taught release improvisation by Mary Fulkerson, who also arranged for them to be taught Contact Improvisation by its creator, Steve Paxton. Other guests teachers invited by Fulkerson at Dartington included American postmodern dancers such as Lisa Nelson, Simone Forti and Trisha Brown, who introduced pedestrian movement, improvisation, matter-of-fact movement style, and other movement modalities characteristic of *Judson Church* in the 1960s (Claid, 2006). *X6* artists incorporated American postmodern dance in their practice, not because they viewed it as a source of ready-made movement vocabularies but because its approach was consistent with the radical social and political views they subscribed to. The deconstruction and re-working of dance traditions and of the trained bodies that perpetuated them was a political expression stating the non-acceptance of prescriptive structures:

We deconstructed the physical patterns of coded conventional performance techniques: ballet, contemporary dance and gymnastics… Our new tools with
which to do this were body-mind centring, Aikido, Alexander technique and release-based knowledges.

Claid, 2006, p. 80

These body-mind techniques made dancers focus on the internal anatomy of their bodies, instead of force-modelling the body on the external representation of a coded technique. The centrality of the subject over the established rules of normativity was further reflected in the democratic, non-hierarchical structure of the group and in the choice of improvisation as a choreographic tool: "as choreography derived from improvisation, each body has an individual language of eccentric gesture" (Claid, 2006, p. 87).

The political element of British New Dance was not shared by all New Dance artists. Even within X6, not everybody adhered to it. Eventually the basic principles on which X6 was created, namely the almost exclusive focus on ideas, the choice to express them in collective works and through a non-style would cause the group's breakup (Jordan, 1992). X6 members Betsy Gregory and Craig Givens, for instance, lamented the monotony of reiterating the same political messages and expressed the wish to return to more technical dancing (Jordan, 1992). Other artists observed that the importance placed on communicating ideas often translated in disregard for the way in which works were presented, resulting in dances that could be described as "unfinished" (Jordan, 1992, p. 85). This caused frustration in some artists; X6 Kate Flatt lamented:

We could have concentrated on making better dance… the work produced was often very low in its expectations of itself.

Flatt quoted in Jordan, 1992, p. 85
One of the main achievements of Strider and X6 Collective was to render dancers independent of the normativity of prescriptive practices, both politically and kinetically, to activate the dancers' agency and put them in control of their own decisions. This expanded the understanding of what dance is, to include the notion that dance may contain non-technical movements or revised versions of conventional techniques. However, as recognized by group members Claid and Lansley, although artists initially benefited from the practical advantages offered by X6, as well as from the possibility it gave them to innovate and experiment, its collective structure eventually caused them to feel unable to express themselves and to pursue their ambitions (Jordan, 1992). Some artists left X6 Collective because they were dissatisfied with the unfinished character of the dance-works created or because they were eventually unhappy with dance being exclusively focused on politics. These two reasons were also what kept other artists from joining X6 in the first place. One of these artists was Rosemary Butcher.

1.3 Rosemary Butcher: New Dance's non political expression

Born in Bristol in 1947, Butcher choreographed her first work in 1974 for the Scottish Ballet Moveable Workshop, and in 1975 formed the Rosemary Butcher Dance Company (Bremser, 1999). Like Strider and X6, Butcher had links with LSCD and, in particular, with Dartington College where she studied choreography, improvisation and Graham technique on a Dance and Theatre Course between 1965 and 1968.13

While Butcher's dance-making embraces the non-normative character of British New
Dance, it does not share the political motivations of many of its artists. With regard to the widespread tendency to produce works that disregarded the importance of what would be traditionally considered a professional-looking result, Butcher commented: "People didn't work long enough at things" (Butcher in Jordan, 1992, p. 85). In relation to the link between politics and dance and, specifically, to the suggestion that her work might have political meanings, Butcher has always emphasised that any alleged political significance was unintentional, never her main intention (Jordan, 1992).

In spite of her non-political stance, Butcher is arguably the New Dance practitioner who has been most significantly influenced by American postmodern dance, as clearly suggested by the apposition of Yvonne Rainer's *NO Manifesto* (1965) as the symbolic starting point of her career, on the timeline presented on her website. Although Butcher studied with Fulkerson (Claid, 2006) and, in 1976, attended a contact improvisation course taught by Paxton at Dartington (Jordan, 1992; http://rosemarybutcher.com/), her most significant exposure to American postmodern dance resulted from her travels to the United States. In 1968-69 Butcher studied in the United States, learning Doris Humphrey technique at the University of Maryland, and taking classes at the Merce Cunningham Studio in New York (Bremser, 1999). However, it was on her return to New York in 1970-72 that she developed a particular interest in the postmodern choreographers’ approaches to movement and choreography (Jordan, 1992). During this period, Butcher studied with *Judson Dance Theater's* Elaine Summers and Yvonne Rainer as well as with Anna Halprin, who pioneered non-technical improvisational dance in the United States (Jordan, 1992). Butcher openly admitted the significance of American postmodern dance as a source
of inspiration for her work when, in reference to Judson Dance Theater's artists Simone Forti, Meredith Monk, Lucinda Childs, Yvonne Rainer, and Steve Paxton, she stated: "They were my heroes… In their classes, I sought my own identity and that which truly interested me" (Butcher in Schneider, 2003).

Of particular artistic resonance for Butcher was Trisha Brown’s performance Walking on the Wall (1971), which she witnessed in New York in the spring of 1971 (Butcher, 1992). In this work – which included Steve Paxton among other performers – everyday movements achieved subject status, and commanded attention by being displaced. Dancers performed normal activities such as walking in an unlikely, gravity-defying dance scenario that saw them attached to a system of pulleys and ropes. This allowed performers to execute movements that were normal in themselves, but anomalous in that they were occurring away from the ground. Butcher, who had already rejected a conception of dance based on the drama of Graham’s style and the technical virtuosity of ballet, adopted pedestrian and improvisatory movement principles, repetitions, and non-narrative structures (Jordan, 1992).

1.4 Agency: a necessity to Butcher's approach

As anticipated, due to the fact that she has been the primary influence for my decision to research the practice of oppositional improvisation, I will concentrate mainly on what could be called Rosemary Butcher's oppositional approach. In particular, I will focus on the film-work Vanishing Point (2004) to show in what practical ways oppositional agency has intervened in the shaping of the
choreographic element and the relation between the choreographer and the dancer; I will further look at Butcher's 2010 reworking of Allan Kaprow's *18 Happenings in 6 parts* (1959), to follow how the use of oppositional agency evolved through her artistic development.

I suggest that agency is the enabler of Butcher's departure from a normative notion of dance in favour of the artistic sensibility and focus described by the following remark:

> There is… art that is literal, in the sense that it tells a story or presents a moral or fulfils a task… There is, however, another, and for me much more interesting artistic tradition, the art of the conceptual.  
> Butcher, 1992, p. 18

Butcher's approach is agentic insofar as, by embracing the art of the conceptual, she chooses a non-normative\(^{15}\) approach to dance-making. Butcher's mention of literal art, intended as the telling of a story, the fulfilling of a task or the presentation of a moral, entails a sense of development eventually culminating in a resolution, be it the ending of the story, the accomplishment of the task, or the reaching of a moral conclusion. As such, whether of a chronological, logical, practical or emotive nature, a literal-art approach provides, in its application to dance, a progressive and descriptive account that articulates a narrative structure. The narrative element that emerges is representational in nature, in the sense that the narration portrays events or situations that allegedly took place elsewhere and at different time; it is the representation of an absent reality, choreographically brought into being by the moving bodies of the performers, through the codification of acknowledged movement vocabularies and techniques. As described by Butcher – whose artistic
sensibility is strongly informed by the visual arts (Butcher, 2008) – the literal approach to art is not limited to dance. The narrative element that is produced by its application within dance can be understood as equivalent to the representational element in the visual arts, where the meaning of the art work rests with what it portrays. In both cases, the artwork is the illusionary representation of an absent reality. In the context of his study on conceptual art (which does not share the representational nature of traditional visual art works), Godfrey (1998) explains the representational nature of a traditional work of art:

A work of art normally behaves as if it is a statement: 'This is a portrait of the Mona Lisa'… We accept it both as a representation and as being ipso facto art.

Godfrey, 1998, p. 6, emphasis added

I consider Butcher's decision to pursue, as she termed it, the art of the conceptual as having fundamental choreographic implications, as it entails abandoning\(^{16}\) (in fact, opposing) the reliance on the kinetic frameworks offered by dance genres; while these are suitable for a narrative/representational choreography, not only are they not useful for a conceptual approach, but they are incompatible with it: since the techniques and movement vocabularies of established genres are means of communication designed to accommodate the narrative purposes of literal approaches, making use of them would automatically cause the work to revert to a representational logic.\(^{17}\)

The agentic rejection of the meaning-making conventions employed by literal practices (the narrative structure and the movement vocabularies through which meaning is expressed) effectively recasts the performer's body as a body unmediated
by the codified framework of dance genres. For the choreographer, engaged in the task of expressing a concept through the dancer's body, this is problematic because, as Butcher explained in the course of an informal conversation I had with her, the body is not an object:

I have a slight problem with the idea of concept and performance, because in my mind it’s easier to be conceptual, so to speak, in relation to visual art and sculpture, where you have something concrete that you can refer to, or apply to... but in the actual performance you can never get away from the identity of the performer. So, you are caught all the time between that personality who enables the work to be performed and the concept itself, because the person is not an object.

Butcher, April 2005

Butcher's observation highlights a tension between her interest in the art of the conceptual and the possibility of putting such approach into practice in dance, within the limitations that it imposes on the use of the medium, namely having to use a body that is unrestrained by the acknowledged kinetic codes employed by dance genres. The dance techniques and vocabularies of genre-based choreographies deliver intelligible narratives by homogenising the body's subjectivity into a pre-defined framework of acknowledged kinetic codes. This places the body under a level of control comparable to that offered to visual artists by the fixed and invariable nature of the objects and materials they use in their works. In the absence of codified movement vocabularies to which to refer in the creation and interpretation of movement, the subjective nature of the latter might communicate meanings different from those intended by the choreographer.

The refusal of orthodox movement solutions – demanded by Butcher's preference for the art of the conceptual – determines the need to find alternative meaning-making
tactics that allow for the concepts that the choreographer intends to communicate to be expressed through the dancers' bodies, through subjectivities that are not being mediated by an acknowledged system of kinetic modalities. This involves the rethinking of structural choreographic choices, kinetic solutions, and the relation between the choreographer and the dancer. In this respect, Butcher's statement highlights the needs to engage in a decision-making process that necessarily relies upon the choreographer's agency, the choreographer's ability to make choices outside the established parameters of the discipline.

The conundrum of how to create meaning through the dancer's unmediated subjectivity is solved by Butcher's agentic tactic of adopting a ‘sympathetic’ objectification of the dancing body, whereby she is able to express the intended concept by selecting suitable kinetic material from the dancer's highly subjective movement, in a process of guided improvisation. In some of her later work, however, Butcher's agency was realised in the decision of refraining entirely from selecting the dancers' movements and, instead, created a framework within which the movement choices were ultimately the responsibility of the dancers.

To sum up, I argue that agency is, at once, the enabler for Butcher's intellectual decision to pursue a non-literal approach to dance-making and the force guiding the search for the non-normative kinetic tactics compatible with that approach. Furthermore, given the previously highlighted concern that making use of established movement vocabularies could automatically cause the work to revert to a representational logic, by facilitating the identification of alternative meaning-making tactics, not only does agency serve the purpose of implementing workable
solutions for a concept-centred\textsuperscript{21} dance practice, but it also fulfils the necessary task of actively ensuring that the normative embeddedness that perpetuates literal approaches to dance is effectively excluded. The opposition against the established criteria of dance genres demanded by the practices and approaches belonging to what Butcher described as 'the art of the conceptual' explains retrospectively the previously introduced description of these practices as oppositional.

1.5 \textit{Vanishing Point: oppositional agency and choreographic tactics}

In \textit{Vanishing Point},\textsuperscript{22} agency operates at different levels. The aim of the ensuing analysis is to explore the ways in which agency manifests itself, the ways in which it informs Butcher's decisions as a choreographer and it enables the creative output of the dancer.\textsuperscript{23} \textit{Vanishing Point} is a fifteen-minute film shot in the Andalusian desert, featuring only one female performer. It appears to depict the strenuous journey of a woman across the desert. The camera-shot framing the performer’s movement appears virtually still throughout the whole film. The upper part of the screen is permanently occupied by a pale, white sky while, in the lower part, the undulating pattern of the desert’s off-white sand is just about discernable in the glary foreground. Sky and sand are separated by a thin, gray horizon line. For the first two minutes, this is all that is visible, while slow, repetitive and discordant harmonies of brass and strings produce a musical score reminiscent of hunting horns and Middle Eastern melodies. The sound is insinuating and daunting, but calming and ethereal at the same time.

Eventually, a minuscule, pulsating black dot appears on the horizon. The dot
progressively grows in size, to become a vertical segment of intermittently decreasing height until, finally, it is recognisable as a human being falling on its knees at regular intervals. Its height is continuously and regularly halved and regained as the advancing figure in the distance falls and returns to standing position. This succession of movements, evenly spaced in time, allows the viewer to detect the repetitive pattern even before the dancer is distinguishable. Throughout the film, the same cycle of falls and recoveries, identically executed, is repeated thirteen times. The performer is devoid of any specific connotation. Her clothes consist of loose-fitting top and trousers, seemingly of the same natural material, of a pale gray colour, just slightly darker than the surrounding sand. The dancer’s head is always oriented slightly downwards and her gaze is never directed into the camera. The film makes no use of complex lighting. The only light source appears to be natural sun-light, glary and pervasive, which creates a dreamy atmosphere and contributes to the pictorial quality of the image.

Butcher's agency is manifested in the oppositional nature of the work's aim and structure. As anticipated, I argue that, on the one hand, Butcher's agency is expressed at the onset, in her intellectual decision to create a work that focuses on a concept rather than on a narrative as subject matter. On the other hand, agency enables, and is manifested in, the tactics through which Butcher achieves her objective, in the practical task of guiding the creation of choreographic solutions through which opposition is realised in movement. Both the intellectual and the practical aspects of Butcher's approach distance her from the established dance genres, thus challenging the embedded normativity. It was also further highlighted that the specific role of agentic tactics in the realisation of oppositional practice has the purpose,
simultaneously, to enforce the negation of normative kinetic solutions and to do this by creating viable alternatives to a literal approach to dance. Strictly speaking, this distinction identifies two categories of oppositional tactics: those in which agency is employed with the preventative aim to avoid the trained body's automatic normative responses, and those in which agency informs the individuation of solutions that differ from those responses. However, as I have already observed, while these two modalities of agentic engagement are logically distinct, they are mutually complementary and, for oppositional practice to emerge, they must be simultaneously implemented. They are two sides of the same oppositional action.

In the discussion above (pp. 35-36), I have identified the avoidance of narrative and established movement techniques and vocabularies as some of the oppositional tactics through which agency manifests itself in *Vanishing Point*. Other instances of agentic expression are the use of repetition and the interdisciplinary character of Butcher's approach. Through the use of oppositional tactics, Butcher's agency intentionally creates an abject moving body, by placing it in a position of dissensus.

The effectiveness and implementation of narrative avoidance as an oppositional tactic can be better outlined by framing the notion of narrative more specifically. What is referred to, here, as 'narrative' is a sense of perceived development in the set of initial circumstances presented as the starting point of the work. In these terms, a narrative can be understood as a progression of factual or affective occurrences linked by reciprocal relations of cause and effect and articulated through the interaction between dancers or between the dancers and the performance environment. I suggest that, in *Vanishing Point*, Butcher succeeds in eliminating
narrative connotations by opposing one of the aspects of the literal approach to
dance: the existence and role of the protagonist, intended as the subject of a narrative
articulation. The rationale behind this is that the existence of a narrative relies on the
presence of characters whose development (whether emotive, intellectual or relating
to the tangible circumstances) enables the progression of a story-line. Therefore, a
non-narrative structure can be achieved by eliminating the protagonist. This does not
require the physical removal of performers from the dance-work; in Vanishing Point
Butcher achieved the erasure of the protagonist by ensuring that the performer is a
bodily presence devoid of discernable personality traits and emotional engagement, a
non-protagonist. As the dancer is not being perceived as a distinctive, willed,
individuality, her movement is not being interpreted as potentially expressive of a
purpose that would become the narrative of the work.

The neutralisation of the protagonist is a specific intervention, functional to the
implementation of the agentic tactic of narrative avoidance; it is an intervention that,
insofar as it represents a non-normative choice through which the oppositional
approach is being satisfied, can itself be considered as an agentic tactic. Moreover, it
is itself realised by engaging further in specific, targeted, interventions at different
levels: visual, emotional and kinetic. In turn, each of these interventions can be
regarded as a further tactic, a manifestation of agency, just like the original agency-
informed challenge to which they provide a solution.

In visual terms, the perception of the performer as protagonist is avoided by ensuring
that her appearance is not affirming of a defined individuality. As remarked, the
outfit worn by the dancer is very simple and understated. It is of a neutral colour and
it blends in with the surrounding environment. Although clearly distinguishable, the performer is not a distinctive presence. Her body is unmarked: there are no references to her status, age or role. Even her gender has no relevance as a defining attribute. Her neutrality, hence the absence of a protagonist figure, is reinforced by the fact that not only is she inconspicuous in relation to the environment, but she appears to be an integral part of it. The wind visibly affects her. Her legs are kept straight even when walking towards the camera; it is the force of the wind that seems to power the movement of her body by causing it to oscillate from side to side, thus inducing her advancement. The dancer appears as a natural extension of the environment.

On an emotional level, the viewer is prevented from perceiving the performer in *Vanishing Point* as defined by a distinctive personality and aim, since access is being negated to the performer's interiority, as it were. This is achieved by ensuring that the dancer never looks directly into the camera. This allows for a more detached reading of the choreographic material. The performer's presence is not strongly felt by the viewer and, consequently, the way in which the dancer moves is not interpreted as an expression of her specific individuality. From a visual and emotive point of view, the performer is like a blank canvas. Like a canvas, her presence is justified by her usefulness: she is a means to an end, a tool for the communication of a concept, not meaningful in her own right.

The non-existence of an individuality, thus of a protagonist with whom to empathise, is further reiterated, on a kinetic level, by incongruences in the movement of the performer. The dancer’s conscious control over her own body appears suspended and
the body seems to be operating automatically, more like an empty shell that allows the movement to be executed, than the body of an individual engaged in the movement. Aspects of her movement seem contradictory. Each time the dancer falls on her knees, seemingly exhausted, her left arm promptly moves out and forward, quickly followed by the other, in a controlled and rather elegant fashion. Her arms are then held out in front, parallel to the ground. Their movement does not appear strained and fatigued. The immediacy and quality of the action seem to show an energy level that is inconsistent with the apparent exhaustion of the dancer, suggested by her staggered walk. There seems to be a force, guiding the movement of the arms, which is not affected or it is only marginally affected by the effort the rest of the body appears to be enduring. It is as if the dancer is possessed and no longer in control of her own body. This leads to a further de-individualization of the dancer as protagonist, and contributes to discourage a narrative interpretation.

It could be argued that, despite the remarks offered so far, it is wrong to claim that Vanishing Point does not present a narrative, since it depicts an individual's hazardous journey across a desert. Although it is true that the film shows a body travelling through the desert, the observation that a narrative exists does not take into consideration the effect of reiterated movement. As the dancer advances, she continuously repeats the same exact sequence of movements, from the moment she appears in the distance on the horizon until she moves past the camera, towards the new horizon ahead. The implication is that the movement will be endlessly repeated even once the camera is no longer filming the dancer. This suggests a journey that has no beginning and no end, suspended in a timeless dimension of infinite reiteration. The absence of any perceived progression or resolution precludes the
understanding of *Vanishing Point* as a narrative-based work. The journey that the human figure is undertaking, in other words, is not the representational substitute for an absent reality, namely an instance of a specific journey-experience but, rather, it refers to 'journey' as the concept of 'journeying', not a narrative instance but a concept. The concept is made to arise from the movement of the performer through the kinetic tactic of repetition.

Butcher's use of repetition is especially significant in the light of her earlier remark relating to the greater ease with which it is possible for artists to be conceptual if operating within the visual arts rather than dance, since they do not have to use the body as medium. Specifically, Butcher's appears to pursue, within dance, a tactical use of reiteration equivalent to that adopted by Andy Warhol in the visual arts. In both cases, the works do not attempt to provide the illusionary effect of an absent reality and, paradoxically, they achieve this not by avoiding to represent reality (for instance through abstraction) but by repeatedly re-presenting it.

In *Campbell's Soup Cans* (1962) Warhol produced thirty-two identical images of a can of Campbell's soup. The images had no discernable traces of brushstrokes, so as to appear mechanically produced, effectively making them not susceptible to the value judgements that associated the perceived worthiness of an artwork with the artist's touch (Godfrey, 1998). Furthermore, because of the number of times the image is repeated, the thirty-two canvases do not remain unnoticed; they stand out for what they are: a multitude of canvases. This suggests that the significance of the artwork is not to be found exclusively in the subject matter being represented.
Godfrey observed:

As Duchamp remarked of Warhol, "when someone takes fifty Campbell’s soup cans and puts them on canvas, it is not the retinal image which concerns us. What does interest us is the concept which wants to transfer fifty Campbell’s soup cans to canvas".

Godfrey, 1998, p. 152

In *Vanishing Point*, Butcher echoes, in dance, Warhol's approach to *Campbell's Soup Cans* in the visual arts. By repeatedly reiterating the same movement phrase, Butcher forces the viewer to find meaning elsewhere: not in the movement phrase as representation of a specific narrative event but in the movement phrase as repeatedly re-presented by repetitions. As an oppositional tactic, repetition is crucial for its role in *Vanishing Point* and, in a wider sense, it is an important tactic in Butcher's approach to dance-making. It is a tactic that Butcher has prominently used, for instance, in *White* (2003) and *Hidden Voices* (2004). Repetition, as part of a chain of other tactics (the refusal of techniques and movement vocabularies, and the – emotional, visual, kinetic – interventions for the erasure of the protagonist), emerges therefore as a further oppositional decision through which Butcher's agency has ensured that *Vanishing Point* is disassociated from the art of the literal and affiliated instead to the art of the conceptual.

While the tactical refusal of movement vocabularies and techniques and the use of relentless repetition place *Vanishing Point* within the art of the conceptual by providing it with the means to communicate a non-literal subject matter, they also facilitate its opposition to normativity in terms of its form, the manner in which the subject matter is expressed. Because they have no discernable correlation to established dance genres, both these tactics prevent *Vanishing Point* from being
evaluated according to the parameters that define the expectations for the discipline. This aligns Butcher's work with Dickie's institutional theory\textsuperscript{26} of art, according to which a work is considered to be art because the artist made it with the stated purpose of creating art rather than because it meets arbitrary artistic parameters (Banes, 1987). Insofar as Dickie's theory frees art from value judgments and the artist from the prescriptive use of creativity they demand, the applicability of Dickie's theory to \textit{Vanishing Point} further reinforces the notion that agency informs the work with oppositional, dissensus-creating results.

To sum up, I argue that through the tactics of avoidance of movement vocabularies and techniques and introduction of the reiterative choreographic structure, agency opposes normativity while also offering alternatives, both in regard to the content and form of \textit{Vanishing Point}, thus disassociating the work from the art of the literal and constituting it as a concept-based work.

\textit{Vanishing Point}'s independence from arbitrary artistic criteria, and a further manifestation of Butcher's agency, can also be recognised in the work's interdisciplinary nature, whereby dance and film come together, in a choice that is resonant of conceptual artist Kosuth’s call to resist the compartmentalisation of artistic expression.\textsuperscript{27} In the context of \textit{Vanishing Point}'s interdisciplinary approach, agency informs, within each discipline, an oppositional use of the respective media, namely the use of image within film and the use of movement within dance. The oppositional use of movement in \textit{Vanishing Point} is the topic that has been discussed so far. Given the subject matter of this study, the oppositional use of image in relation to film will not be analysed in depth. It is however worth observing that the
oppositional character of the filmic element is immediately apparent in the seemingly counterintuitive use of still framing, which effectively disables the potentials of the medium for heightening the dynamic elements, providing up-close details of the moving body, or articulating a narrative.\textsuperscript{28} The fixity of the framing causes the image on screen to appear as if on canvass. This, alongside the soft colours and the glary light, confers painterly qualities to the image. In the same way the continuous repetition of the movement component forces viewers to look for meaning beyond the literal exteriority of the movement phrase, the fixity of the image elicits a similar intellectual leap.

In relation to both the kinetic and the filmic element, the meaning of \textit{Vanishing Point} is not accessible through a process of decodification of known vocabularies. This requires that viewers commit their personal and unique intellectual capabilities and kinesthetic experiences to interpret the movement being visually apprehended.\textsuperscript{29} In forcing interpretative choices that are outside the logic of established correspondences between movement or imagery and meaning, \textit{Vanishing Point} places agentic demands on viewers. Agency is manifested in interpreting what is being watched through a decision-making process (whether conscious or pre-reflective), whereby certain interpretative possibilities are excluded in favour of others; these choices reflect individual agency.

\subsection*{1.6 Recasting the dancer-choreographer relation in \textit{Vanishing Point}}

Butcher's decision not to use normative movements does not imply that the movements executed by the performer are just accidental. The concern expressed by
Butcher's earlier statement, in relation to the difficulty of being conceptual while using the human body, testifies to the will to find movement solutions that, while oppositional, are targeted and not accidental. Paradoxically, the problem of the choreographer maintaining control over the concept being expressed in spite of the dancer's subjectivity is solved by Butcher by delegating to the dancer the creation of movement, using improvisation. This is paradoxical, because it means that, in order to retain control, Butcher relinquishes control; her agency is manifested in eliciting the concept from the dancer's agency, as expressed in improvisation. Butcher has already identified the concept, but has not preconceptions about the details of its kinetic realisation:

I never turn up to a rehearsal with the steps or structure worked out, nor even with a fully developed idea – but I do arrive with a very strong concept.

Butcher, 1992, p. 18

In my experience of collaborating with Butcher for The Return, the improvisation was initiated by providing me with input material that could vary from a picture to a word, from the reading of a book of her choosing (prior to the improvisation practice sessions) to shared visits to art exhibitions. This preparation was done with a view to elicit from me movement that would relate to the concept of 'memories', which could be seen as one of the recurrent themes of the exhibitions we visited.

The resulting movement improvisation is the expression of how my body engaged with the issues and concerns I encountered within the conceptual areas identified by the inputs provided by Butcher. This process is the dancer's independent kinetic search, informed by the input and mediated by the dancer's agency; it is not the forced recognition of a specific concept, imposed on the dancer's individuality by the
choreographer; neither is it the re-arrangement of a predetermined vocabulary into the most suitable combination for the expression of the concept Butcher focused on.

Butcher doesn't rely on a pre-existing code which is merely altered in one way or another to suit the particular occasion; and she is singularly uninterested in known, formal structures.

Schneider, 2003, p. 36

According to Miranda Tufnell, who was part of Rosemary Butcher's dance company between 1976-82, Butcher actively opposed the normative influence of dance genres on the trained body. "[Butcher] tried to free her body of the techniques it had been trained in, and rediscover her natural style of moving" (Mackrell, 1992, p. 56).

Butcher's aim is to ensure that the dancer does not try to re-enact a given concept, but uncovers it as part of the organic process of her kinetic investigation. As I improvised, Butcher observed the movements that emerged, in order to identify the one, or ones, in which she recognised the concept she intended to explore. The choreographic process became the research for the concept as realised through the dancer's agentic choices.

To summarise, Butcher's choreographic process is constituted by three steps: providing dancers with an input, the dancer's engagement in improvisational practice, and Butcher's recognition of the suitable movements. They are succinctly summarised by Butcher as follows:

I give the dancers words, then I wait to see what happens… I try to find the key and to bring what I see up to the surface.

Schneider, 2003, p. 36
The consequence of Butcher's approach is that the movement vocabulary used to express the concept is idiosyncratic, as it depends on the subjectivity of the dancer creating the movement; the same concepts can be expressed by different dancers though different (and independently created) movement vocabularies. Crucially, this also means that Butcher did not develop, over time, a movement vocabulary system applicable to successive works. Each work employs a specific vocabulary, each time tailored to the expression of the particular concept being explored, by the specific dancers engaged in that search. In Butcher’s words: "I search for a new language for each piece that is relevant to the concept, replacing mere style with form" (Butcher, 1992, p. 21).

While the language identified by Butcher inevitably features the dancer’s subjectivity, the latter does not become the focus of the performance but, rather, it is functional to it. Butcher's approach synthesises coherently the dichotomy between her conceptual intentions and the performer’s subjectivity. In doing so, she performs a subjective objectification of the dancing body into the concept she seeks to explore.

This approach can also be understood, in relation to agency, as the synthesising of the dichotomy between Butcher's agency and the performer's agency. It is a sympathetic objectification of the dancer's agency; sympathetic, because it is not intended to rid the dancer's body of its potentials for agency: on the contrary, it finds a way of transforming the dancer's agency from a potential obstacle to a complementary means for the communication of the concept sought by the
choreographer. It is a synthesis of 'agencies' (the choreographer's and the dancer's) that realises dissensus through the intentional creation of abject bodies.\textsuperscript{37} In turn, the creation of the abject bodies is realised through kinesthesia: on the one hand, the kinesthesia through which the practitioner, in engaging with the input, searches for alternatives to the embeddedness of her own dance training; on the other hand, the kinesthesia experienced vicariously\textsuperscript{38} by Butcher, as she watches the dancer's improvisation, and that informs her recognition of specific movements as those expressing the concept that she is looking for.

In relation to previous works, in \textit{Vanishing Point} Butcher has shifted her choreographic approach from the creation of objective movement\textsuperscript{39} to the body and the exploration of concepts as expressed through and by the body (Mackrell, 1992). As this happened, Butcher has come to express her agency increasingly by embracing, rather than limiting, the practitioner's subjectivity. She has, however, exercised her control by selecting the movement solutions she deemed more appropriate to her work (Meisner, 2005). In her reinvention of Allan Kaprow's \textit{18 Happenings in 6 Parts}, Butcher's approach developed even further in the direction of achieving her choreographic aims by relinquishing control over the aesthetics of movement.

\textbf{1.7 Butcher's \textit{18 Happenings}: the agentic tactic of relinquishing control}

In \textit{18 Happenings in 6 Parts}, Kaprow planned, schematised on paper and wrote a detailed description of the actions to be carried out by each participant involved in the piece, at specified timings and locations: three rooms created in the Reuben
Gallery in Soho, New York. In each room, six different actions were to be carried out by the participants, as per Kaprow written instructions. Instead of creating a reiteration of 18 Happenings in its original format, Butcher engaged in a re-elaboration of the work. Of Kaprow's original production Butcher maintained the idea of putting in place a system, a framework, which then becomes the mechanism through which art is produced (Sachsenmaier, 2013). One of the structural elements of the framework put in place by Butcher was that dancers were to be allowed decisional freedom, to the extent that they could alter or disregard the instructions given by the choreographer (Sachsenmaier, 2013). Therefore, each performer's contribution is also expression of her lived experience and individuality.

While the performers had control over their decision-making, each of their choices was taken within a specific phase of an agreed creative process and, in turn, informed the choices they would take in each successive phase. The structure of the creative process itself, intended as the mechanism for producing the work, was discussed and devised collaboratively, through discussions between Butcher and the performers (Sachsenmaier, 2013). However, what Butcher did request was that the actions performed in 18 Happenings be improvised: while the performers were given cards with instructions on what actions to perform (some of which they had written themselves), these were not prescriptive with regards to the manner in which the requested action was to be performed; as observed, dancers were also entitled not to perform the action if they so desired. Furthermore, Butcher asked that their actions be informed by a "sense of doing something" (Sachsenmaier, 2013, p. 236) rather than by the norms of dance, and remarked on the existence of a "fine line between
'action' and 'dancing'" (Sachsenmaier, 2013, p. 236). The elements of freedom that accompanied Butcher's requests (the freedom that the performers were given within the creative process) meant that, unlike in her previous works, Butcher did not intervene in the development of the performance by selecting, out of the performers' offerings, the movements that she deemed most appropriate for the work: "We shan't know the piece until the end" (Butcher quoted in Sachsenmaier, 2013, p. 234).

In *18 Happenings*, the role of agency is two-fold. On the one hand, it informs Butcher's choreographic tactic of relinquishing the role of the choreographer, intended as the subject ultimately in charge of movement decisions. Butcher is not the first to implicitly question the role of the choreographer and, further, she did guide the performers by requesting that they did not pre-planned the movements and maintained a "sense of doing something". Nevertheless, her refraining from shaping or even selecting the performers' movements and her entrusting them completely with the execution of the actions still remains an agentic decision that challenges normative approaches to dance genres. On the other hand, in placing upon the performers the responsibility to improvise their delivery of the actions to be executed, Butcher necessarily elicits the performers' agency.

Through her career, although in varying degrees, Butcher has consistently drawn upon the improvisational movement of the dancers who collaborated with her (Lansdale, 2005). Furthermore, she has regularly chosen to work with trained dancers because of the precision of the movement they produced. The importance of precision is of particular importance in consideration of the intense use that Butcher makes of repetitions in her works. With reference to dancer Elena Giannotti
and her movement in *Hidden Voices*, Butcher remarks:

> The intensity is drawn out by the nature of the repetition, the absolute accuracy of that foot, being exactly the same distance – always.
> Butcher, 2008, p. 7

Butcher's need for precision explains her paradoxical decision to work with technically trained dancers, while at the same time requesting that they refrain from using the movement techniques they had acquired from their formal training background. In reference to *SCAN* (1999), Butcher stated:

> I was using the technical expertise of the performers but trying to get them to lose the technique but not their accuracy and performance quality.
> Butcher, 2008, p. 7

Butcher's request that the movements of her dancers be, at once, precise but not technical calls for their movement awareness, that is to say their kinesthesia to be twice engaged. On the one hand, kinesthesia is called upon in the delivery of precision in movements. Given that precision is an inherent – kinaesthesia-informed – constituent of the trained dancer's expertise, it could be argued that it will be present in the dancer's movement as a spontaneous feature; in particular, it is a feature that, because of its desirability in Butcher's work, does not require an agentic intervention aimed at countering it. On the other hand, kinesthesia is also called upon in the delivery of movement devoid of the techniques that the dancer acquired throughout her years of training. I would argue that, in this instance, the dancer's agency intervenes so as to use kinesthesia in an oppositional manner, to guide the individuation of tactics through which to create movements other than the habits and techniques that, given her training, would spontaneously emerge out of the dancer's trained body. In the case of *18 Happenings*, for instance, agency intervenes
to inform kinesthesia in such a way that the performers are prevented from crossing over to the dance side, as it were, over the fine line between action and dancing to which Butcher had alluded.

In my visual perception of the performers' movements in *18 Happenings*, I did not recognise distinguishable traces of genre-based techniques. Insofar as, according to the mirror neuron theory, by watching a dancer's movements I can experience them at neuronal level as if I was executing them, I would argue that my vicarious kinesthetic experience of their movement shows that Butcher's dancers do not engage in technical movements. In *18 Happenings*, as it consistently happens in Butcher's works, the agency-informed, oppositional, use of kinesthesia seeks to create an improvisational movement that is non-genre specific. As I have experienced myself when opposing my trained body to create oppositional improvisation, this process challenges the trained dancer; Bales remarks:

> It is one thing to be an untrained dancer performing in a dance piece and quite another to be a former ballet student or a Merce Cunningham dancer performing 'pedestrian' movement.  
> Bales, 2008, p. 13

While Bales refers to a ballet or Cunningham dancer as an example, this challenge is encountered by any trained dancer and even, as it tends to be the case today (Bales, 2008; Foster, 2011), by dancers trained in multiple and diverse dance styles. In the discussion at hand, the avoidance of genre affiliation for the movement created is not intended as/achieved by conflating or juxtaposing different techniques belonging to different genres, thus obtaining a heterogeneous multi-genre movement collage that cannot be identified as one specific genre only because it displays the techniques of
many. Rather, the movement that I am referring to is oppositional because the kinetic solutions it articulates are different from those that the dancer may have acquired in genre-based training.

1.8 Oppositional dancers' self-recasting: agency as detraining

As a spectator, watching Butcher's works – and despite my background as a trained dancer – it is not possible for me to be aware of the specific procedures through which the performers succeeded in divorcing their engagement in the work from the genre-based responses of their trained body, so as to create oppositional improvisational movement. With reference to American postmodern dancers' intense use of pedestrian movement, Elisabeth Dempster observes that the ability to achieve a non-technical movement requires the prior neutralisation of their previous training, a reversal process, a process of detraining that removes or deactivates the movement techniques embedded in the trained body. Dempster stated:

post-modern dance also describes an attitude to physical training… involving a period of detraining of the dancer's habitual structures and patterns of movement.

Dempster quoted in Bales, 2008, p. 15

This can be achieved in different ways. Dretaining processes, I would argue, differ from each other in terms of how agency is activated and how it engages with kinesthetic awareness in the creation of tactics that, at once, neutralise the dancer's embedded responses and induce oppositional ones. Dretaining, in other words, enables the intentional transformation of the trained body into an abject body; from a body that perpetuates a normative framework into one that places itself in a condition of dissensus. By providing the practitioner with the ability to make decisions
independent of normativity, agency severs the associations established by habit. Detraining enables this separation to be experienced beyond the intellectual acceptance of opposition to normativity. It implements oppositional agency at an experiential level by severing the exclusivity and automaticity of the association between dance and embedded movement, which was established by training and habit; further, it replaces that association with the practitioner's felt perception that oppositional movement is an equally legitimate alternative.

Detraining as a means to counter the embeddedness of the trained body emerges with clarity in Anna Halprin's approach to dance. Halprin has significantly informed the postmodern attitude to training (Ross, 2009), to which Dempster referred in the earlier quotation. The role and effect of detraining indirectly emerges from an observation made by Yvonne Rainer, who had been one of Halprin's students: "Ann gave me my first permission to use my body and imagination" (Rainer quoted in Ross, 2009, p. 152). Rainer's remark communicates the replacement of the embedded techniques of the trained body with the dancer's own individual agency. In Halprin's own words:

I wanted to give them [the dancers] a sense of believing in themselves, so they weren't worried about being right or wrong.

Halprin quoted in Ross, 2003, p. 44

Halprin's approach proved important in creating the pre-condition for the subsequent development of other practitioners' oppositional approaches. Pivotal to this, although Halprin would not have referred to it by that name, was her introduction of dissensus, the notion that dance can be different from the movement vocabularies that perpetuate the normative understanding of what dance is.
1.9 Anna Halprin

Despite her modern dance training, in 1950 Halprin decided to turn her back on modern dance. This choice was motivated by her refusal to conform to the given sets of established parameters that she felt had crystallised the field of modern dance, and which caused all dancers to look and act like the choreographer they worked for. Halprin lamented the dancer's lack of agency:

All the Graham dancers looked alike. All the Humphrey dancers looked alike. You looked like the person who was leading your company, who in a sense was a guru. Your movement style, your philosophy, everything. Halprin, 1995b, pp. 5-6

Halprin refused to accept approaches to modern dance such as that of Graham's, for instance, on the basis that they directed students towards a specific movement vocabulary which was expression of the choreographer's own agency, as opposed to the dancers'. Halprin described all the modern dance techniques she acquired through her dance training as being "highly stylized... [and] recognizable" (Halprin, 1995a, p. 188) and found their use limiting because it led her back to the same movement patterns. Halprin challenge was radical, effectively pursuing, although that was not her stated aim, what has here been described as a position of dissensus. Accordingly, the purpose of a course she held in 1954 was, as Halprin put it, "to find out what our bodies could do, not learning somebody else's pattern or technique" (Halprin quoted in Ross, 2009, p. 127).

Halprin's approach is reminiscent of H'Doubler's, with whom she had studied, and whose interest in movement was not motivated by her allegiance to a specific dance
genre (Ross, 2009). H'Doubler focus was on movement as a means to achieve balance and connection between mind and body through creativity⁶ (Partsch-Bergsohn, 1994).

The detraining tactic adopted by Halprin to rid herself and her students of the movement responses built-in by dance training was improvisation. A. A. Leath, whose collaboration with Halprin began in 1953, observed that Halprin's movement explorations were entirely based on improvisation (Ross, 2009). According to Halprin, improvisation, to which she referred as 'direct movement', could be taught by helping dancers develop an awareness of themselves as unified wholes, where the subject's emotional, mental and physical aspects all interact in the creation of movement (Worth and Poynor, 2004). The acquisition of the experiential awareness of these interconnections can be regarded, in Halprin's approach, as the oppositional dancer's training or, rather, the process of detraining from embeddedness. As such, it does not imply a notion of technique intended as prescriptive, ready-made, kinetic solutions acquired through repetition. Halprin simply encouraged students to improvise within the set framework, without demonstrating for them, nor directing them towards, specific movement patterns or styles to reproduce (Ross, 2009). The experiential awareness Halprin sought is based on an understanding of movement as developed through the dancers' own explorations, through which they can create original kinetic solutions (Worth and Poynor, 2004). Accordingly, Halprin stated:

I never told anybody what a movement should be or how it should look… They had to build their own technique… in our company there is no unified look. There's a unified approach but everybody is different in movement style.

Halprin, 1995c, p. 77
Halprin facilitated the dancers' acquisition of the holistic awareness necessary for the creation of non-normative movement by nurturing their kinaesthetic sense and the awareness of their body's relation to the environment. While attention to the body articulation and to the somatic experience of moving was already part of H'Doubler's engagement with the body, Halprin expanded this approach by also asking dancers to become somatically aware of the effect of gravity on their moving body, to observe the qualities and character of the environment and their bodily responses to it, and to use these elements to inform their improvised movement (Ross, 2009).

One of the ways in which Halprin endeavoured to develop this kind of awareness in the dancers was through exercises referred to as 'movement rituals'; through these, dancers could become familiar with what Halprin describes as the "universal laws… that govern all movement" (Halprin quoted in Worth and Poynor, 2004, p. 56) and they could explore their body's articulation and potentials in the light of these. The kinesthetic sense and overall somatic experience elicited by the execution of the movement rituals helped dancers develop greater awareness of what elements constitute movement and how their interconnected interaction determines its creation. In turn, this understanding could aid in the creation of improvised movement without relying on acquired techniques and movement vocabularies. Initially, the search for movement possibilities that departed from recognizable dance styles took the form of improvisational movement developed by focusing on the body in an analytic way, in terms of its mechanics (Halprin, 1995c).

We would isolate the body as an instrument in an anatomical and objective way… What is the efficient way to do that movement? Do we really need to do this or is it just habit?

Halprin 1995c, p. 77
Halprin used improvisation to transform the trained body into an abject body. However, she observed the emergence of recurrent patterns in her own improvisations, testament to a phenomenon of habituation of the abject body, whereby repeated applications of a specific, oppositional, approach to movement had caused an initially non-normative manifestation of dissensus to become the new norm:

Within about a year's time, that particular way of working [improvisation] had its own pattern... certain kinds of movements... kept coming back, certain attitudes to movement, certain ideas.

Halprin, 1995a, p. 188

Coherently with her non-prescriptive understanding of dance, Halprin endeavoured to overcome the fixity created by such recurrences by consistently using tactics that maintained movement as a tool of exploration rather than reiteration. To this end, she continuously challenged her own creativity by changing the frameworks and parameters within which she was improvising. Halprin developed "new compositional form[s]" (Halprin, 1995b, p. 6) by introducing in her kinetic explorations elements such as nude dancing, as well as the execution of tasks and activities that are part of everyday life; these included the use of words, objects, associations, moving outdoors, or ordinary actions such as sweeping the floor (Halprin, 1995b; Ross, 2009). This forced Halprin and her dancers to produce movements that were neither derived from previous dance training nor from the habituation of a no-longer-abject body. The artistic exploration becomes the embodied, idiosyncratic response of the individual to the evolving circumstances.

You do not teach people a traditional or idiosyncratic style... instead you set up a situation to move in, you systematically give people the opportunity to develop a full range of original movement.

Halprin, 1995b, p. 12
The introduction of new situational frameworks in order to abandon kinetic patterns that had become recurrent effectively implements a form of detraining that reintroduces the dissensus that had been lost due to the habituation, and recasts the habituated body, once again, as an abject body. Each newly introduced task, environment and/or challenge forced the dancer to negotiate a different engagement of agency with kinesthesia in the creation of improvisational movement. Forti commented that Halprin's improvisation resulted from "kinesthetic awareness and impulse" (Forti quoted in Ross, 2009, p. 136).

Halprin's refusal to provide students with a ready-made mould on which to shape their movements, combined with her request that they performed task-oriented actions as their daily training could result in dancers feeling frustrated. Brown lamented that students were asked to perform seemingly purposeless exercises (Ross, 2009). Brown remarked: "I thought they were all half-mad… There were movement explorations, and she told us MOVE!" (Brown quoted in Ross, 2009, p. 148 – capitalisation in original text). Brown's comment is reminiscent of the observation made by Wigman in relation to the movement experimentations led by Laban, who also demanded of dancers the creation of movement devoid of established techniques and based instead on their individual agency:

> Anyone who had seen us during this improvisation would have left with the impression that that we were a bunch of idiots.  
> Wigman quoted in Doerr, 2008, p. 37

Brown's and Wigman's description of dancers, including themselves, as 'half-mad' or 'a bunch of idiots' may appear as negative value judgements and, indeed, given her frustration, Brown may have intended it as such. However, in the context of
oppositional movement, the comments should be understood as markers that identify abject bodies expressing dissensus. They indicate, implicitly, the non-fulfilment of the embedded expectations of what dance training traditionally looks like, as derived from past experience. In other words, conventions become a parameter of validity by which any new approach is measured, and the failure of the latter to fit the former is highlighted by the apparent negativity of value judgments. Expressions of bafflement or possibly refusal are distinctive responses to the difficulties of innovative approaches. They highlight the gap between the orthodoxy and dissensus, and the challenge that dancers themselves have to overcome in the manifestation of their own oppositional agency.

According to Simone Forti, it was Halprin's ability to devise these challenges that constituted her strength as a dance educator, as it taught dancers "to really trust the body, its intelligence and how it wants to move" (Forti quoted in Ross, 2009, p. 152). Forti was echoed by Rainer in her recognition, already reported above, of having been empowered by Halprin to use her imagination and body freely; it could be argued that Halprin's influence also informed Rainer's uncompromising statement "my body remains the enduring reality" (Rainer quoted in Burt 2004, p. 29), which is acknowledged by dance scholar Ramsay Burt to signify that the body "can resist normative, social and aesthetic ideologies" (Burt, 2004, p. 29). The body, that is to say, is endowed with and capable of implementing oppositional agency.

By eliciting the originality of the agentic body, the challenges set by Halprin demand that the dancer engage with movement on a personal level: the movement response becomes not an artefact reflecting the embeddedness of a trained body, but the
product of the dancer's individual agency and relation with the object or the situation (Halprin, 1995c). The shift towards a personal connotation of movement is recognised by Halprin in her recounting of an instance, in the 1950s, in which improvisation, free association, words and dialogues had been introduced as an input. Significantly, Halprin commented: "We began to deal with ourselves as people, not dancers" (Halprin, 1995c, p. 79). Halprin followed this concept further not only by using everyday tasks but by focusing on interpersonal relationships.

Let's see what will happen if we don't use any props, music or anything. Let's just use each other. Let's explore who you really are in terms of me.

Halprin, 1995c, pp. 96-97

This is what Halprin eventually did in *Apartment 6* (1965), where tasks and interpersonal relations are intertwined in a life-like experience. Performers interact with each other while each carrying out everyday tasks such as cooking, talking or reading. Commenting on the work, Halprin remarked that the piece "was absolute, complete realism" (Halprin, 1995c, p. 98). Halprin described her intention in performing the work as

simply to have two hours on the stage of a real-life situation, in which you as a performer and you as a person were completely the same thing.

Halprin, 1995c, p. 99

Halprin remarked that performing a task automatically makes dancers just be themselves (Halprin, 1995c) since their interiority, as expressed in every day movement, informed the execution of the task. As a choreographer, Halprin realised a position of dissensus in respect of the norm of dance or, to put it differently, manifested her oppositional agency, by creating oppositional frameworks and, in a manner that is similar to what Butcher would do in *18 Happenings*, in *Apartment 6*
her agency was manifested by relinquishing her choreographic control in favour of
the performers’ agency. As one of the active participants to Apartment 6, Halprin
could further express her agency as a performer, within the improvisatory context of
the work.58

It could be argued that, despite the freedom afforded to the dancers, Halprin has
maintained a degree of control. Her improvisatory tactic is based on a specific
understanding of, preparation for and engagement with movement. Halprin requires
that dancers operate within her understanding of movement as constituted by the
interconnection of the dancer's emotional, mental and physical characteristics. Once
the dancer has developed the experiential awareness of such interconnection, the
framework of engagement within which improvisation is to take place is set by
Halprin, be it the selection of a task or object to interact with, or the decision to
operate within a given environment (Ross, 2009; Worth and Poynor, 2004).
Furthermore, on occasions Halprin has reportedly interfered with the aesthetics of the
movement created by some of her dancers, causing them to cease their collaboration
with her (Ross, 2009).

Throughout her career, Halprin has adopted a multiplicity of tactics whereby, while
she has not relinquished control entirely or in all instances, she has expanded the
dancers' individual freedom. Whether by enhancing dancers' kinesthetic awareness,
creating unfamiliar frameworks within which to move, or introducing life-like
interactions as performance, Halprin's approach creates movement that is an
implementation of dissensus: empowered by agency, Halprin and her dancers
transform their trained body into abject bodies.
I have so far contextualised my oppositional practice as part of an approach to dance within which detraining tactics are implemented for the trained body to abandon its embeddedness. In the remainder of the chapter I will continue this contextualisation. Specifically, given the two-fold nature of my practice, namely its oppositional and improvisational character, I will continue to focus on detraining tactics implemented within an improvisational approach. To this end, the ensuing part of this chapter looks at the constitution of the abject body through/as Contact Improvisation.

1.10 Contact Improvisation

Steve Paxton, the initiator of Contact Improvisation (CI), dates the inception of this approach to movement to 1972; he describes it\(^5\) as including movements that can vary from stillness to physically demanding (Paxton, 1997a). CI requires that two performers be in constant physical contact as they move, negotiating their physical engagement with each other through gravity, friction, inertia and momentum. There is no pre-determined aim other than maintaining the flow of movement; movements are improvised, each dancer using as input the partner's movement and body.\(^6\) What is required of dancers is, firstly, to be in a state of focused relaxation so as to be perceptive to changes in the partner's moving body and, secondly, to be open-minded so as to create movements that abandon the embeddedness of their normative training (Paxton, 1997a). While providing dancers with the skills necessary for safe practice (Paxton, 1997c), such as the ability to fall and roll without injuring themselves, Paxton understands CI as an approach to movement rather than a codified system of techniques and movement vocabularies such as those offered, for instance, by modern dance (Paxton, 1997c). CI rejects the notion that dance is only
identifiable with established dance genres; it democratically extends dance to all bodies (Foster, 2005).

Paxton describes CI as "a relief from years of wilful technical applications" (Paxton, 1997c, p. 67). The dancer transitions from the execution of movement that is planned, prescriptive and non-improvisational to an active decision-making role in the creation of unrehearsed movement solutions, thus calling upon the improviser's oppositional agency and kinesthetic awareness.

Contactor\(^6\) Nancy Stark Smith observes that, in CI, the constant challenge of divorcing oneself from embeddedness is facilitated by the interaction with the dancing partner's moving body (Smith, 1997b). The continuous bodily contact introduces a degree of oppositional accountability, as it were, in that the partner's kinetic response continuously informs the dancer's kinesthetic awareness and forces a readjustment of the her movement, thus interfering with the potential articulation of embedded movement phrases. Despite this, however, it can still happen that practitioners revert to movement habits.

Smith recalls that, during a CI session, her attention was caught by a particular movement she had executed; what caused her to take notice was that she had recognised the movement as not hers, that is to say atypical for her way of moving. This is significant because it suggests that, despite being engaged in an improvisational practice (both in that particular moment and, more generally, since practicing CI), Smith had developed a habitual way of moving, against which it had been possible for the atypical movement to stand out.
Smith remarks:

I had been under the assumption that in improvising I was calling on any and every movement I could possibly make, but now I realised I was in fact doing a very limited and consistent range of movements, textures and timings.  

Smith, 1997a, p. 105

Smith's observation is noteworthy also because her experience is shared by other practitioners. What facilitated Smith's recognition of the improvised movement as not belonging to her was that it resembled, instead, the idiosyncratic movement performed by Lisa, one the contactors with whom Smith regularly practiced and who happened to be in the studio at that time; moreover, when shown the movement in question, also Lisa readily recognised it as her own way of moving. The episode highlighted that, while embracing an improvisational approach to dance, both Smith and Lisa had developed idiosyncratic kinetic habits, distinctive and recurrent enough to make their respective improvised movements recognisable.

An explanation for this could be found in Aat Hougèe's observation that the physical sensations experienced when improvising may become the aim of the dancer's movement (Hougèe, 1997). This possibility is supported by Smith's comment:

I was too busy subjecting myself to "the forces" –of gravity, momentum, inertia etc.–to notice what kind of subject I was.  

Smith, 1997a, p. 105

It is also possible that the crystallisation of improvisation into a narrow range of movements, as lamented by Smith, could be caused by the focus on movement as sourced by/through the dancer's individuality: according to Hougèe, this risks limiting the movement to individual habits without sufficiently challenging their
fixity, thus involuntarily substituting the normativity of genres with the normativity of idiosyncratic movement (Hougée, 1997).

Neither is the tendency to focus on a restricted array of movement solutions an occurrence unique to CI. It has been remarked above that Halprin lamented the emergence of recurrent patterns over time, when relying on the same kind of improvisational approach.63 Similarly, as part of an imaginary dialogue between herself, as the dancer, and her improvisational practice, British scholar and practitioner Vida Midgelow describes her movement as in flux, but also observes that she "often remain[s] within a fairly narrow64 and recognizable range of movement qualities" (Midgelow, 2011). Midgelow further expresses an interest towards developing "a practice that overtly encourages an unfixing (of self)” (2011).

Midgelow's interest in the unfixing (of self) is also echoed in Smith's notion of a desire for openness (Smith, 1997b). Openness is a human potential, and Smith argues that it is the subject's desire for openness that makes that potential become a concrete reality; the desire is, at once, the source and the catalyst for openness. I identify Midgelow's interest and Smith's desire as expressions of the subject's agency, namely the subject's ability to elaborate decisions that challenge the fixity of habit/normativity. Furthermore, I argue that the conversion from agentic interest/desire into oppositional improvisational movement is implemented through the use of the subject's kinesthetic awareness guided by – oppositional – agency. Therefore, agency effects, on the one hand, the intellectual/affective elaboration of the interest (for the unfixing of self)/desire (for the human potential for openness) while, on the other hand, it informs its practical realisation.65
In the light of this relation between agency, kinesthesia and the resulting oppositional movement, Smith's unintentional self-limitation to a narrow range of movements can be understood as the result of a focus on kinesthesia implemented without sufficient guidance by oppositional agency. In other words, to re-articulate Hougèe's and Smith's earlier comments, the possibility that the dancer does not sufficiently challenge the fixity of her own movement can be interpreted as a use of kinesthesia only partially informed by oppositional agency. In this situation, the dancer focuses on the kinesthetic individuation of idiosyncratic movements but fails to recognise that these, although not genre-based, have themselves become habits.

Alternatively, kinesthesia can be used as a means to focus uniquely on the body's experiencing of the forces that define its relation with the external environment. Also in this case, kinesthesia is being used in a manner that does not allow to fully explore solutions beyond a given range of movements, thus not implementing the body's potentials. What is lacking is something directing the exploration of kinesthesia beyond that given range; this 'something' is what Smith's would define as desire for openness, Midgelow as interest in the unfixing (of self), and I define as oppositional agency. However, when contactors succeed in maintaining an agentic focus that guides their kinesthesia towards oppositional solutions, CI is at the same time an improvisational dance practice and a detraining method. This highlights the importance of agency in making use of kinesthesia for oppositional purposes. It does, however, also highlight the importance of kinesthesia in providing the awareness through which Smith was alerted to the crystallisation of her improvisational movement.
The crucial role of kinesthesia in oppositional practice has also been emphasised by American choreographer and educator Elaine Summers. For this reason, and because Summers' approach is of relevance to Butcher's, her contribution to detraining is introduced next.

### 1.11 Elaine Summers

A detraining method, which was given the self-explanatory name of Kinetic Awareness®, was developed by American dancer and choreographer Elaine Summers, with whom Butcher studied during one of her visits in the United States and by whom was introduced to such method (Foster, 2005). Summers' need to detrain emerged from what she describes as "the struggle many of us where having about training and mannerism" (Elaine Summer quoted in Banes 1993, p. 81), which inhibited the kind of movement that she had sought: "I personally had a lot to shed to get down to what I wanted in movement" (Elaine Summer quoted in Banes 1993, p. 81). Butcher remarked that the practice of Summers' kinetic awareness caused her body to change: she was able to free herself from the kinetic patterns she had absorbed during her previous formal training in ballet and Graham style, and that had become part of her habitual way of moving (Foster, 2005).

A substantial part of the detraining method developed by Summers involves floor exercises in which rubber balls are placed underneath the body to support it, so as to experience positions and a relation to gravity unlike any of those encountered and practiced in formal dance training. This allows the subject to focus on the sensing of her own body, as opposed to focusing on using it to repeat movements provided by a
dance teacher or choreographer, or focusing on the automatic execution of embedded movements without being consciously aware of her kinetic experience (Wooster, 1980). Summers' aim was not that of replacing the dancers' embeddedness with an alternative movement system; rather, she aimed to raise the consciousness that subjects have of their bodies and movement potentials, so that they be in a position to assume decisional control over their movement choices, instead of relinquishing them in favour of the prescriptive solutions offered by dance genres (Wooster, 1980). This awareness-building exercise is necessary since, according to Summers, trained dancers lack kinesthesia (and therefore they need to acquire it), given that the automatic execution of the embedded movements to which they are used does not require that they possess kinetic awareness (Wooster, 1980).

While, based on my first-person experience, I would agree that trained dancers develop movement patterns that become so embedded as to develop into automatic kinetic responses, thus making it difficult to move differently, I would also argue that years of practice would feasibly cause trained dancers to develop kinesthesia, as a necessary tool for learning how to execute correctly the movements and techniques they are being taught. Kinesthesia would also be used, at a level that is likely to become progressively unconscious, to automatically monitor that the embedded movements being perpetuated are being properly executed. Therefore, I would suggest that, rather than determining a lack of kinesthesia, the automaticity of embedded movements crystallises the ability to apply the kinetic awareness that dancers do possess. Kinesthesia is forced into the role of enforcer of genre-based techniques. Nevertheless, insofar as it calls for the refusal of established dance techniques and, once the detraining has made the body kinesthetically aware, it
allows for the search of oppositional movement, Summers' detraining is expression of the dancer's agency.

On the other hand if, as I have suggested, trained dancers already possess a movement awareness that is only momentarily disabled by the automaticity induced by their movement training, Summers' stated need to provide the body with kinesthesia before engaging in the agentic search for oppositional movement can be fulfilled by more direct approaches. In other words, oppositional movement can be created without first engaging in the intermediate stage of engaging in a form of training specifically aimed at developing kinetic awareness. Kinesthesia, in other words, is presumed already present\(^{70}\) and is elicited and recast as an oppositional catalyst through an immediate agentic engagement with movement: the body can immediately set out to re-constitute itself as an abject body in and through movement, in the pursuit of dissensus. This is the case of approaches to dance that bring together the dancer's agency and kinesthesia in the form of oppositional improvisation, as it happens in Contact Improvisation, and in my own movement practice.\(^{71}\)

To sum up, there is diversity between Summers' approach and CI's, in the respective ways in which they realise an abject body. The former introduces the trained body to kinesthesia through an approach that sensitises it to its own non-normative potentialities, in order to provide it with the means to implement oppositional agency in later kinetic engagements. CI, on the other hand, does not appear to rely on the prior development of kinesthesia: it elicits and cultivates kinesthesia (in a sense, it forces its emergence at a conscious level) through an immediate kinetic engagement
between the agentic choices of two dancers. In CI, as it is also the case for my practice, opposition is identified not only through but also as the improvised movement being created. However, in both approaches, that of Summer's and CI's, opposition to normativity or, which is the same, the dissensus realised in the creation of abject bodies (bodies no longer moving according the techniques and movement vocabularies once embedded in them by their training) emerges from/as the interaction between the subject's kinesthesia and her agency.

1.12 Oppositional approaches contrasted and compared

The aim, in presenting the practices in this chapter, was to explore how practitioners other than myself had responded to the challenge of creating movement that avoided the use of learnt techniques. These approaches activated agency and kinesthesia both at a choreographic level and in the dancers' bodies.

While agency affords the ability to make decisions that counter normativity, the practitioner's kinesthesia enables agency by providing the kinetic bodily awareness necessary to make those decisions. Oppositional movement results from the interaction between agency and kinesthesia and, in particular, as the analysis of my practice has shown, from specific ways in which agency uses kinesthesia. In spite of its importance, in this chapter the role of kinesthesia has been articulated to a lesser extent than that of agency. The focus was mainly, although not exclusively, on how agency facilitates opposition in the form of choreographic choices and training methods.
The reason for this is one of accessibility. It was possible to identify quite accurately – not least because the choreographers often declared the rationale behind their choices – what choreographic tactics were elicited by agency as part of the choreographers' oppositional engagement. However, the tactics employed by the individual dancers to counter the automatisms of their embeddedness, and to effect the challenging transition from movement informed by formal training to oppositional movement, remained elusive. This is because looking at the dancers' movement from a third-person perspective does not allow for the understanding of the internal dynamics that fuel and articulate the dancers' creative process. For this reason, in my research I have adopted a methodology that allows me to investigate the creative process from a first-person perspective.

Despite the constraints entailed by the third-person perspective, it was possible to establish that, as it is also the case in my oppositional practice, the approaches presented in this chapter disrupt the trained body's habitual way of producing movement. However, it is apparent that differences exist between the approaches, and between these and my practice. The differences are manifested in the character of the specific oppositional tactics, whether choreographic or kinetic, that agency implements in constituting the abject body. On the other hand, a common characteristic of the approaches is the existence of multiple, distinct, subjectivities interacting with the dancing body in the creation of oppositional movement. This, however, is also an element that contrasts with my practice, in which I am the only subject.

Although the structure of their works is deeply collaborative, in Butcher's and
Halprin's approaches there is a clear distinction between the subjectivities of the choreographer and the performer. In Butcher's *18 Happenings*, the performers' agency is expressed both kinetically, through their use of improvised movement in carrying out the tasks given to them by Butcher, and intellectually, through their decision, if they so wish, not to perform those tasks – or through their participation to open discussions with Butcher, about aspects of the work. However, while in a coordinating capacity rather than in a censorial one, Butcher's role remains crucial for the work, and distinct from that of the practitioners. Furthermore, as it happens in my practice, also in Butcher's, Halprin's and CI practices it is incumbent upon the moving bodies to oppose their embeddedness. However, unlike my practice, their agentic effort is aided by exogenous frameworks interacting with their movements; frameworks such as Butcher's instructions in *18 Happenings*, Halprin's tasks or unusual settings, and CI's constant physical contact with a dancing partner, providing an ever-changing input. In my practice, on the other hand, there are no subjectivities other than myself and no external frameworks, only the – internal – notion of opposition. In other words, the choreographer, the moving body and the framework are enclosed into one person, as I am at the same time all three of them. However, each of the three has a double connotation relating, respectively, to my subjectivity as compliant to the normative system that constitutes my trained body, and to my subjectivity as actively engaged in the oppositional approach that counters my trained body. As I engage in oppositional practice, both connotations are simultaneously active, one as my default embedded disposition, the other elicited by my attempt to abandon embeddedness and find oppositional alternatives.

In what could be described, perhaps contradictorily, as my role as oppositional
choreographer, a tension exists between my intellectual and aesthetic understanding of dance grounded in the value judgments of normativity, and my decision to adopt oppositional parameters as a framework of engagement. As a moving body – and in this respect, there is no difference between my body and the bodies of Butcher’s, Halprin’s and CI dancers – I am both the trained body that I wish to detrain and, simultaneously, the agentic body that uses its kinesthetic awareness to effect that detraining, that looks for oppositional tactics conducive to the creation of an abject-self. Finally, my moving body has no interactions with external subjectivities or circumstances that may facilitate its path towards dissensus, whether by aiding the individuation of oppositional movement or the means to create it. It only has its trained-self as a negative framework of reference, as an example of what to counter, and its physical-self as the means through which, and site in which, to realise its abjection.

In sum, in oppositional practice my body, as a trained body, engages in the negation of itself in order to become an abject body; it experiences itself simultaneously as the embodiment of normativity and as its contrary: the source and the enforcer of abjection, and the physical framework for the embodied expression of the latter. I argue that agency is the catalyst for the trained body's transformation into an abject body, and kinesthesia is the means that enable agency. This applies both to my practice and to Halprin's, Butcher's and CI oppositional approaches.

The final part of this research articulates the relation between agency and kinesthesia, of which my oppositional practice is the embodiment. Prior to that, however, the existence of theories that challenge the feasibility of my findings should be
acknowledged. Their argument of contention is that subjects do not possess agency. The next part of the study acknowledges this tension, its implications and discursive resolution. Specifically, in the next chapter, I engage with the thinking of feminist theorist Judith Butler, who proposes that subjects are devoid of agency.
ENDNOTES

1 It should be observed that, while used within this research to describe non-normative practices, the wording 'oppositional' was neither employed by Butcher, nor by the other practitioners introduced in this chapter.

2 The retrospective definition 'New Dance' derived from the homonymous magazine, featuring trends in British dance. The magazine was founded in 1977 by experimental group X6 Collective. However, approaches to dance consistent with X6’s, such as that of Strider, were referred to as New Dance even if they had developed prior to the magazine being founded (Jordan, 1992). While the practitioners referred to in this chapter are among the earliest exponents of New Dance, Mackrell (1992) identifies and explores practitioners engaging in this kind of approach also in the 1980s and 1990s, albeit with differing characteristics compared with its earliest expressions.

3 While classically trained, Early endeavoured to explore movement possibilities beyond those provided by his classical training (Jordan, 1992).

4 In Britain, up to the 1960s, ballet was considered the only ”serious' dance” (Mackrell, 1992, p. 2; see also Mansfield, R., in Joan W. White ed., 1985, p. 119). Signs that contemporary dance, in the form of a Graham-based style, was becoming a credible alternative to ballet in Britain were the conversion of Ballet Rambert "from a classical into a contemporary dance company in 1966" (Jordan, 1992, p. 1) and, in the same year, the creation of the London School of Contemporary Dance (LSCD). In an Arts Council's report on dance in Britain in the 21st century, Burns and Harrison observe:

Although Laban and Kurt Jooss were practising at Dartington Hall from the mid 1940s, contemporary dance did not really emerge until the 1960s when Robin Howard and Robert Cohan brought Martha Graham’s work to this country, setting up London Contemporary Dance School in 1964 and London Contemporary Dance Theatre (LCDT) in 1967.
Burns and Harrison, 2008, p. 29

5 Other prominent practitioners to emerge from the early phase (pre-1980s) of British New Dance are, among others, Siobhan Davies and Ian Spink (Jordan, 1992). See Mackrell (1992) for a more comprehensive list of practitioners.

6 After seeing Martha Graham in London in 1954, Howard decided to dedicate himself to the development of the British art scene, which he felt lacking (www.theplace.org.uk). This was a philanthropic endeavour that over the years became his main objective. It started to take tangible form in 1963, with Howard financing the return to the UK of Martha Graham's Company.

7 In 1969, LSCD found permanent residency at The Place (Jordan, 1992).

8 Alston created Strider with three of the most radical dancers of LSCD, Jacky Lansley, Christopher Banner and Wendy Levett, and with LSCD students Diana Davies, Dennis Greenwood and Sally Potter (Jordan, 1992).

9 X6 was formed in 1976 by Fergus Early, Maedée Duprès, Emilyn Claid, Mary Prestidge, and Jacky Lansley (who had previously spent one year with Strider), all of whom, with the exception of Prestidge, knew each other from the London School of Contemporary Dance. While Early, Lansley and Claid had mainly a background in ballet, Duprès had her dance training at the London School of Contemporary Dance, and Prestidge had danced with Ballet Rambert.


11 From the same journal, Alston also read articles by sculptor Robert Morris and Yvonne Rainer who, like fellow dancers Trisha Brown, Simone Forti and Morris himself, at one stage studied with Halprin (Jordan, 1992).
As Jordan (1992) remarks, Fulkerson acquired her position at the college when Strider was offered the opportunity of shaping the college's curriculum and training. Although Strider declined the offer, Hassall, a dancer by then member of Strider, recommended Fulkerson whom she had known from the Cunningham Studio back in the United States.

Sources: Bremser, 1999; http://rosemarybutcher.com/

Rainer's NO Manifesto is a critique of representation through and within performance. Its impact on the visual elements of the performance is dramatic because it entails the absence, the displacement of, or the opposition to the conventional canons of the specific medium. It produces a performance deprived of the elements that are traditionally expected to be in it, or in which these are present but in an unconventional reciprocal relation. It reads:

No to spectacle, No to virtuosity, No to transformations and magic and make believe, No to glamour and transcendence of the star image, No to the heroic, No to the anti-heroic, No to trash imagery, No to style, No to camp, No to seduction of the spectator by the wiles of the performer, No to eccentricity, No to moving or being moved.

www.rosemarybutcher.com

Although the art of the conceptual can be regarded and, indeed, is described by Butcher as ‘a tradition’, it is not a tradition that imposes prescriptive styles or modalities on the making of art; on the contrary, it consists of an approach that avoids fixity and encourages experimentation (Godfrey, 1998; Rorimer, 2004; et al.).

In stating this, I am understanding ‘art of the conceptual’ as artistic expressions that are not meant as a reflexive critique of a dance genre. However, it would be possible for a dance work to make use of established techniques and movement vocabularies without necessarily conveying a narrative-led content, if these were employed in order to perform a self-reflective critique of the dance genre to which they belong.

As remarked in the previous annotation, it would be possible to make a disruptive use of techniques and movement vocabularies by voluntarily misusing them, thus avoiding the communication of a narrative. However, this tactic would result in the subject matter of the dance-work becoming confined to a specific critique of the genre, and devoid of the possibility of tackling other issues.

Other choreographers share Butcher's opinion. Paul Taylor, for example, argues that:

Dancers are not exactly like tubes of paint with which to cover the canvas of space. They have character and personality which they assert.

Taylor, in Copeland and Cohen, 1983, p. 104

In visual artworks, the encoding and decoding of the concept on the part, respectively, of the artists and the viewers can be based on fixed points of reference such as the invariable functions and characteristics of objects/materials. For any given object/material, the specific characteristics and functions will be the same everywhere and always. This acts as a built-in control that ensures that the artist's vision for the work can be implemented in such a way that the finished product is faithful to the abstract plan. However, in a dance-works this is not possible because the dancers and their bodies, from which the movement emerges, are not as fixed and invariable as inanimate objects and materials. On the contrary, they are subjective and idiosyncratic.

I would argue that, if an acknowledged movement vocabulary is employed, issues of interpretation are greatly facilitated. However, there is an argument according to which they are far from being completely solved:

[Materialists] maintain that it is possible for two productions of the same work to employ identical steps and yet be different in effect.

Chapter 1

21 'Concept-centred dance' is here intended as in contrast to a dance practice of a representational nature, as it would emerge from a literal approach to art.

22 The film was a collaboration between Rosemary Butcher and German filmmaker Martin Otter.

23 Although the viewer's perspective is not the focus of this research, it should be noted that agency is also indispensable for the understanding of the work on the part of the viewers.

24 In turn, the artist is judged on his/her ability to adhere to and implement the established artistic criteria for the discipline, perpetuating the same understanding of what art is (Godfrey, 1998).

25 Typically, canvases are unobtrusive, they are not acknowledged or seen, as it were; they are virtually invisible to the eye insofar as the viewer sees the artwork as the visual representation of a subject matter, not as the surface upon which the latter is painted.

26 Dickie's theory was developed to explain how works such as Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917), Rauschenberg's *Bed* (1955) and Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* (1964) can be considered art, despite contravening the traditional understanding of what art is (Rorimer, 2004). For more details see: Dickie, G. (1974) *Art and the Aesthetic: An Institutional Analysis*; Cornell University Press.

27 According to American conceptual artist Joseph Kosuth the purpose of conceptual art's artistic enquiry should be to understand "the foundation of the concept 'art', as it has come to mean" (Kosuth, quoted in Godfrey, 1998, p. 13). This requires artists to challenge the traditional art categories, as these perpetuate value judgments founded on how strictly the artwork respects the established canons of the specific artistic discipline it belongs to. As these canons are given a priori, an artwork that implements them, as opposed to challenging them, will not contribute to the understanding of the concept 'art' (Alberro and Stimson, 1999).

28 Camera techniques such as zooming or variations of the camera angles, and editing techniques ordering the speed and sequence of successive video-frames, for instance, can highlight movement details or create a sense of chronological progression that help establish a narrative.

29 It could be argued that the spectator's first person perspective is always implicated in interpreting the concept expressed by the work of art, even when this complies with the artistic parameters of a given discipline. De Marinis observes:

> In the twentieth century, the spectator might have been seen as… the reader of pre-existing formulae, but s/he can now be viewed as the co-producer of the performance, the 'active creator of its meanings.'

  de Marinis quoted in Adshead-Lansdale, 1999, p. 16

However, the possibility of an intertextual or personal interpretation of the work does not exclude that an inherent, original meaning may also exist, accessible to viewers that are familiar with the vocabulary employed by the artist. On the other hand, with regard to an oppositional art work, since it is devoid of an acknowledged vocabulary, the viewer has no other option but to interpret the work through her distinctive, individual perspective.

30 What is understood by 'input' is any element that the dancer uses as the subject matter for the kinetic research. The input informs the nature of the kinetic exploration without defining its specific form. In presenting choreographer Anna Halprin's method for teaching improvisation, Simone Forti refers to the notion of input as

> a point of departure for the exploration… a focus (sometimes called a "problem") for which each student would find his or her solution

Forti, 2003, p. 54
As part of my preparation for improvisation practice sessions, Butcher asked me to read *The Box Man* by Kōbō Abe. Similarly, when creating SCAN (1999), among other inputs, Butcher asked the dancers to base their improvisation on images from Cartwright's book (Foster, 2005).

The eliciting of the concept from the dancer, by engaging the latter with inputs such as imagery or text as opposed to pedestrian tasks aimed at ensuring objective movement, is an approach that Butcher began to employ in the 1990s, as she distanced her works from primarily abstract subject matters in favour of a greater attention to the human body and the development of a sense of situation (Leask, 2005).

Tufnell was part of Rosemary Butcher's dance company between 1976-82.

Butcher's monitoring as a means to identify the concept she is looking for in the dancer's improvisation is also remarked by Meisner (2005).

The expression 'subjective objectification' reflects Butcher's relation to the dancer's movement. I have used the term 'subjective' because the subjectivity of the dancer is at the heart of the movement; 'objectification' because the dancer's subjectivity is being elicited to satisfy Butcher's aims.

This approach is reminiscent of conceptual artist Robert Morris' critique of the institutionalised understanding of sculpture as the act of wilfully shaping a given material. Morris used galvanised steel or industrial felt in some of his works, thus negating the possibility for the artist to carve the material and making his craftsmanship irrelevant to the artwork (Godfrey, 1998). This disrupts the traditional canons of sculpture by demanding that the artist work sympathetically with the material, rather than forcing his vision upon it. Butcher use of the dancer's subjectivity, unrestrained by embedded techniques and vocabularies, similarly questions traditional approaches to dance.

As earlier remarked, I use the phrase 'abject bodies' to refer to bodies that refrain from using the embedded movement vocabularies and techniques that inform the traditional understanding of what dance is.

Watching a body in movement activates mirror neurons. This induces in the viewer a kinesthetic response equivalent to what she would experience if performing the movement herself (Foster, 2011). With specific reference to the choreographer, this theory is also echoed by dance scholar and phenomenologist Maxine Sheets-Johnstone:

> Viewing the dance with a moving eye that is consummately absorbed in the movement of moving bodies… [the choreographer] is caught up in a flow of kinetic thought, perceptually experiencing the dance.

Sheets-Johnstone, 1999, p. 495

In the beginning of her career, Butcher's approach to dance-making was intensely focused on the search for objectivity she inherited from her exposure to American postmodern dance. This resulted in a tendency towards abstraction, achieved through the use of pedestrian movement and the highlighting of the work's structural devices (such as the reading out, during the performance, of instructions for dancers to carry out) in order to minimise the interference of the dancer's subjectivity (Mackrell, 1992; Leask, 2005).

Kaprow described 'happenings' as:

> [actions that] do not make any particular literary point. In contrast to the arts of the past, they have no structured beginning, middle or end.

Kaprow 2003/1961, p. 85

Kaprow's suggested link between the absence of a literary point and the absence of a beginning-middle-or-end structure is significant insofar as it is resonant with Butcher's refusal of a literal approach to art which, it was argued with regard to *Vanishing Point*, translates into the absence of a narrative development.
I was able to see Butcher's reinvention of Kaprow's *18 Happenings* performed as part of the exhibition *Move: Choreographing You* (London, Oct. 2010–Jan. 2011). However, my reference to Butcher's choreographic approach to this work is primarily based on the article of Stefanie Sachsenmaier (2013), who collaborated with Butcher as researcher in the reinvention of *18 Happenings*, and provides a description of Butcher's choreographic choices and relation with the performers.

This approach is conceptual in nature as, although the work is given physical realisation, what is relevant is not its aesthetics but the idea behind it, intended, as American conceptual artist Sol LeWitt described it, as "the machine that makes the art" (1999/1967, p. 12). Consequently, the artwork does not derive any value from the artist's touch and is not judged in relation to traditional criteria of beauty.

Contrary to her initial perception that, when movement is produced without the use of technique, it is acceptable for it just to “be what it is” (Butcher, 2008, p. 4), Butcher became later convinced that, in order for movement to capture the idea being investigated, the body, through which the idea is being expressed and to which the idea belongs, must be very detailed and precise in its movement (Butcher, 2008). In relation to her approach to movement and the demands this places on the dancer, Butcher observed:

> If you don't direct emotionally, then the actual precision and accuracy has to be so strong.
>  
> Butcher, 2008, p. 6

Here I appear to delineate, implicitly, a distinction between the individuation of oppositional tactics and the creation of the movements that can be achieved through them. However, while this is a logical break-down of the oppositional process, in practice the two aspects are realised concurrently as a single creative instance and are indistinguishable from each other.

Although the observation can be extended to the body of any formally trained dancer, Wooster (1980) remarks on the difficulty encountered by a group of dancers in their attempt to abandon their own embeddedness, as they attended Robert Dunn's class at the Merce Cunningham's studios in 1960. The group, from which *Judson Dance Theatre* were soon to emerge, was formed, among others, by Steve Paxton, Alex and Deborah Hay, David Gordon, Lucinda Child, Simone Forti, Meredith Monk, Elaine Summers, Yvonne Rainer and Trisha Brown (Banes, 1987), all of the most prominent exponents of American postmodern dance.

'Detraining' refers to a process of dishabitation from acquired movement patterns. Noland (2009) refers to it as de-skilling.

As remarked elsewhere, however, prior to the implementation of detraining, agency is also responsible for informing the practitioner's original openness and impulse to devise such tactics, namely for affording an understanding of dance that counters a normative approach. Agency is the pre-condition, as well as the catalyst, for the search for oppositional movement.

Halprin's approach was a stepping stone towards postmodern dance (Ross, 2009). Her influence was not limited to the practitioners with whom she had direct contact, namely Yvonne Rainer, Trisha Brown and Simon Forti, who would become some of postmodern dance most representative exponents.

American choreographer and film-maker Yvonne Rainer later became one of the most prominent representatives of American postmodern dance from the early 1960s to the mid 1970s. She was a member of experimental dance groups *Judson Dance Theater* and *Grand Union*. From the mid 1970s she devoted herself to film making. More recently, since 2000, Rainer has reconnected with dance, both by revisiting some of her previous choreographies and creating new work (see Julien, 2008: video-debate *The Conceptual in Choreography* – N.B. Online access was originally obtained in 2010 through Siobhandavies.com. Link no longer available. I have provided in the bibliography a new access-link).
For instance, Rainer credited Halprin’s influence for her use of voice in the solo she created for Dunn’s workshop class just few months after attending Halprin’s, in the summer of 1960 (Ross, 2009).

Although Halprin’s observation was made with reference to the teaching of dance to children, her approach remains the same towards adult dancers.

Halprin studied modern dance from an early age but it was not until her teenage years that she first came into contact with the four main modern dance contemporary innovators of her time: Charles Weidman, Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey and Hanya Holm (Ross, 2009). Of these, Halprin stated, the one she felt more in tune with was Humphrey (Ross, 2009).

An example of this is the practice of observing the natural world, in relation to which Simone Forti remarked:

She led us to this awareness of somatic sensations in response to perceptions outside so that the inside and outside of each of us would be working together.

Forti quoted in Ross, 2009, p. 126

Halprin developed four movement rituals each of increasing dynamic intensity and complexity compared to the previous one (Worth and Poynor, 2004), focusing on the somatic sensations, in a manner that is reminiscent of H'Doubler's explorations. However, Rainer also observed that some of the floor exercises in Halprin's workshop (1960) had a strong similarity to Graham's technique.

Halprin inherited this approach to movement creation by studying with H'Doubler. With regard to H'Doubler's approach, Ross observes:

One arrived at creative movement by attending to the biological logic of the body in motion... Embedded in this logic was a route to extraordinary freedom. Later this would be called improvisation, but H'Doubler didn't use that term...

Ross, 2009, p. 48

Forti further observes that a third element in Halprin's improvisation was the dancer's ability to be aware, while moving, of what the improvised movement would look like from the outside, so as to edit it as desired. This appears in contrast with Rainer's remark that "the physical experience of the action being executed was more important than the look of it" (Rainer quoted in Ross, 2009, p. 151). The apparent contradiction could be resolved if the monitoring and editing that Forti reports was aimed at ensuring that the improvised movement was not an involuntary reflection of the dancer's embeddedness, and at modifying it in case it was.

In an observation which brings to mind Rudolph Laban's and Mary Wigman's approaches, Halprin describes her teaching philosophy as follows:

I didn't really have anything to teach that wasn't already there, and it was really up to them to get it.

Halprin quoted in Ross, 2009, p. 152

As observed, for Butcher the abject body can only emerge if practitioners monitor their trained body also when performing pedestrian movements, so as to ensure that the fine line between action and dancing is not crossed and the movement does not revert to the norm of dance. On the other hand, in stating that tasks reflect the dancers’ interiority, there is a sense that Halprin regards the use of pedestrian movement as sufficient on its own to neutralise the impositions of dance normativity and achieve dissensus, without the need for performers’ to focus on avoiding the embeddedness of their trained body.

Although there is no official definition of Contact Improvisation, and while its evolution sees later practitioners place less emphasis on the element of constant contact between the dancers (Smith, 1997c), the elements noted in Paxton's description equally feature in other practitioners'.
The choice was made not to focus deliberately on social issues (Smith, 1997c). This, however, does not insulate Contact Improvisation from being perceived as political, because of the implications potentially emerging from the use, as its medium, of an oppositional means such as improvisation.

'Contactor' is the term with which a practitioner of Contact Improvisations is referred to (Smith, 1997c).

Smith describes the act of improvising by using her recurrent movement habits as "doing myself" (Smith, 1997a, p. 105), in contrast to the improvisational movement that she caught herself doing and that was instead reminiscent of a movement that was outside her habitual comfort zone.

By contrast, Ross (2009) also observes that Halprin could be lenient towards improvised movements that appeared to revert to movement clichés, estimating that their improvisational derivation had more value than their lack of originality. While this is a paradox that might be explored, its significance in relation to the issue at hand, namely the risk of fixity within improvisation, is that it reinforces the notion that improvising does not automatically ensure the avoidance of embeddedness.

It should be observed, however, that Midgelow's improvisational aim appeared to be directed towards an exploration and expansion, rather than a rejection, of a dancer's recurrent movements.

The relation that I am proposing between agency and oppositional movement reflects my understanding of Smith's relation between desire and openness as realised in improvisation: desire is, at once, the source and the catalyst for openness.

In an earlier quotation Smith referred to 'the forces' as: gravity, momentum, inertia, etc.

Summers would also be one of the funding members of Judson Dance Theater.

It is equally true, however, that Summers pursued a personalised way of moving that she herself developed because, due to a severe form of osteo-arthritis affecting her joints, by 1955, at the age of 30, it was painful for her to engage in the movement patterns offered by the readily available dance training methods of her time (Wooster, 1980). This was confirmed on the Kinetic Awareness Center website (www.kineticawarenesscenter.org); however, the latter has subsequently become unavailable since, following Summers' death in Dec. 2014, the website is no longer operational due to financial difficulties being experienced by the Kinetic Awareness Center (information obtained upon contacting a representative of the Center through their social media Facebook page).

To facilitate this, Summers also minimised the focus on emotional and aesthetic elements (Foster, 2005).

Referring to exercises devised to elicit the dancers' sense of movement (namely kinesthetic awareness), Steve Paxton spoke of reclaiming "physical possibilities that may have become dormant, senses we have been trained to disregard" (Paxton, 2003, p. 180).

The direct approach that I employ in my practice is also the kind of approach which I found myself engaging in when collaborating with Butcher for The Return.

I am referring to the presence of two dancers, in CI, and of a choreographer/teacher and her practitioner/s in the other approaches.
CHAPTER 2

Agentic intentionality in bodies that matter

Trained dancers develop kinetic habits that reflect the hold of their formal training on their improvisational movement. This study develops the argument that, through a concerted use of agency and kinesthesis, the trained body possesses the capacity to oppose the normativity of the kinetic systems that constituted it. Specifically, anticipating here de Certeau's (1988) system-user theory introduced later in the thesis (p. 153 ff.), I argue that through agency and kinesthesia, the dancer – intended as the user of the normative system 'dance' – can use her trained body – intended as the normative system itself – in ways in which it was not supposed to be used.

However, a perspective according to which the body is not capable of taking truly autonomous, independent, decisions also exists. This notion relegates the body to a passive entity, constituted by the police and, as such, embodiment of normativity and meaningless without it. Feminist theorist Judith Butler is one of the proponents of the agency-less body, unable of deliberate intentionality. Here, following an introduction on the divisive nature of the debate, I engage with Butler's stance, with two aims. Firstly, I equate Butler's notion of the body as normatively constituted by gender to the notion of the dancer's body as normatively constituted by technical training in
specific dance genres. Secondly, I challenge certain aspects of the notion of the
gendered body in order to find grounds for claiming that the gendered body also
displays features that suggest an agentic nature. I then argue that, given the alleged
similarity in the constitution of gendered and technically trained bodies, the
individuation of instances of agentic deliberation in the former makes it feasible to
accept that agency may equally be a constitutive feature of the latter.

In the following chapter, I also elaborate upon approaches implicitly or overtly
endorsing agency: from Rancière to Sklar, Noland and de Certeau. The reason for
debating the issue of agency within the context of social and political theories, be it
Butler's or Rancière's, is that it is within these disciplines, rather than in dance
discourse, that the discussion has been developed.

2.1 Agentic subjects vs. discursive subjects: an introduction to the debate

Postmodern American choreographer Yvonne Rainer, who famously proclaimed:
"my body remains the enduring reality" (Rainer quoted in Burt 2004, p. 29). As
remarked by Burt, Rainer's statement signifies that the body "can resist normative,
social and aesthetic ideologies" (Burt, 2004, p. 29). Rainer's statement is an
uncompromising declaration of the agency of the subject.

According to Foster, in improvisation the agency of the body is activated as "the
thinking and creating body engages in action" (2003b, p. 8). In Foster's
interpretation, the fact that the body engages in action does not mean that it takes
undisputed control of the improvisation, but rather that, in becoming active, it
engages with the mind in an enquiring and responsive fashion. Conversely, the definition of the body as 'thinking' and its engagement with the mind do not imply that agency is a primarily intellectual power and that the improvised oppositional movement is entirely selected and controlled by the subject's conscious awareness.

Foster remarks that, in improvisation, agency is displayed in the practitioner's ability to balance known and unknown elements, to draw both on the "familiar/reliable and the unanticipated/unpredictable" (2003b, p. 3). The known elements include the conventions associated with the site in which the improvisation takes place, any pre-arranged guidelines, or the presence of specific media that limit or influence the body's freedom of movement, any tendency of the body to move in a particular way, due to training habits or individual preferences, and the outcome of previous improvising sessions. The unknown elements, defined as "that which was previously unimaginable" (Foster, 2003b, p. 4), are deeply linked to the known: improvisers are able to discover the unknown only because of their engagement with the known.

With reference to my oppositional practice, the importance of the link between known and unknown elements consists in the fact that the former provide an opportunity of relating to normativity as the reminder of what to reject. Through this it then becomes possible to achieve the unknown, the previously unimaginable: the disruption of normativity itself. Agency becomes a means through which the embedded movements of the established dance genres are not just rearranged into new combinations, juxtaposed or partially distorted, but are used against themselves, towards their own erasure. In an oppositional context, therefore, agency is realised in the elaboration of tactics refusing, disabling and replacing the known.
The aim of agency in oppositional improvisation is to interact with kinesthesia to elicit the unimaginable. In general terms, agency could be described as the process of synthesis between the intellectual and the physical, and as the ability to elicit the most appropriate cross-modal tactics for the achievement of the intended aim, given the contingent situation. In this sense, as it will become clearer in due course, agency is the force that enables and oversees the subject's engagement in the system-user interaction described by de Certeau.

Within oppositional practices, agency exists and is expressed on different levels: originally, in the normatively-constituted subject's deliberate decision to disrupt normativity; subsequently, in the endeavour to identify modalities, kinetic or otherwise, for the implementation of dissent; and, lastly, in the ability to adapt to the state of the continuously evolving relation between the subject and the circumstances, so as to sustain the intended interference with normativity.

Theories that propose a discursive understanding of the body, whereby the body is considered as constituted by the projection upon it of cultural structures that inhibit agency, are of particular concern to dance practitioners. The common contention is twofold: on the one hand, the suggestion that the body is discursively constituted deprives the artistic process – and the artist who performs it – of its due credit; on the other hand, the lack of agency that a discursive reading of the body espouses makes it impossible to account for the creative and improvisational processes.

According to dance scholar Christopher Bannerman, to regard the body exclusively as a surface upon which performance is inscribed as a text is to misrepresent the
body: "[It means] avoiding the complex issues of agency and both the mystery and knowledge of the artmaker" (Bannerman in Bannerman, Sofaer, Watt, 2006, p. 21).

The consequences of a discursive connotation of the dancing body are also highlighted by dance scholar Margaret Thompson Drewal. Specifically, Drewal focuses on the lack of agency in a performative context. As part of her analysis of the improvisational dance practices of the Yoruba peoples of south-western Nigeria, Drewal recognises that the western dancing body's capacity for action is hindered by the cultural bias of a spectator-based understanding of theatre:

Mainstream Western theatre practice... has treated performance as product... by maintaining a system that privileges the distanced, critical (mind's) eye of the spectator/director... Products of this sort value fixity and are thus not conducive to improvisation.  

Drewal, 2003, p. 129

Drewal contrasts this approach with the Yoruba's improvisational dance, which develops the performance as a process by attributing "agency to the performers, rather than to the disembodied eye of a distanced critic" (2003, p. 130). According to Drewal, the reliance on the individuality of the subject, as opposed to a scripted choreography that restricts it, allows the performer to abandon the "common stock of performance knowledge" (2003, p. 130) and produce new embodied knowledge.

The denial of the agency of the performer introduced by discursive theories of the body is also lamented by Emilyn Claid (2006), one of the founding members of X6 Collective. Further, Claid draws on her training as a ballet dancer to articulate the functioning of the normative systems espousing the discursive body. In doing so, Claid also reflects the logic of de Certeau's system-user theory, in implicitly
suggesting how users are able to use the system in ways it was not intended for. Claid interprets the system of ballet through French philosopher Michel Foucault's theory, which elucidates how systems of power maintain control by manipulating the subjects that constitute them. Claid observes that ballet inscribes its language on the dancer's body, which then becomes both the tool through which the system perpetuates itself, and the embodied perpetuation of the system. Furthermore, ballet's hold on the subject is not experienced as coercive, but perceived as the body's own desire, which reinforces the system's control over the user. However, Claid remarks that the necessity, on the part of the system, to impose a strict control on the body implies that the latter is not inherently obedient. I suggest that this potential for disobedience individuates the user's agency, and that agency can sever the vicious circle of normative perpetuation of embeddedness, and institute a virtuous circle of oppositional detraining/creativity. In this scenario, the user's/dancer's body, which is a perpetuation of the system, is being used by the user/dancer in ways it was not intended for.

Claid also laments the lack of recognition for the agency of the female dancing body in ballet, when viewed through the lens of Foucault's theory; she likens this failed acknowledgement to that of the 1970s feminist theories, which presented the ballerina exclusively as a political body, helpless against the patriarchal powers that constituted it:

> These theories, while liberating the female body from the clutches of beauty, also deny her agency... They act to dismiss ballet performers themselves from discourse, negating their embodied intelligence of dancing.

Claid, 2006, p. 37

In her critique of theories that disregard agency, Claid is echoed by Foster. The
power of agentic resistance is explained by Foster by making reference to "a body that is written upon but that also writes" (1995, p. 15). According to Foster (2003b), this duality emerges with particular clarity in the improvising body, since the latter is neither active nor passive or, conversely, it is both, active and passive. However, Foster also remarks that this concept is in contrast with most theories since, typically, human action is interpreted as distinctly attributable either to a self that instructs the body, or to the conditioning of society and culture. In relation to the latter, that is to say the theories identifying the body as the repository of cultural discourse, as a discursive body rather than the creator of independent meanings, Foster (2003b) makes specific reference to Michel Foucault as one of the first to present this notion.

Michael Foucault understands the body as a passive entity entirely inscribed by, and dependent on, the social and cultural specificity of the historical reality in which it is situated.

Nothing in man – not even his body – is sufficiently stable to serve as the basis for self-recognition or for understanding other men.

Foucault, 1977, p. 153

As the feminist theorist Judith Butler has remarked:

In a sense, for Foucault… cultural values emerge as the result of an inscription on the body, understood as a medium, indeed, a blank page… [an inscription made by] history, as a relentless writing instrument.

Butler, 1999, p. 166

Foster observes that, within theories such as Foucault's,

the body is relegated to the status of instrumental object... robbed of all vitality, much less the capacity for agency.

Foster, 2003b, p. 8

In light of the tension described between the notion that subjects do possess agency
and theories that negate this possibility, the ensuing part of the research critically engages with the latter. I will do so by introducing the gender theory of feminist scholar Judith Butler, with the purpose of individuating within it instances of agency. My engagement with gender theory is justified by the fact that Butler is one of the most prominent thinkers to espouse the position that subjects do not possess agency, and the frequency with which she is referenced in dance studies suggests that her influence in the field is meaningful.

I. Gendered and genred subjects: shared constitutive structures of agency-less bodies

In the chapters that follow, Rancière's and de Certeau's accounts of non-conformity to normative frameworks, Foster's real-life example of agentic intentionality and Merleau-Ponty's notion of embodiment provide a theoretical grounding for the understanding of oppositional improvisation. However, my lived experience of oppositional improvisation has revealed significant challenges in disengaging from embedded movement habits and shaping new ones. This signals that my technically trained dancing body is strongly informed in its understanding of dance by what I would describe as the normative gaze (the system of value judgments based on the criteria of established genres). Although I do maintain that I possess agency, I would argue that the reason for the difficulty in divorcing my body from the normativity of its formal training is that it is constituted in a similar manner, and is therefore analogous in nature, to what feminist theorist Judith Butler refers to as the gendered body.
In this chapter I introduce a parallel between the gendered body, which is a normative body, and the technically trained body, which is also a normative body and which I try to resist as I attempt to be or, more exactly, to become, an oppositional body, able to engender oppositional movement. The comparison with Butler's gendered body has two aims. The first is to use the similarity between the two bodies to offer a theoretical explanation of, and to help individuate, the difficulties that I encounter when I resist my normative body. The second aim is to elicit from Butler's theory the notion that, despite being normative, the gendered body also has individual agency. I will use this notion, in conjunction with the suggested correspondence between the gendered body and the technically trained body, to argue that the latter also possesses agency and that, therefore, it has the ability to resist normativity on the path to becoming an oppositional body. Confronting Butler's notion of gendered subjects allows for a more effective counter-argument against approaches that exclude the possibility that subjects may possess the power of individual deliberation and, consequently, the possibility of oppositional improvisation. Butler's position is balanced, in the following chapters, by those of Rancière, de Certeau, and Merleau-Ponty, supporting the notion that subjects possess agency.

Since Butler's ideas are being used, here, to investigate the trained body's problematic embeddedness as well as its potential for agency and opposition, extended parts of the analysis will concentrate on the exposure and understanding of elements of her theory, without always reiterating their relevance to oppositional improvisation. However, the study relies significantly on an implied general correspondence between pairs of equivalent notions: trained dancing body and
gendered body, oppositional improvisational body and abject body, embedded technical training and heterosexual normativity. Specific differences between the two terms of each pair will also be appropriately highlighted on a case-by-case basis, when relevant to the purposes of the study.

I endeavour to be rigorous in my approach, but I will only engage with those aspects of Butler's theory that are relevant to the issues I am tackling. Therefore, the analysis is not intended as an exhaustive examination of Butler's ideas. Such a task would be beyond the scope of this study, not least because of the difficulties in engaging with Butler: her positions are not always identifiable as linear and clearly defined contentions. As observed by Carrie Noland (2009) and Martha Nussbaum (1999), Butler's tendency to conflate heterogeneous theoretical approaches results in fractures or contradictions, which, according to Noland, emerge particularly when comparing her treatment of corporeal and discursive practices. I will try to negotiate these areas of ambiguity in such way so as to maintain the logical consistency necessary to uphold the validity of my arguments.

2.2 Technically trained and gendered bodies: a preliminary comparative overview

The gendered body is a body formed through an automatic adherence to normativity, which, in Butler's analysis, is equated to heterosexuality. However, as I draw the comparison between the gendered body and the trained body, I do not mean to imply that the trained dancing body is constituted by heterosexual normativity. Rather, my intention is to emphasise the similarity in the structure – not the content – of the
relationships that each of the two bodies has with its respective constitutive source; namely, heterosexuality for the gendered body and genre-specific technical training for the dancing body. The gendered body, therefore, is used here as the archetype of a normative body constituted by prescriptive exogenous forces, and Butler's analysis as a way to highlight the procedures through which these forces operate. I argue that these forces are also at play in the constitution and functioning of the trained body. While I submit that there is structural similarity in the formation of the gendered body and the trained dancing body, it should also be recognised that, in terms of their respective derivation, of their originative sources, there are two major differences.

The first difference is that, before becoming normatively constructed by specific technical trainings, the dancing body is a social body or, as Butler would have it, a gendered body. This means that, unlike the latter, the dancing body has also the knowledge that it has the potentials to be something else; it has experienced itself as something different from what it is – also in kinesthetic terms. However, I would also suggest that this does not imply that the automatisms derived from the training regime are less constitutive of the dancing body than the automatisms derived from the heterosexual gender matrix are of the gendered body. That is not the case, because the dancing body is understood to exist – and understands itself as existing – as what it is only insofar as it has constituted itself according to the technical movement parameters of its training. In the same way, the gendered body understands itself for what it is through the heterosexual parameters of the performatives it has enacted in the process of its own constitution. In other words, despite existing as something else in other contexts that are outside dance, as something other than a dancing body, the trained body would not know how to move
differently than it does any better than a successfully constituted gendered body would know how not to be gendered. However, it is feasible that, in comparison to the gendered body, once cracks do begin to appear in the technically constituted dancing body – in ways that will be described later and labelled 'kinesthetic modes' – the experiences informing its other areas of engagement with reality could facilitate its progression towards something other than itself, towards an oppositional body.

The second difference is that, while the gendered subject is forcibly constituted as what it is, the dancing subject makes the conscious decision of becoming what it is by voluntarily deliberating to undergo the necessary technical training. With reference to my practice, this does not facilitate the ability to find oppositional movements since, as noted above, the trained body's constitutive process institutes automatic kinetic responses. However, paradoxically, the conscious awareness of the process of skill acquisition during formal training may elicit the idea that the inverse process, de-skilling, may also be theoretically possible.

The combined effect of having experienced itself as something other than a technically trained dancing body, and the understanding that a process of de-skilling might be a possibility, could cause the dancing body to implicitly perceive that alternative potentials may exist within itself. This is not sufficient on its own to make the individuation of these potentials explicit, but it might engender within the dancing body a sense of agency more promptly than in the gendered body.

Although Butler's analysis is useful in understanding the trained body as normative by correlating it to the gendered body, I also argue that the tenets of her theory
should be resisted, or at least reassessed, with regard to the body's alleged inability to ever alter voluntarily its constitutively embedded habits. In this sense, the objection that will be raised to Butler's notion that subjects lack individual agency is to be seen as an argument in favour of the possibility of resisting embedded technical movements through practices of oppositional improvisation. A more in depth approach to Butler's notion of gendered body and of the process through which it is constituted will be useful not only to articulate in more detail its similarity to the constitutive structure of the technically trained dancing body, but also to argue the existence of ways in which the body can, at least in part, inform its own actions beyond the imperatives of normativity, thus becoming an agentic body, the body of oppositional improvisation.

2.3 Normative performativity: the structural constitution of the gendered and technically trained bodies

Butler's contention is that any seemingly natural law relating to human behaviour, including sexual behaviour, does not precede its own formulaic implementation. This means that human behaviour does not express natural laws, rather, it articulates prescriptive norms and, in doing so, it produces effects that are mistaken for the expressions of natural laws. Utterances and gestures are the means of construction of the alleged natural laws to which they claim to abide. According to Butler, this same logic operates in the constitution of the subject. The gendered body's adherence to heterosexual normativity is enacted as a matter of course, rather than as the result of individuals' autonomous and intentional deliberation. It is an adherence that is expressed in what Butler defines as performativity: the reiteration of performatives.
socially meaningful utterances and gestures\textsuperscript{7} embedded in the fabric of everyday-life and affirming – heterosexual – normativity. Individuals become subjects by acquiring their gender through performativity.

These reiterations engage the individuals in ways that shape their relative social relations within the framework of discourse and in accordance to pre-established normative parameters. As stated, in the case of the gendered body, the parameters used to define the individual belong to the heterosexual matrix. Acquiring them means, first and foremost, being classified as a she or a he, thus becoming a subject. The correspondence with the constitutive structure of the trained dancing body is immediately obvious. On the one hand, individuals obtain subject status through association to a given gender, achieved by complying with the performative parameters of the heterosexual matrix; on the other hand, an individual becomes a dancing body by affiliation to a certain genre, achieved by complying with its established kinetic principles. In relation to the gendered body, instances of normative verbal performatives are, for example, the acts of interpellation, which contribute to constitute a subject by naming and reiterating its gender. The attribution of gender to the I is both immediate and always ongoing. It is immediate in the sense that it commences even before birth, with the appellation female or male, following the identification of the individual's anatomical traits: "A 'she' or a 'he', and in that naming, the girl is 'girled' …through the interpellation of gender" (Butler, 2011, p. xvii).

The attribution of gender is also always ongoing in the sense that, should the individual be identified as female, for instance, she will be addressed in interpersonal
communication through the use the pronoun 'she'; also the gestural behaviours society will adopt in relating to her will be consistent with the anatomically assigned affiliation. Both, verbal and gestural interactions will validate the marking of her gendered body as female, ensuring her continued existence as a subject. The reiteration of the gendering parameters over time ensures that the individual is not only originally constituted but also continuously re-constituted as a subject, and continues to exist as what Butler describes as a body that matters, a body that is socially legible thanks to its conformity to normativity. In the same way, the reiteration of technical training ensures that the dancing body becomes and continues to be recognised as a dancing body, through the execution of movements being understood as dance. The normative reiterations of the gendered body are implemented, on a daily basis and unsuspectingly, by the whole of society, by each and every performative-enacting subject who, in this way, reconstitutes both her (or his) gendered subjecthood and that of others. In short, the performativity of gendering is not a one-off event; rather, it is a process of collective replication of verbal and gestural performatives over time. Butler describes performativity as:

\[
\text{not a singular "act", for it is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition}
\]

Butler, 2011, p. xxi

An attempt to interpret Butler's statement in terms of socially recognisable instances would presumably present the gendering of a female subject as facilitated by individuals other than herself, through performative actions such as giving her make-up products as a present, since these are deemed suitable for a woman (or maybe dolls, if the subject in receipt of the present is a child); on the other hand, gendering
can also be realised through the performative norms of naturalised first-person behaviour, such as the gesture of applying the make-up, or playing with the dolls received as a present. Similarly, in relation to performative utterances, a female subject could be addressed by others, verbally, through gender-conferring appellations such as the complimentary epithet 'beautiful' (as opposed to 'handsome'); or, in the first person, the subject might describe herself as 'a wife' (as opposed to 'a husband'). The consistent reiteration of these and other performatives ensures that the individual's gender-based subjecthood is continuously re-stated over time. Once a female subject has been constituted, as Butler remarks:

That 'girling' of the girl does not end there... that founding interpellation is reiterated by various authorities and throughout various intervals of time.

Butler, 2011, p. xvii

The implementation of the gender matrix – or, which is the same, the gendering process as it happens through the use of gender-defining performatives over time – is the illustration of how, as stated initially, according to Butler, actions and utterances that appear to be the expression of allegedly natural laws are in fact responsible for the creation of the law they seemingly abide by. A more specific example of this are the laws of sex, which are generated by performatives enacting heterosexuality as the norm (Butler, 2011). This, I would submit, is an altogether analogous framework to the one in which the trained dancing body operates. In the absence of any attempt to interfere with the process, my dancing body abides by seemingly natural kinetic responses which are, in fact, the re-affirming of the genre-matrix through the kinetic performatives embedded in me by means of my technical training. Performatives, whether animating the gendered body or the dancing body, are the prescriptive formulations of the law. In other words, performatives create what they express, that
is to say, in relation to the two areas being discussed, gender and genre.

Although partly implicit in the description of the gendering process provided so far, it is useful to point out two crucial and interrelated characteristics of performativity: historicity and citationality (Butler, 2011; Noland, 2009). The concepts of historicity and citationality have implications for the constitution and behaviour of the subject and, consequently, inform the understanding of what is intended by agency. To the extent that the constitutive structure of the gendered body closely resembles that of the trained body, exploring its relation with agency can shed light on the feasibility of resisting kinetic embeddedness, as a deliberate choice, through oppositional improvisation. The notion of historicity refers to the already observed fact that, because they are the reiteration of pre-existing norms, performatives refer back to a meaning already embedded within them. The constitutive power of performatives is rooted in the validation that these precedents confer on them, in the same way that technical dance training can legitimise itself because it is part of the kinetic inheritance of a certain genre.

Citationality, on the other hand, relates to the idea that performatives are reiterable in the same way language is. This implies a temporal and spatial transferability that could result in them being enacted in contexts other than those within which they have typically operated to constitute normative subjects. This potential conflation with unsuitable contexts may result in failed subjectivations, whereby individuals are not properly gendered. This makes of the failed subjects socially unintelligible bodies which, as remarked later, are the only form of resistance to normativity admitted by Butler's theory.
2.4 Historicity: the roots of performativity and the impossibility of individual agency

I will engage now, in more detail, with the first of the two aspects of performativity mentioned: historicity. With regard to the subject and their gendering, there are two main accusations that Butler acknowledges and attempts to counter. The first is that the gendering process is contradictory given that it is said to be enabled and implemented by the subject while, at the same time, it is deemed to constitute the subjects by whom it is created. The objection, therefore, is that Butler's explanation of the gendering process fails to recognise the logical implication that the enacting of gestural and verbal performatives requires the prior existence of a gendered subject, a gendered agent doing the enacting. Butler disputes this objection by stating that the relation between the gendering process and the constitution of the gendered subject is not dependent on the ordinary temporal chronology of a linear cause-effect link, whereby a certain outcome results from an action which, in turn, implies the prior existence of an agent performing it. According to Butler, since the individual is born into a gendered framework where it has no choice but to instantly relate to the surroundings according to parameters that enforce and perpetuate gender biases, its gendering is concurrent with and indistinguishable from its very existence. In the words of Butler:

The "I" neither precedes nor follows the process of this gendering, but emerges only within and as the matrix of gender relations themselves.

Butler, 2011, p. xvi

Once again, Butler's statement is also descriptive of the normative dancing body inasmuch as this is, like the gendered body, concurrent with and indistinguishable
from its own inception and existence, given that, firstly, it is being created in training, through the process of acquisition of the embedded kinetic responses and, secondly, it exists through, and as the reiteration of, those responses.

Butler's statement exposes the gendering process to a second possible objection: if the I is constituted as part of the process, as opposed to existing prior to it, the subject is not in charge of its own actions; it has no agency. However, according to Butler, the fact that the subject does not exist prior to the gendering process does not imply that, once constituted, it is devoid of agency. On the contrary, remarks Butler, what provides individuals with the capacity to will is precisely the status of subject that they acquire through the marking of the gendering process. In the same way, the dancing body's ability to dance could be seen as gifted to it by the training process through which it is constituted. Even the trained body's understanding of itself as a dancing body is derived from the awareness of having acquired established kinetic techniques traditionally considered to be dance.

Butler considers subjects to be complicit in this exercise of normative compliance, inasmuch as they enable the gendering process through their performative actions or, which is the same, they activate the norms that regulate gender relations. Subjects are an inextricable part of the historical legacy they perpetuate. Butler remarks that

[the] "I", which is produced through the accumulation and convergence of such "calls" [the interpellations of the performatives], cannot extract itself from the historicity of that chain.

Butler, 2011, p. 82

Butler, therefore, identifies a notion of agency that, somewhat paradoxically, is
realised as subjects behave consistently with how they are expected to behave on the basis of the assigned gender. In these conditions, the subject's gaze and that of normativity become indistinguishable. Individual agency, intended as the ability to act independently of, or to question, conformity is substituted with agency by proxy, where the subject's will become one and the same with the will of the gendering process, but is perceived by the subject as its own. Butler admits that, because they derive their identity from being enablers for, and expression of, "the matrix of gender relations [which] is prior to the emergence of the 'human'" (Butler, 2011, p. xvii), subjects are not to be intended as freely deliberating individuals, independently articulating an original content. In her words:

The subject is one who is presumed to be the presupposition of agency… but the subject is also one who is subjected to a set of rules or laws that precede the subject. This second sense works against the humanist conception of an autonomous self or self-grounded human actor.

Butler, quoted in Meijer 1998, p. 285

In a more straightforward reiteration of her conception of the relationship between subject and agency, Butler states that "agency… cannot be conflated with voluntarism or individualism… and in no way presumes a choosing subject" (2011, p. xxiii).

To sum up, Butler intends historicity as a cumulative inheritance of prior applications of the performatives, through which their meaning is consolidated and in which their constitutive power is rooted. Historicity, therefore, identifies chains of signification that are embedded within, and enable, performativity. Insofar as subjects are constituted by those performatives, they are part of that historicity and, thus, do not posses an autonomous, individual agency.
2.5 Gendered bodies and trained bodies: the possession of the matrix gaze

One of the reasons for engaging with Butler's theory was to highlight the similarity between the gendered body and the technically trained dancing body, to help understand the difficulties in creating oppositional movement. With this in mind, and in light of the connections already observed between the two, a parallel can be established between the normativity of the trained body and the elements that constitute the gendered body, as highlighted in the paragraphs above.

The notion of historicity, summarised as a cumulative inheritance of prior applications of the performatives, can also be recognised in the wealth of embedded kinetic performatives, the implementation of which leads, simultaneously, to the constitution of the trained dancing body and to the promulgation of the dance genre of which they represent the established normativity. Therefore, because it is constituted and only exists as a body that effect a certain dance genre through the execution of the prescribed performatives, the technically trained body is part of the historicity of the genre and devoid of original kinetic initiative. In short, the trained dancing body exists as embedded technique.

The difference between the gendered body and the technically trained body, as already noted, is the fact that, while the exposure of the former to constitutive interpellations is beyond its control, the latter, the dancing-body-as-subject, is constituted following the dancer's conscious decision to undergo the training, a form of self-directed interpellation, during which the body's identity as a dancing body is developed concomitantly to its acquisition of kinetic techniques. Therefore,
regardless of the difference in their respective reasons for coming into being (involuntary, in the case of the gendered body, and voluntary in the case of the dancing body) they both exist as, and as a result of, what they are: the materialisation and means of promulgation of the respective normative matrixes, namely heterosexuality and orthodoxies of genres. Effectively, these bodies (gendered and technically trained) appear as shells animated by external forces although, to be precise, this apparent emptiness is the reflection of the unavoidable coinciding between the normative gaze and the subject's understanding of itself according to that gaze. This, in turn, is a consequence of the already highlighted constitution of the subject according to the normative parameters that are the referents of that gaze – which is why I have described the coinciding of the subject's gaze with that of normativity as unavoidable. The coercive nature of this unknowingly self-recursive understanding of one's own identity is expressed by Butler in these terms:

This not owning of one's words is there from the start… since speaking is always in some ways the speaking of a stranger through and as oneself.  
Butler, 2011, p. 185

This correspondence between the gaze of the orthodoxy of the genre and the gaze of the trained body is one of the reasons why I refer to my embedded movement as 'second nature', and explains, in part, the difficulties I encounter in my attempts to evade normativity. However, as part of my endorsement of the possibility of oppositional improvisation, I will argue against an understanding of the subject as comprehensively disempowered, and in favour of a subject who, while conditioned by normative performatives even when resisting them, is also able to enforce first-person, agency-led decisions. The subject of oppositional improvisation is neither solely constituted by normativity, nor annihilated by it; it is a subject that actively
resists normativity through agency, kinetic self-awareness (kinesthesia) and the movement choices that the combination of these two forces can engender.\textsuperscript{10} In this sense, when engaging in oppositional improvisation my dancing body becomes the site where the conflict is played out,\textsuperscript{11} between my normative body, which sees itself as a dancing body only inasmuch as it embodies the embedded technical training it has undertaken, and my oppositional body, which perceives and, although struggling, attempts to materialise the potential of something other than kinetic normativity.\textsuperscript{12}

II. Performative tensions, abject bodies and agentic potentialities

In this and in the next section of the chapter I will attempt to identify aspects of Butler's theory that potentially suggest individual agency may exist at some level, and I will then expand upon those theoretical potentialities, to show how subjects might be able to acquire control of their own agency.

2.6 Citationality: performative reiteration and the seed of change

The analysis of Butler's gendered body can now be resumed with a look at citationality, which was the second of the two forces mentioned above, informing the constitution of the subject and its agency. Citationality is, at the same time, what allows for historicity to act as a validating precedent for the performatives and what accounts for the possible failure of the performatives to constitute a normative subject, thus offering a potential for resistance to normativity.

As Noland (2009) points out, Butler advocates Derrida's notion of supplementarity to
justify the fact that, in attempting to constitute the subject, performatives may unintentionally create identities that do not conform to the normative intent that generated them. Language is based on the premise that each of its discrete units – words – is iterable. This allows for meanings, of which words are the coded carriers, to be conveyed through space and time, via the language system.\textsuperscript{13} The encoded meaning of a word refers to the word as used in the specific context within which that meaning was acquired.\textsuperscript{14} However, this meaning can be altered if that context changes. The meaning that a word will express in its future applications is also a reflection of the contextual circumstances of its usage, of the enunciative position of the subject/speaker: the context of usage interacts with the encoded meaning to engender signification. Should the contextual circumstances change, the meaning that the word enables is also altered. The possibility of this happening is linked to the very iterability of words, insomuch as iterability makes their repetition possible even outside the prescribed context.

The word's potential for this kind of disassociated iterability is defined by Derrida as citationality (Noland, 2009). This occurrence is an inescapable condition of language usage, since words are necessarily pronounced in spatial and temporal contexts that are different from those in which they originally assumed their encoded meaning. Therefore, the meaning that the reiteration of a word comes to express is not exactly identical to the original signification of the utterance. The unavoidable changes in the enunciative positions cause the original meaning of words to morph and engender supplementary connotations. This supplementarity is a de facto law of language, and citationality allows for its occurrence (Noland, 2009).
Derrida applies the theory of language supplementarity to Austin's notion of speech acts (see endnote 6), which are the equivalent of Butler's constitutive performatives. Derrida's contention that speech acts are subject to the supplementarity of language is justified by the fact that, as it happens with any other part of language, also speech acts are liable to being disrupted by the failure to reiterate each instance of their execution in exactly the same way, under the same normative conditions. As Butler observes: "Reiterations are never simply replicas of the same" (2011, p. 172). Butler embraces Derrida's logic and applies the law of supplementarity to the performatives that constitute the gendered subject. The normative power of performatives is rooted in the enunciative position of historicity, which is to say, on a shared acceptance of the codified meaning of performatives and on the understanding that they must be enunciated within the appropriate context. Butler's acceptance that performatives are affected by supplementarity entails that the subjects being constituted will differ from their gendered archetypes. Butler refers to this difference as 'excess' (2011).

The law of supplementarity will cause excesses in the constitution of the gendered subject, variations from the normative identity that performatives attempt to install. Furthermore, insofar as, for Butler, gestural performatives are vulnerable to the same perils as their verbal counterparts (see endnote 7), performative gestures executed in the wrong context or timeframe will also constitute subjects whose identities exceed normative expectations, rather than ensuring the compliance with the heterosexual matrix (Noland, 2009). Butler's acceptance of citationality, hence supplementarity, has two effects: on the one hand, it interferes with performativity by offering a justification for the possibility of change; on the other, however, it places, once again, the causes for any alteration beyond the will of the subject, thus not admitting
Chapter 2

voluntary agency.

2.7 Abject bodies: normative utility and resignification

Following Butler's logic to its extreme consequence, if it is impossible for performatives to be always reiterated in identical conditions, given that different spatio-temporal settings will necessarily provide non-identical contexts, it should be impossible for norm-compliant subjects to be constituted, as each subject would be an excess, the result of the imperfect application of performatives.\(^{15}\)

The subject as a self-identical entity is no more. It is in this sense that the temporary totalization performed by identity categories is a necessary error… necessary as a term of affiliation, but it will not fully describe those it purports to represent.

Butler, 2011, p.175

Nevertheless, it would appear that different subjects incur different degrees of deviation from the norm\(^ {16}\) whereby, despite the theoretical impossibility of reiterations being self-identical, the constitution of most subjects is still successful enough for them to be counted as bodies that matter.\(^ {17}\) There are instances, however, in which the deviation from the norm, the degree of excess, is such that bodies become abject. These are subjects that flout the laws of performativity to the point that they occupy positions that are not socially identifiable; historicity cannot act as their referent. They are, in a sense, non-existent (Butler, 2011). Because they lack an acknowledged social articulation, these bodies remain, to anticipate Rancière's terminology, unaccounted-for (Rancière, 2001).

However, Butler also remarks that this state of abjection can have a double benefit:
on the one hand, it is essential in the constitution of non-abject subjects; on the other hand, it can have the specular effect of democratising the category the abject body was meant to belong to by favouring the expansion of the category's boundaries.

To deal with the first of these two points first, Butler argues that gender is not only positively determined by inclusion, whereby archetypal results are achieved by the correct application of gender-appropriate performatives in the suitable context; the gendered subject is also constituted through "exclusionary means" (Butler, 2011, p. xvii). Butler states that "a domain of abjected bodies, a field of deformation… in failing to qualify as the fully human, fortifies those regulatory norms" (2011, p. xxiv). The concept is reiterated even more specifically elsewhere in Bodies that Matter:

Much of the straight world has always needed the queers it has sought to repudiate through the performative force of the term. Butler, 2011, p. 169

Abject bodies contribute to delineate the contours of the successfully interpellated bodies by acting as a "constitutive outside" (Butler, 2011, p. xiii), a space of social exclusion they occupy by virtue of their own abjection. In this way, the bodies that matter are made visible within the 'distribution of the sensible', to anticipate another expression derived from Rancière. Subjects are constituted as what they are also through opposition to what they are not. However, while they occupy the outer borders of normative acceptability, abject bodies also lay claim to their right to be recognised as legitimate connotations of the category to which, instead, they are regarded as excess.
This is not a request, on the part of abject individuals, for socially articulated bodies to be tolerant of the abnormality of the abject ones; it is, instead, a call to re-classify the abject as non-abject, as not abnormal in the first place. Their aim is to recast themselves as just another legitimate manifestation of the distribution of the sensible, rather than to be included within it while, at the same time, still being regarded as an abomination. Their aim is to resignify abjection. A specific example of this effort is that of gay subjects appropriating the word 'queer' by actively using it themselves. The resignification of this injurious performative is not achieved through the inclusion within the distribution of the sensible of the subjects it constitutes, as a sympathetic effort, performed by normativity, to extend social acceptance of diversity, while still viewing being queer as a state that antagonises normality. What resignification aims to achieve is for "queerness" to be recognised as a constitutive part of normativity, just one among other manifestations of normality. It is in this sense that abjection can have a democratising effect, resulting in the expansion of category boundaries.

The public assertion of "queerness" enacts performativity as citationality for the purpose of resignifying the abjection of homosexuality into defiance and legitimacy.

Butler, 2011, p xxviii

To recapitulate, Butler's formulation presents the abject subject as resisting normativity in two ways: firstly, by being created as an excess to the norm, as an involuntary effect of the law of supplementarity on performativity; secondly, by refusing to accept the exclusion of its own abjection from the social framework. Both expressions of resistance, according to Butler, imply no individual agency. With a view to affirming the condition of existence of oppositional improvisation, which is
the subject's access to individual agency, I will argue against Butler's notion of normative resistance as an agency-less endeavour.18

III. Individual agency in abject subjects

The discussion over the existence of agency in subjects resisting normativity will be structured in four parts. Firstly, I will clarify the specific understanding of normative resistance and agency on which I will base the analysis; secondly, I will engage with Butler's notion of the queer-subject as an instance of the abject body, in order to delineate the abject body as, ultimately, a body that does possess agency; thirdly, I will re-classify the abject body as normative, with regards to its constitution, and I will argue that, on this basis, if the abject body possesses agency, it is reasonable to argue that the gendered body does too; finally, given the previously suggested correspondence between the gendered body and the technically trained body, I will conclude that the individuation of agentic power in the former will, in turn, legitimise the notion that also the trained body possesses agency. This can explain the trained body's capacity to become an oppositional body, by resisting embedded movement habits, thus producing oppositional improvisation.

2.8 Intentional agency: the active resistance of abject and oppositional bodies

As a first step in this four-part analysis, it is important to observe that my attempt to show the potential for agency in the normative body will be limited to an engagement with the second of the two instances of resistance summarised above:
the abject body's refusal of its exclusion from the normative and its claim for validation as a body that matters. I will not be engaging with the first instance, because the use of the locution 'normative resistance', with reference to abject bodies that are involuntary excesses created by supplementarity, is somewhat misleading. The creation of abjection through supplementarity is not representative of the resistance to normativity provided by agency, if what is intended by agency is the capacity to make conscious, first-person decisions independent of normativity. The formation of abject bodies does not entail first-person involvement or decision-making processes. In terms of its constitution, an abject subject only disrupts normativity to the extent that the performatives that were meant to constitute her (or him) failed in their univocal gender assignation. From the perspective of the subject, this form of opposition is passively acquired through the constitutive process, not engendered by the subject's intentional agentic choices.

For this reason, not only will I not present the process of constitution of excess subjects as an instance of opposition to normativity, but I will also suggest that they are a confirmation of it. However, my decision to engage with the second of the two instances of resistance to normativity listed above, consisting in the abject body's refusal to accept its normatively imposed exclusion from the social framework, requires further clarification. Normative resistance, with regard to the social subject, is not to be identified with how unrepresentative of normativity the subject's constitutive traits happen to be, but with how, when this is the case (as it is with abject bodies), the subject engages with and challenges normativity by using agency.

Unlike abjection, oppositional improvisation is not a state the subject finds itself in
unintentionally. In a specular way to what has been noted with regard to the difference between the gendered body and the trained body, while the abject subject does not choose its abjection, oppositional improvisation is, in a way, a process of voluntary constitution of an abject state and of myself as an abject subject. As a result, the reasons why the abject body and the oppositional body resist normativity are very different, in fact, antithetic: the former endeavours to have its state of constitutive abjection labelled as normatively legitimate; the latter to distance itself from normative legitimacy, and to self-constitute as an abject body. The antithesis of purposes displayed by the abject and oppositional bodies in their resistance to normativity is motivated by the fact that their respective starting points are antithetic: normative compliance, for the trained body which is attempting to transition into an oppositional body; normative abjection, for the abject body which is attempting to transition into legitimacy.

The agency that the technically trained body needs to possess in order to effect the transition to oppositional body, or even provisionally operate as one, is an active form of agency, able to effect change starting from a normatively constituted body as point of departure. Agency is needed, while improvising, to ensure not only the positive individualization of oppositional movement, but also the uninterrupted rejection of the incessant attempt, on the part of the normatively constituted – trained – body, to revert to embedded movement habits (see endnote 11 for a reminder). This intentional and mindful monitoring mode is the precondition to the individuation of oppositional movement. To show the concrete existence of this enabling agency, hence explain oppositional improvisation, I will argue that Butler's abject subjects already display this kind of interactive, resistive agency. They do so not in their
being an excess, unknowingly constituted by supplementarity, but in their later\textsuperscript{19} claim for recognition as bodies that matter, in their struggle to democratise normativity by rejecting its given framework of acceptability and extending its borders of positive inclusion. It is this democratising effort that represents an intentional, oppositional, stance against normativity. These are the reasons why it is in the abject subject's efforts to resignify its own abjection that I will attempt to individuate the existence of agency within Butler's theory.

To speak out of metaphor, as it were, in Butler's concrete example of the queer subject, i.e. an abject subject, the resistance to normativity is displayed in the attempt to rework the meaning of the interpellation by which the subject is injuriously constituted – the epithet 'queer'. Consistently with the earlier observation that, although alike in their intent to counter normativity, the resistive purposes of the abject body are different from those of the aspiring oppositional body, the modalities to achieve them differ too: while the aspiring oppositional body refuses its constitutive, embedded, kinetic expressions, the queer abject body engages in the repetition of the original injurious interpellation by which it is constituted. The choral iteration of the utterance 'queer' on the part of its victims undermines the perpetrator's exclusive control over it and, consequently, its discriminatory power. However, to reiterate, despite the opposing modalities, both bodies are motivated by, and effect, an intentional departure from the orthodoxy of normative parameters.

It should be made clear that, in the resignification of the injurious interpellation 'queer', agency does not allow the subject to simply choose whether or not to be abject,\textsuperscript{20} nor may he chose to undo the constitutive reason for his abjection at source
(be it cultural, biological, social or a mix of those and other factors). In other words, he cannot resist personifying the status by virtue of which he is deemed an abject subject. The way in which the queer subject expresses its willing opposition to normativity is through the agentic choice to resist normativity's indictment of his status as abject, and to resist the attitudes that accompany that charge. This is the kind of intentional agentic resistance that, I believe, is also necessary to oppositional improvisation, and the existence of which I endeavour to explore.

2.9 Resignifying injury: abject resistance through intentional agency

I would argue that it appears difficult to explain the reworking of the interpellation 'queer', while also maintaining the assumption that the subject lacks individual agency. Butler bases the possibility of resignification of the abject subject on the notion that reiteration can become "the very condition of an affirmative response to violation" (Butler, 2011, p. 84). In this context, as we have seen, the performative is appropriated and repeated, but it is devoid of the injurious intent that originated it. Although Butler attributes the semantic shift of the interpellation to "a certain agency" (2011, p. 84), consistently with her concept of historicity she also hastens to add that this agency is engendered by "the force of repetition in language" (2011, p. 84), and it is not the product of a subject's individual will. More specifically, she identifies the source of resignification in an immaterial space of temporal interaction of discursive energies, which she describes as a "juncture of discursive demands… a crossroads of cultural and political discursive forces" (Butler, 2011, p. 84).

Butler observes that discourse can be a potentially ambivalent space, in which the
influences that converge to constitute the subject do not necessarily operate in unison and sometime even collide with each other. Butler's attempt to contextualise resignification provides a description of discourse that allows for the notion that forces other than performativity may influence the subject. This statement could be countered by saying that those inconsistencies of discourse are the performative inaccuracies already described as excesses and explained with the notion of supplementarity. While this would be consistent with other aspects of Butler's theory, it would seem unlikely to apply in these specific circumstances as a justification for the resignification of an already abject subject. Supplementarity is what engenders abject bodies, it is the reason for their failed constitution as bodies that matter. Furthermore, supplementarity is incidental; it results from the accidental mismatch between performatives and their intended context of application. Therefore, it seems highly unlikely and paradoxical that, after creating the abject bodies, a further, distinct, instance of – incidental – supplementarity would also happen to inform their demand for the resignification of the interpellation that enforces their abject status. Rather, it would seem reasonable to identify the discursive tensions that engender the reiterative resignification of the queer subject with forces independent of performativity and supplementarity. This, however, is still not sufficient to expressly validate any involvement of human agency.

To go back to the original claim, the conflation of these – as yet not clearly identified – discursive forces can engender a repetition that causes resistance against normativity in the form of a different articulation of the same performative: "The compulsion to repeat an injury is not necessarily the compulsion to repeat the injury in the same way" (Butler, 2001, p. 84). Stating that the conflation of forces within
discourse can produce a rehabilitative reiteration of the injurious interpellation provides resignification with a theoretical space of inception, but does not explain how these forces are conjured up. As suggested above, to maintain that this conflation is indeterminate, devoid of a governing and controlling will but that, at the same time, it is also the power that engenders re-signification is to equate the latter to randomly occurring interactions. In addition to being unlikely (as also hinted above), this could not explain the appropriation of the injurious interpellation on the part of its victims.

On this basis, and having previously excluded supplementarity and performativity as possible creating powers, the notion that the reiteration of the same utterance is capable of inducing the resignification of abjection, rather than causing a repetition of the original injurious intent, leads to the suggestion that it is used according to a specific logic that, I would argue, can be identified as the subjects' individual agency. Resignification is enacted when the community that is affected by the injurious term collectively endorses its use for restorative purposes. This is a concerted effort born out of a shared motivation. Its achievement is the result of a choral stance, but it requires the deliberate choice of each discrete unit, each victim of abjection, to stand against normative compliance and disrupt the mechanics of injury by appropriating its means. This intent identifies an action so specific as to demand a level of critical thinking and premeditation not consistent with the notion that it might be the incidental result of the incongruences of discourse.

The will to react to victimisation and the adoption of a collective strategy to reach this aim entail a level of first-person awareness and deliberation that denotes agentic
resistance. To contextualise this observation more clearly in the framework of Butler's theory, I would suggest that the absence of individual agency would render impossible Butler's contention that citationality – and, specifically, the citing of the term 'queer' – can be used as a means to manipulate performativity and turn it on its head into a means through which to recast abjection as an aspect of normality. The tactical appropriation of the vocabulary of abjection and the desire to be counted as bodies that matter in their own right, not as tolerable variations of something they failed to be, are specific examples of intentional instances. I have used the adjective 'tactical' to qualify the subjects' appropriation of the performative 'queer' in order to emphasise the link to de Certeau's notion of tactical actions, espoused later, through which subjects display the agentic ability to negotiate the constraints of the contextual situation so as to achieve their purposes.

In this sense, oppositional improvisation is a tactical endeavour as well, in its intentional countering of the normative framework to achieve alternative kinetic solutions. In their enacting "performativity as citationality for the purpose of resignifying the abjection of homosexuality" (Butler, 2011, p xxviii), Butler's queer subjects are clearly engaging in a tactical action that implies agency. These actions are also testimony to a more general expression of agency: the abject bodies' acceptance of themselves, their willingness to embrace their abject state, in spite of normative pressures to the contrary. This is not to imply that homosexuality, for instance, is an agentic choice. Rather, it is to recognise in agency what affords an abject subject the possibility to embrace and live according to – although with difficulty – the terms of his abjection, as opposed to having no alternative but to comply with the established performativity of the normative gaze.
So far, I have claimed that the existence of individual agency, a concept that Butler openly refuses, is a necessary constitutive element of resignification. I have done so by directly countering Butler's notion that resignification is a discursively generated process. I will now attempt to support further the claim that individuals possess agency, but through a more conciliatory approach: by eliciting it from possible inferences of intentional agency in Butler's own theory. The aim is to suggest that agency may be present as a potential trait of Butler's subject and that, as such, its existence is not necessarily incompatible with the normative constitution of the body.

### 2.10 Shared bodies: between performative constitution and intentional agency

I suggest that a space for individual agency in Butler's theory might be found in a statement that refers to abject subjects that have been constituted through injurious interpellation (as in the case of the queer-subject):

> Occupied by such terms and yet occupying them oneself... it is also the occasion to work the mobilizing power of injury, of an interpellation one never chose.

Butler, 2001, p. 83

This excerpt could be understood as implying that there is more to resignification than randomly engendered reiteration; that reiteration might be purposefully guided. Butler's suggestion to "work the mobilizing power... of an interpellation one never chose" seems to imply two elements. The first is a pre-condition that must be met in order to work the mobilising power: the abject body must be able to recognise its state of abjection. In the absence of this recognition, I would argue, a term such as 'queer' could not be perceived as injurious. Only once the abject state is recognised
by the individual that embodies it and, thus, the insult is felt, is there a reason and the possibility to "work the mobilizing power of injury". This recognition, in turn, requires the individual to have an understanding of himself as a subject who is distinct and different from other – normative – subjects, the comparison with whom allows him to understand himself as abject. Finally, this comparison between self and other entails a form of self-referential perception, of first-person awareness that is in conflict with an understanding of the abject subject as a passive excess born out of a contingent error, the application of performatives to an inappropriate context.

The second element that Butler's remark brings to the fore is an apparent invitation to an act of seemingly voluntary deliberation. Butler seems to suggest that the subject could act upon the situation highlighted above, upon the injurious effect of its constitutive interpellation – brought to light, as just observed, by its first-person awareness. An oppositional undertone is present in the tension existing among the elements of Butler's statement: the direct action evoked by the exhortation 'to work', the overtly negative reference to 'injury', the implicitly critical qualification of the interpellation as something that 'one never chose', the implied potential for change inferred by the locution 'mobilizing power', and the desirability of change suggested by the word 'occasion'. Butler appears to issue to abject subjects an invitation to deliberately and consciously work to redress the negative connotation bestowed upon them. The word 'work' itself delineates a clearly targeted task, born out of the self-awareness of abjection: the task to resignify the abject into the non-abject, by democratising normativity.

It cannot be excluded, of course, that Butler's remarks were not meant as I have
intended them – an invitation to counter normativity – but were instead simply acknowledging the abject subject's observed response to its abjection. I would suggest that, even in this case, the language she uses still colours her analysis with an oppositional connotation; even if not exhortative in its intention, Butler's observation appears nevertheless to imply the abject subject's potentials for intentional opposition.

For these reasons, to Butler's likely disagreement, I would argue that her statement can be read as an indication that subjects are capable of effecting voluntary choices. In other words, subjects possess agency. Although this does not imply that all of the subjects' decisions are agentic in nature, to the exclusion of normative constitutive processes, it does leave the space open for the possibility that individual agency may exist alongside the normative constitution of subjects, as a potential attribute of the abject subject, and be called upon on occasions. A place for agency in Butler's theory could also be found in the unoccupied spaces that exist within discourse, but that are outside the constitutive structuring of normativity. The existence of this negatively identified space can be intuited from Butler's statement:

To claim that discourse is formative is not to claim that it originates, causes, or exhaustively composes that which it concedes.

Butler, 2011, p. xix

This observation, it appears, goes beyond the one in which Butler referred to the site of resignification as a juncture of discursive demands. To state that discourse does not "exhaustively compose… that which it concedes" allows for the possibility that some aspects of the constituted subjects may be delineated by forces that, although existing within a discursive framework, are not discursive in nature. More precisely,
it could imply that the body may not be exclusively informed by performatives, which are forces enacted on/by the subject, but which originate from a normative space external to it. In the absence of a detailed account of precisely which other forces might inform the subject, the possibility that the body's self-awareness, its phenomenological, lived experience of itself may exert a constitutive influence cannot be excluded. In fact, this hypothesis could provide a possible solution to the issue highlighted by Noland:

The body also exerts pressure on discourse, Butler insists; however, she provides no account of how, when and why this pressure makes itself felt.

Noland, 2009, p. 178

Insofar as the body's lived experience may induce responses that are not originated by the performatives of normativity, these would testify to the existence of individual agency. The existence and importance of bodily pressure on discourse (and of agency as a potential source for this pressure) is evidenced by the observation of feminist theorist Elisabeth Grosz. According to Grosz, denying the credibility of a subject's bodily experience would put into question feminism itself, since the basis for the latter cannot be identified in cultural inscriptions on the body, as these are consistent with the teaching of a patriarchal society which, blatantly, would negate feminist sensibilities (Noland, 2009). Feminism points towards a body informed by self-awareness and a subject who possesses agency.

2.11 Agency in bodies that matter

The statement that 'discourse does not constitute all that comes to exist within it' was used as a way to suggest that the existence of agency within the body may be
compatible with Butler's theory. This rationale could be taken a step further and Butler's statement be interpreted as implying not only that agency might exist within the body but that, more poignantly, it might exist even within the gendered body.

The notion that, like abject bodies, gendered bodies also possess agency appears logical. Agency and the first-person experience and awareness that enable it are not skills developed because needed in order to resist normativity and be counted as bodies that matter. Although, in the case of abject bodies, they are used with this finality, they already exist within the subject as part of its potential of resources. The contingency of resignification of abjection elicited, rather than created, the subject's agentic potentials. There seem to be no obvious reason for gendered bodies not to be imbued with the same potential to effect responses based on forces other than established performatives. But this contention can also be supported by other considerations. The contention that, like abject bodies, also the bodies that matter are imbued with agency derives from the simple observation that it would seem illogical to assume otherwise, to assume that gendered bodies may not be afforded this capacity. A theoretically more compelling argument in defence of the alleged parity of agentic potentials between abject and gendered bodies is that it would be misleading to assume that normative bodies do not possess agency on the basis that abject bodies, which are their perceived opposite, do possess it.

The reason why such justification would be erroneous is that both the gendered and the abject bodies are normatively constituted (even if, once constituted, the latter is excluded from normativity). The constitutive process of abject bodies can be regarded as normative too given that, as is the case for the gendered bodies, it
consists in the application of performatives. Their abject state is not derived from
following a constitutive process different from that of the gendered bodies but,
rather, either from the flawed application of such performatives, whereby the
gendering process fails to successfully constitute a gendered subject, or from the
application of negatively connoted performatives, as in the case of queer subjects: the
constitution of bodies through injurious interpellation is one of the constitutive
modalities of normativity.

Therefore, the mechanics of constitution of abject bodies adhere to normativity.
Their abjection is not established by their constitution. In principle, this position also
appears to be consistent with Butler's own. As already pointed out (endnote 9) Butler
stated that:

The paradox of subjectivation… is precisely that the subject who would resist such norms is itself enabled, if not produced, by such norms.

Butler, 2011, p. xxiii

Abjection ensues following the exclusion of unsuitable subjects from the normative
framework of acceptability, on the basis of their lack of conformity to the archetypal
normative subject. Furthermore, also this exclusion is a normative occurrence, in the
sense that abjection only exists as there is a normative framework from which to be
excluded.

To sum up, abject bodies are normatively constituted, normatively evaluated, and
normatively excluded as non-compliant. Normativity, therefore, constitutes and
informs the abject bodies through the same structural modalities as the gendered one
– albeit with different results. This implies that, if the abject body, as argued, has
individual agency, there is no reason for the gendered body not to have the same potential for agency. Neither can agency be considered as exclusively inherent to the abject body and, consequently, as the cause of its abjection. If this was the case, the fact that the gendered body does not display signs of abjection would testify to its lack of agency. However, this argument cannot be accepted because to present abjection as the result of individual agency would equate to declare that the abject state of homosexuality, for instance, is an agentic choice. Therefore, to restate the main point, I argue that agency is not an exclusive trait of the abject body; also the gendered body has the ability to employ individual agency if and when needed.

2.12 Transitive connections: from embedded movement to oppositional improvisation via the agentic gendered body

The equating of the gendered and abject bodies in terms of their potentials for agency was based on a form of transitivity whereby, since the abject body and the gendered body are both normatively constituted, if the former possesses agency, so will the latter. A similar transitivity can be used to suggest that, since the technically trained dancing body, like the gendered body, is constituted by normativity, if the latter has agency, so will the former. Through agency, the trained body would be capable of escaping its normative performatives and become an oppositional body. The possibility that all bodies may possess agency is not in conflict with the fact that bodies might also be successfully constituted, nor with the notion that performative reiteration might engender excesses (via supplementarity), or with the process of constitution by injurious interpellation. The existence of agency within the body does, however, allow for the possibility that normativity, whether in its function of
performative enabler to the archetypal body or enforcer of exclusionary boundaries to the abject body, is not the only force dictating the subject's conduct and understanding.

With specific reference to the trained dancing body, normativity is represented by the gestural performatives identifiable in the embedded kinetic practices experienced as the body's second nature. Within this context, agency can lead to resisting the body's understanding of itself through the kinetic parameters of the normative gaze, in favour of an understanding provided by the awareness, whether conscious of pre-reflective, of its own lived experience. This, in relation to kinetic practices, shifts the focus, reflectively or pre-reflectively, from the automatic execution of embedded movements to the experience of kinesthesia. From the premises of this kinesthetic awareness, agency is then newly engaged in the articulation of further non-normative kinetic responses in the form, for instance, of an oppositional improvisation.

To sum up, through my engagement with Butler's theory I have tried to do two things. The first was to liken the technically trained body to the gendered body, in order to highlight the normative strictures to which it is subjected. Following that, I have attempted to extrapolate the existence of agency within the normative body. In order to do so, I have focused on the case of abject bodies, which, despite challenging normativity over being refused the status of bodies that matter, are nevertheless constituted through a normative process. Finally, I have argued that, given their shared mechanisms of performative constitution, the fact that agency was individuated within abject bodies suggests that it is reasonable to assume its presence also in successfully constituted gendered bodies.
On this basis, I contend that gendered bodies are, too, imbued with agency and, given that technically trained bodies are performatively constituted in an altogether analogous way to the gendered bodies, it is also reasonable to assume that they too possess agency. The considerations above articulated further the theoretical framework expounding the technically trained body's potential to engage, albeit problematically, in the agentic practice of oppositional improvisation. The theoretical framework that I have proposed interprets my perception and experience of oppositional practice. On a personal level, despite being fully aware of the overwhelming weight of my normative training, in the course of my movement practices I always experience a distinctive sense of individual agency. This is perceived as a sense that I can evade normativity and, paradoxically, also happens when normativity seems to take control of my oppositional improvisation. For this reason, in an experiential sense and irrespective of the efficacy or otherwise of the counterarguments that I have put forward to respond to the rigorous logic of Butler's critical perspective, I found my lived experience of oppositional improvisation to be better described by movement theories that do incorporate the notion of an active agency in their theoretical framework.
ENDNOTES

1 This observation is reminiscent of Paxton’s already quoted statement:

Once in place, conventions can dictate what the mind will allow itself to think.

Paxton, 1997b, p. 129

2 Through the text I might also refer to my ‘technically trained dancing body’ as the ‘technical body’, the ‘dancing body’ or, generalising, the ‘trained dancer’.

3 Elsewhere in the thesis, when a singular third person pronoun is needed I normally use the feminine pronoun ‘she’, as I implicitly identify myself with the subject. However, given the distinctive role that the notion of gender plays in Butler’s theory, in this chapter I will use the neutral pronoun ‘it’ – unless this creates ambiguities or the gender of the subject is apparent.

4 Although I contrast the notions of oppositional body and technically trained body, the use of the verb ‘become’ indicates that they are two different expressions of the same body. The study engages with the emergence of the oppositional body within the same physical and mental space already occupied by the trained body. It is useful to be aware that this duality can create confusion when talking about agency.

5 The gendered body too may experience itself as other bodies, but it does so while always being, at the same time, also itself: a gendered body. Its other emanations are experienced in addition to being gendered. Gender is a trait the body cannot escape: a dancer can never stop being a gendered body, but she is a dancing body only while dancing. When not dancing, her dancing body only exists as a potential and, as such, it can passively participate of experiences from areas other than dance. There is no area other than gender, as it were.

6 Butler’s notion of performatives reflects that espoused by Austin’s Speech Act Theory. They are codified utterances that, under standard normative conditions, have the power to constitute by reiteration that which they name (2011). An example of performative is the declaration with which the priest institutes the marital bond during the marriage ceremony with the words ‘I now pronounce you husband and wife’. Butler understands performatives not as the enactment of individual will but, rather, as the constitutive power rooted in the impersonal authority of gender conventions implementing the heterosexual matrix. However, as it will be observed later, Butler also accepts Derrida’s critique of Austin, according to which performatives may fail to produce the expected effects when the context of their implementation changes (Noland, 2009).

7 As Noland remarked, although Butler theorisation chiefly articulates the modus operandi and effects of verbal performatives, she conflates the gestural and verbal categories by extending the validity of her analysis of discourse to gestural practices too. Butler stated that all gestures, speech acts and behaviours are ”performatives… fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs…” (Butler quoted in Noland, 2009, p. 189).

8 It is worth remembering once again that, when using verbal and gestural performatives, the individual is defining herself (or himself) by enabling established norms, the effect of which are confused with, but are not caused by, natural laws.

9 In Butler’s theory, the subject is normatively constituted. For this reason, according to Butler, even if the individual opposes normativity, it will be not doing so as a result of an independently conceived deliberation:

The paradox of subjectivation… is precisely that the subject who would resist such norms is itself enabled, if not produced, by such norms.

Butler, 2011, p. xxiii
It is debatable whether kinesthesia engenders agency or, on the contrary, agency is what engenders kinesthesia. Noland (2009) argues in favour of the former sequential progression, whereby the subject's attention to its own body is elicited by incidental occurrences such as, for instance, pain or fatigue. Following this, the lived experience of one's physicality becomes accessible to conscious awareness and its intentional manipulation, which is to say, the agentic choices, become a possibility. Although this is a plausible account with reference to the generic gendered subject, with specific regard to oppositional improvisation the opposite explanation would appear more persuasive. An originating agentic deliberation appears to be the necessary inspiring force to initiate this kinetic practice, to embark upon a challenge of normative movements. I would argue that the initial impulse provided by agency activates kinesthetic awareness, which then becomes the intentional (because agentic), default, state of engagement through which to pursue oppositional movement. In other words, once activated by agency, kinesthesia becomes what enables agency, what makes it operational in terms of effecting intentional – oppositional – kinetic choices.

By opposing agency to normativity I am not trying to theorise the existence of a natural body that negates the cultural body but, simply, the availability of alternatives to the normativity of genres, and the ability to choose them.

This functional interpretation of language, it could be argued, can be seen as the complementary side to an ontological explanation, whereby the very existence of words as coded meanings seems to indicate the necessity to reproduce given meanings at different moments and locations in the future.

However, this does not imply that anything is possible. Even if, as clarified earlier, reiteration engenders supplementarity, hence the possibility of disruption, certain reiterative chains of discursive production are barely legible as reiterations, for the effects they have materialized are those without which no bearing in discourse can be taken.

Butler states:

It is not enough to claim that human subjects are constructed, for the construction of the human is a differential operation that produces the more and the less "human," the inhuman, the humanly unthinkable.

Butler's gendered body's variations within parameters of acceptability find their counterparts in the trained body's failure to adhere exactly to prescriptive movements. For instance, specific differences in the anatomy of dancers might cause them to perform a given movement in ways that, although not perfectly faithful to the archetypal movement for that genre, remains within its boundaries of affiliation.

By suggesting that resistance to normativity might be informed by agency I do not mean to imply that all aspects of existence that do not appear to comply with normativity have been constituted by individual agentic choices. For instance, I am not suggesting that homosexuality is an agentic choice. What I am suggesting is that, for example, it is agency that affords to a gay subject the possibility to live and behave according to his first-person, phenomenological understanding of himself, as opposed to mis-understand himself through the normative gaze and, consequently, have no option but to comply with established performativity and live a conflicted existence. The way in which normativity
tends to impose itself as the only available perspective (thus rejecting the alternatives, irrespective of whether these are the kinetic potentials of a dancing body or something as fundamental as an abject subject's identity) is described in Frantz Fanon's account of the black subject, caught between the normative and phenomenological perception of himself (see Noland, 2009, p. 196 ff).

19 I am here using the adverb 'later' to indicate logical succession, rather than a temporal sequence of actions.

20 As stated above, homosexuality, for instance, is not a choice.

21 I refer here to Butler's earlier statement:

The public assertion of "queerness" enacts performativity as citationality for the purpose of resignifying the abjection of homosexuality into defiance and legitimacy.

Butler, 2011, p xxviii

22 It could be argued that Butler is not expressing an invitation but, rather, is simply acknowledging what appears to be the abject subject's observed response to its abjection. The reason for qualifying Butler's remarks as an invitation is that, elsewhere, she seems not just to acknowledge the abject subject's democratising effort, but to attempt to find solutions to counter abjection; and those solutions seem to require the subject's active engagement. I refer to statements such as the following:

If there is a "normative" dimension to this work [Bodies that Matter], it consists precisely in assisting a radical resignification… to expand the very meaning of what counts as a valued and valuable body in the world.

Butler, 2011, p xxix

If one comes into discursive life through being called or hailed in injurious terms, how might one occupy the interpellation by which one is already occupied to direct the possibilities of resignification against the aims of violation?

Butler, 2011, p 83

On the contrary, precisely because such terms [injurious interpellations] have been produced and constrained within such regimes, they ought to be repeated in directions that reverse and displace their originating aims.

Butler, 2011, p 83

The suggestion – in the first statement – that her work might "assist a radical resignification", her enquiring – in the second – "how might one… direct the possibilities of resignification"; and her arguing – in the third – that injurious interpellations "ought to be repeated in directions that reverse… their original aims": all these expressions, I would suggest, appear to communicate a support aimed at intentionally displacing abjection and its causes.

23 The reason for describing the phrase 'to work the mobilizing power' as an exhortation is that I understand the term 'occasion', used by Butler to qualify that same phrase, as expressing a sentiment of desirability and encouragement. This understanding is in line with my previously stated interpretation of her statement as an invitation to the subject to counter abjection.
CHAPTER 3

Oppositional practices:
theoretical grounding, agency and the agentic body

The debate over whether subjects possess agency has immediate relevance for this study. To restate the terms of the problem, I argue that, embedded through years of formal training and practice, specific techniques and movement strategies become part of the trained dancer's instinctive kinetic responses, even when performing unrehearsed improvisation. In my oppositional practice, I attempt to improvise using movements that do not belong to the established dance schools and genres that formed the basis of my formal dance training. I argue that this is made possible by agency, as the latter uses the dancer's kinesthetic awareness to escape embedded movement and create alternatives to it. This is what choreographer Ellen Webb, as already remarked, has described as the ability to be "responsive in new ways not bound by my usual self-definition" (2003, p. 243). It is what makes these new ways possible and the nature of their practical engagement (namely agency, kinesthesia and their interaction) that this study attempts to delineate, rather than the specific forms of their embodiment.

This chapter provides an immediate rebuttal of Butler's contention in the form of
Noland's (2009) and Sklar's (2008) considerations on the link between embodiment and agency; a link established through the somatic mode of kinesthesia, which both elicits agency and realises it. Noland's and Sklar's observations situate agency in everyday life. This serves as a brief but important reminder of the grounded, practical nature of agency, ahead of the theoretical approach that follows. Noland and Sklar's reference to the embodied nature of agency resonates particularly with the theory of Merleau-Ponty, introduced as one of the theoretical counterarguments to Butler's position.

3.1 Sklar and Noland: a cursory confutation of Butler's agency-less subjects

When equating technically trained bodies to Butler's gendered bodies, it was shown how the iteration of habits, developed through the practice of acquired technical movements within the context of formal training, homogenises the kinetic expression of dancers by pre-setting their bodily awareness to comply-mode, so to speak. This, it has been argued, produces what is understood to be dance according to the gaze of genre; genre acts as the filter of value judgments through which the dancer understands dance, and her own movement as being dance. The result is the crystallisation of the access to new movement possibilities. I argued in favour of the possibility to escape the compulsion to reproduce embedded movement, on the basis that even the trained body possesses agentic intentionality.

One of the aspects of Butler's theory that I have argued against is the passivity of normative interference. Disruption to normativity is acknowledged by Butler on two levels: in the constitution of abject bodies through the law of supplementarity and in
their recasting of their own abjection. According to Butler, in neither of these occurrences disruption to normativity is being actively brought about by the subjects' individual agency. I engaged with Butler's theory to argue, instead, that the second of these occurrences, the recasting of abjection, required agentic intentionality.

Also Noland (2009) recognises the possibility, for Butler's subjects, to engage in intentional disruption. However, rather than making this possibility emerge from an analysis of Butler's notion of abject subjects, as I have endeavoured to do, Noland elicits it from the subjects' enactment of gestural performatives. Her contention focuses on Butler's observation that, when reiterating performative gestures, subjects re-experience the cultural meaning encoded in those movements. Noland argues that, as part of the physical reiteration, what is being relived by the subject is not only the encoded meaning but, although not necessarily at a conscious level, also the somatic experience of that gesture. Noland further observes that a situation might occur whereby this lived somatic experience is brought to the subject's conscious awareness. This would happen, typically, when the body experiences sensation of discomfort or pleasure (Noland, 2009). In these instances, the subject's attention is drawn towards the physical sensation and the part of the body that is experiencing it, which causes the somatic element to become thematised. Once the body has become the focus, Noland reasons, the individual can also become aware of the bodily experience of her own movement, which is to say, she acquires kinesthesia^{2} (2009). Further, this awareness affords the ability to alter a normative gesture by interfering at will with established kinetic routines, if so desired. This is the path through which, Noland suggests, individuals may acquire intentional agency.
Similarly to Noland, also Sklar (2008) identifies in the incidental repetition of movement a possible means to gain conscious awareness. Sklar describes situations in which repetition is contextual to the circumstances. One such instance is the repetitive use of breaks when driving a car through a traffic jam. This kinetic reiteration may lead to the driver becoming acutely aware of the kinetic experience of the breaking action which, under normal driving conditions in which breaking is less frequent, would have been executed automatically without becoming noticeable. In turn, continues Sklar, the somatic awareness of the breaking movement may induce the driver to question personal or cultural assumptions related to the act of driving itself, such as the reasons for driving, or the economic, social, and environmental implications related to it.

Sklar suggests that, with the same logic, the ballet dancer's repetition of the same exercises at the bar might activate a similar kind of self-observation. The dancer can become aware of her movement in one of two ways: either, as if perceiving her own body from an outside observer's perspective, evaluating the learnt movement sequences that express "the perceptual, ideological, and aesthetic conventions of a socio-cultural system that values 'ballet'" (Sklar, 2008, p. 91); or, as if perceiving the movement from a first-person perspective, in terms of the somatic awareness of the body as it executes the habitual routines.

To sum up, repetition can trigger the subject's kinetic and/or kinesthetic awareness, in everyday life as well as in dance regimes, either through bodily sensations such as pain or pleasure, as suggested by Noland or, as Sklar contended, through extremely persistent reiteration of specific movements – be it while dance-training or car-
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driving. This, in turn, can elicit a reflection on the kinetic event, thus providing the moving subject with the consciousness required to potentially disrupt normativity. As Sklar put it: "The hold of the habitus is broken, inviting opening beyond routine" (2008, p. 91). This counters Butler's refusal to accept this possibility, and contributes to the grounding of oppositional improvisation.

I. From dissensus to system-user theory: the situated subject's practices of opposition to normativity

The oppositional challenge comprises two logically distinct but simultaneously occurring stages. The first stage involves the act of abandoning or at least provisionally inhibiting embedded movements despite the spontaneous urge to revert to them. The second stage, which follows logically rather than temporally, involves the creative act of generating new movement. This two-stage process does not only call for the acquisition of new motor-coordinating abilities. The embedded movements hindering the creation of new ones are the manifestation of the normativity of the dance genres I have trained in. In this respect, abandoning them equates not only to forsaking my automatic movement patterns but also to forsaking the normative gaze constituted through years of dance training and practice, and informing my dance sensibility. The avoidance of the habitual ways of self-definition requires that I move away from my – institutionalised – understanding of what dance is.

As I reflected on my first-person experience of oppositional improvisation, it became
clear to me that the resistance I opposed to the normative gaze and the oppositional alternatives to embeddedness I offered identified a different, previously unaccounted-for kinetic reality and, necessarily, a body (my body) able to be the source of that reality. The oppositional body, therefore, had to possess an original individual decision-making power: individual agency. The theoretical discussion that follows is an attempt to reflect this experiential understanding and account for the alternative non-normative kinetic reality as well as for the body that delivers it.

I propose two theoretical frameworks: one that accounts for the existence of oppositional practice; the other that identifies how I can engage in it despite my embeddedness. These frameworks are, respectively, those of French philosophers Jacques Rancière and Michel de Certeau. In particular, I rely on Rancière's notions of distribution of the sensible, police, dissensus, and politics and de Certeau's tactical and strategic actions, and system-user theory. Further, following Foster's observation (see p. 157 here, Foster, 2003b), I identify agency as the implicit enabler of de Certeau's system-user theory, and I emphasise its importance in the context of practical instances of opposition to normativity. Finally, I suggest that Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological notion of 'embodied subject' provides an understanding of the body that reflects the character of the active agentic subject of oppositional improvisation.

3.2 Jacques Rancière: dissensus and politics, unaccounted-for subjects becoming visible

The way in which Rancière's theory can support an understanding of oppositional
improvisation is by articulating the possibility that individuals may inhabit the normative system while maintaining a position at odds with it. The reality we exist in and perceive is constituted by "spaces, times and forms of activity" (Rancière, 2006, p. 12) in relation to which different individuals have different levels and modalities of participation. These distinctive individual participatory patterns are reflected, for instance, in one's profession. Thus, a school teacher will operate primarily within the space of the school premises, at pre-established times, and engage in specific forms of activity, ranging from the delivering of lessons, to the interaction with children, their parents and work colleagues. Socially, her role as an educator will also variously shape her reciprocal relation with other individuals. In general terms, subjects’ relations to various aspects of reality and to each other are made tangible in their verbal, visual, physical and social articulations. These concrete manifestations collectively individuate and shape an acknowledged "system of self-evident facts of sense perception" (Rancière, 2006, p. 12) that Rancière terms 'distribution of the sensible' (2006).

To reiterate, by interacting in various relational roles with other subjects within the distribution of the sensible, individuals do two things: they define themselves in terms of these relations and they re-affirm the hierarchical patterns of those relations. These patterns form a matter-of-fact framework of rules and regulations that Rancière has termed 'the police' (2001, 2006). The police is the regulatory web that, at one and the same time, codifies and informs the subject's participation in the distribution of the sensible. It is also the presupposition that such codification accounts for all possible forms of participation to reality, the descriptive framework allegedly individuating in a comprehensive manner all the articulations of the
relationships between individuals and their forms of participation in reality (Rancière, 2001). Thus, the police is neither the physical expression of law enforcement nor the imposition of rules on individuals. It represents the abstract account of the distribution of the sensible, and comes to be identified with the notion of normativity; it is the structure and content of normativity as well as the belief that normativity acknowledges all social entities. The police is identifiable with the notion that

society consists of groups dedicated to specific modes of action, in places where these occupations are exercised, in modes of being corresponding to these occupations and these places.

Rancière, 2001, Thesis 7

According to Rancière, the distribution of the sensible is both an inclusive and an exclusive structure. This means that there will be subjects whose participation in aspects of the sensate reality, as we perceive it, does not fall within any of the relational categories that form the framework of reference described by the police. They escape categorisation and are therefore not considered to be part of the distribution of the sensible. They are not recognisable through the gaze of normativity; in a sense, they are invisible to it. These subjects are defined by Rancière as "unaccounted-for" (2001, Theses 4, 5, 6) and challenge the police’s claim to the comprehensiveness of its codification inasmuch as they are the "supplement to the count of the parts of society, a specific figure of 'the part of those who have no-part'" (2001, Thesis 6).

Because these subjects are not recognised by the framework of the normative system, the police lacks (and, I would add, does not feel required to find) the vocabulary and
understanding to relate communicatively to their verbal, visual, physical or social articulations. This communicative impasse prevents the unaccounted-for from being accepted as legitimate interlocutors and, in a social context, their actions could be equated to antisocial or criminal behaviour. Examples of this could be the suffragette movement\textsuperscript{12} as it would have been perceived by the normative sensibility of the time or, more recently, the Occupy London movement\textsuperscript{13}.

While, ultimately, the relevance of Rancière's theory to oppositional improvisation consists in providing a structured theoretical foundation for a non-normative practice within a normative framework, it is already possible to establish an intuitive correspondence between the social and political aspects Rancière engages in and instances of oppositional artistic practices. Specifically, the notion of unaccounted-for subjects is derived from Rancière's political analysis of the birth of democracy (see endnote 11). In that context, Rancière identifies an "unprecedented reversal of the order of things" (2001, Thesis 4). This reversal consisted in the rupture of the normative principles that regulated the access to power. Those who had been previously excluded from exercising power because they did not have the qualities traditionally deemed necessary for it, those, in other words, who did not count, could now part-take in the exercising of power.

I would argue, as does Rancière, that an equivalent logic of subversion of the status quo might also operate through artistic categories. It is on the basis of this superimposition of the political onto the artistic that I suggest that Rancière's political analysis can explain the existence of experimental practices disconnected from the discriminating logics of artistic legitimacy embraced by established genres. With this
in mind, I would argue that, within the arts, the subjects who do not count and part-take in art without satisfying the criteria traditionally associated with it, the unaccounted-for artists, can be identified with the avant-garde practitioners, insofar as these flouted the codification of established genres.

The existence of unaccounted-for subjects, observes Rancière, "is the manifestation of a distance of the sensible from itself" (2001, Thesis 8), and is identified with the notion of 'dissensus' (2001, 2006). Dissensus is the condition whereby some individuals (the unaccounted-for) are faced with the realisation that aspects of their existence are not corroborated by the distribution of the sensible, as they do not conform to the pre-established categories it comprises. The notion of dissensus appears to be, at once, passive and active, in the sense that the unaccounted-for are being excluded, but their very existence questions the structure of the distribution of the sensible and forces its re-configuration. And it is in forcing this re-configuration that, argues Rancière, the unaccounted-for bring politics into being (2001). In other words, for Rancière, dissensus engenders politics; it is, at the same time, its catalyst and its condition for being. Dissensus is the self-awareness, on the part of the ignored subjects, of the failed acknowledgement of their political – or social, or artistic – existence, and politics is the process of addressing and rectifying this oversight: "the essence of politics is the manifestation of dissensus, as the presence of two worlds in one" (Rancière 2001, Thesis 8). The notion of politics, therefore, is in direct opposition to that of police, since the former identifies and validates social relations as yet undetected and negated by the latter. By extension, the subjects of politics are those whose existence identifies discontinuities in the social aggregate, in the already visible, validated formations of the social body.
The relevance of Rancière's analysis to artistic practices engaging in experimental approaches is found in the notion of dissensus, which institutes the pre-conditions for their inception. The recognition that a non-compliant practice is exercising dissensus divorces its existence from the need to conform to already established parameters of visibility. Once in existence, invisible artistic manifestations or, to extricate the concept, works that are not seen as art through the lenses of established genres, can, so to speak, launch into the politics of art, i.e. articulate their demands for a reconfiguration of the distribution of the sensible. While the physical existence of the artwork in itself forces the viewer to come to terms with its unorthodox nature, the process of becoming visible as an artistic manifestation can comprise further complementary means. These can range from raising public awareness by using public spaces as background for the artwork, to the academic theorisation of the work as expression of art or its endorsement through the writings of sympathetic critics who can aid in the development of a vocabulary specific to the work and in the identification of a framework that can further its understanding.

Given Rancière's notion of dissensus as the vitalising impulse of politics, dissenting artistic practices become instruments for the activation and implementation of democracy in that they oppose the logic of domination of established sensibilities, predicated upon the a priori principles individuated by the police. In this context, an oppositional improvisational practice, for instance, can become an opportunity for the emancipation of dance, an extension of what dance can be conceived as, under the democratic suspension of value judgments. However, a situation in which artistic expressions are entirely absolved of the burden of normative impositions, a situation that Rancière termed 'aesthetic regime' (2006), has consequences. It can cause the
boundaries of art practices to dissipate and art, effectively, to overlap with life. Once this extreme is reached, perversely, the police will be equated with the absence of artistic canons, while dissensus will be expressed by practices that re-introduce them. In Rancière's words:

In the aesthetic regime of art, the future of art, its separation from the present of non-art incessantly restages the past.  

Rancière, 2006, p. 24

The recursive structure of Rancière's aesthetic regime seems to imply reciprocity as a condition of existence. In other words, something is identified for what it is also by contrast to its opposite which, in turn, implies the conceptual trace of the latter within the former. Opposites exist within each other as mutually dissenting entities. In this sense, although Rancière's notion of dissensus implies the possibility of existing outside embeddedness, it does not allow for the conclusion that embeddedness can be eradicated. With specific reference to the oppositional improvisational body, embeddedness will be present as an epistemological negativity, an awareness of the movement habits to be avoided. Within the oppositional improvisational movement, such as that I create in my practice, embeddedness is conspicuous by its absence, as the movement will be its embodied negation. To paraphrase Rancière's paradoxical statement, in the dis-embedded regime of improvisation, its separation from embeddedness incessantly revisits embeddedness.

Notwithstanding these considerations, Rancière's notion of dissensus offers the understanding that it is possible that something might develop even outside the pre-defined parameters of normativity. In this sense, the oppositional improvisation I am engaging in could be seen as an artistic practice expressing dissensus. This releases it
from the need to conform to the police of my formal dance training. The relevance of Rancière's analysis is that it has delineated a theoretical framework that can account for oppositional improvisation, intended as a practice that avoids the use of embedded movements belonging to my formal dance training.

With regard to my oppositional practice, it should be emphasized that dissensus is neither a state of necessity nor my default condition. On the contrary, with oppositional improvisation I am seeking dissensus as a deliberate choice. Due to my formal dance training, I do meet the pre-defined parameters of normativity and fit into one or more of the pre-established categories reserved to movement practitioners within the distribution of the sensible. However, I am trying to escape normativity and create oppositional movement; I am actively seeking a position of dissensus. Therefore, in the reminder of the chapter I will investigate oppositional improvisation in terms of its actual conditions of existence or, in other words, in terms of what accounts for my ability to achieve dissensus starting from the state of embeddedness in which my trained body finds itself. A possible theorisation of this is found in the analysis of Michel de Certeau.

3.3 Tactical actions: users' non-normative use of normative systems

While Rancière's focus on the forces of resistance appears to be primarily aimed at accounting for their existence, in the articulation of de Certeau's theoretical framework these tensions identify behavioural dynamics that are more subject-centred. De Certeau posits the notion of strategies and tactics (1988) as actions governing individuals' collective behaviour. These are actions that, respectively,
uphold and disrupt normativity. Strategies are actions that create and try to administer normative systems, such as the legislating necessary to the existence and functioning of a city, for instance. These are similar to what Rancière would call the police, and may include, among others, the acknowledged modalities for the use and enjoyment of the city's spaces and services, its social conventions, economic relations and so forth. Tactics, on the other hand, refers to the "clever tricks of the 'weak' within the order established by the 'strong'" (de Certeau, 1988, p. 40). Tactics are actions that individuals carry out in everyday life to achieve their objectives, even by going against the established norms, which is to say, by disrupting the strategies. They are intentional actions that can interfere with the established normativity in different ways: by opposing it, altering it, misusing it, or simply by adding other elements to it. Tactics are aimed at finding creative ways to exploit normative systems in the pursuit of one's own agenda. To stay with the example of a city, tactics could be the personalised ways in which its population uses the physical features of the urban space when putting personal advantage before the regulations. For instance, pedestrians could cross the road where there is no zebra-crossing to reach more conveniently the desired destination on the other side, commuters could attempt to travel by public transport without paying the ticket fare to have more money for themselves.

Through tactics, subjects create for themselves, and inhabit, a condition of duality whereby they exist within the system but, at the same time, strive to extricate themselves from its coercive powers. My attempt at oppositional improvisation could be seen as a tactic, because it is an attempt to resist the normative system of my dance training while existing within my body – which is embedded with the
norms of that system. In this respect, de Certeau's framework is relevant to the notion of oppositional improvisation because it states the possibility of divorcing oneself from the normative system despite being part of it. Although Rancière's politics and De Certeau's tactics both disrupt normativity, with the former the subject aims to attain recognition as a constitutive part of the distribution of the sensible, while with the latter the subject is acknowledged by the system, but aims to adapt it to her own individual desires.

De Certeau argues that the effectiveness of tactics at manipulating strategies – or, in Rancière's analysis, the police – is explained by the fact that they possess the same articulating powers of a *speech act* (1988). The latter is a notion derived from linguistics and that, in the words of de Certeau, "is at the same time a use of language and an operation performed on it" (1988, p. 33). Simplified, de Certeau's position is that three occurrences can be distinguished in the formation of speech acts:²² the first is the appropriation of the language system by the user, the second is the modality of engagement with the system on the basis of the user's needs and of the context – rather than on the basis of a prescriptive normative and homologous framework – and the third is the distinctive results deriving from this individualised engagement. The discrete elements of a speech act, that is to say the language system, the user, the purpose and the context mutually interact and morph into a unique, indivisible unit: the speech act itself. The interaction between these constitutive elements is responsible for creating a difference between the intended ways of using the language system (as indicated by its – grammatical and syntactical – rules) and the ways in which users actually do use it.
According to de Certeau, this interactive logic is at work in any system-user combination, which is why tactical actions can evade normativity. Whenever engaged with, the system – be it the language system or any other system – is appropriated by the user; it is vitalised. This engagement institutes, between the system and the user, a contract that describes the unique terms of usage that typify that specific engagement. A physically constructed space such as a street, for instance, is actualised by someone using its topographical features (walls, stairs, etc.), and its existence is renewed by the use of these features in different combination or for ends other than those for which they had been designed (e.g. using stairs to sit on, crossing the road when traffic light is red, sleeping on a bench, etc.). Each time, the place is recreated differently. This describes the pedestrian's ability to interact with the surroundings in a way that is not limited by the fixed and normative structure of the physical space. The subject displays, in other words, the ability to make independent choices, based on the contingency of the specific situation, thus manifesting a continuously engaging and potentially subversive motor-intelligence (de Certeau, 1988).

The system-user logic of speech acts can also describe the tactical action of oppositional improvisation, where the role of user is performed by the dancer, in the capacity of oppositional improviser, while the system is represented by the dancer's trained body. In this application of the system-user logic, oppositional improvisation can be expressed as the difference between the way in which the dancer's trained body should be used and the way in which the dancer actually makes use of it. Following the three-step formation of the speech act described earlier, oppositional improvisation can be presented as the combination of three occurrences: the dancer's
appropriation of her own trained body through movement, an engagement with her trained body through the specific modalities of oppositional improvisation, and the consequent creation of a distinctive kinetic response produced by the oppositional relation. In other words, the tactical action of oppositional improvisation consists in releasing the body from the coercive power of the strategy of formal training, which regulated the dancing body’s relationship to movement.

Thus, de Certeau's analysis offers a possible answer to the research question – how are new movement possibilities generated? – by presenting a plausible explanation of the mechanics of resistance, based on the interactive system-user logic. This statement could also be articulated by saying that answering the question of how new movement possibilities are generated is the same as identifying the modalities that make it possible to divorce oneself from the normative expressions of the distribution of the sensible. These modalities have been identified above as the tactical actions through which movement solutions, other than those enforced by established dance genres, are created. The combination of Rancière's and de Certeau's analyses provides a theoretical grounding for the understanding of oppositional improvisation and the possibility of achieving it in spite of the embeddedness of my trained body, through the dynamics of the system-user logic of tactical actions.

II. Agency: an antidote to normativity

The notion of dissenting bodies, which includes my improvising oppositional body, indentifies subjects that possess the ability to evaluate and choose, to formulate decisions that are independent of the police, and that are based, instead, on
individual evaluative parameters and necessities. These observations delineate subjects that are capable of exercising agency, intended as the capacity to act independently of, and, if need be, contrary to, the pressure exerted on them by normativity. As Foster (2003b) remarks of de Certeau's analysis, by explaining tactical actions in terms of the logic of the speech act, de Certeau effectively credits those actions and the bodies that carry them out with the power of agency.

While Rancière's theory focuses more on the political aspect of resistance than on its mechanics, it too implies the essential role of agency. This is evident in the subjects' ability to act independently of the police when, instead of accepting their formal exclusion from the distribution of the sensible, through politics, they demand acceptance for their position of dissensus. Rearticulated in terms of the subject's capacity for agentic intervention, the tactical actions that specifically pertain to my practice can be described as modalities through which agency, by manifesting itself through them, allows for the materialisation of oppositional improvisation. Additionally, oppositional improvisation can be re-defined as the manifestation of agency in the disruption of the normative relation between my trained body and its movement habits or, which is the same, as the manifestation of agency in the activation of the non-normative kinetic possibilities of the trained body.

3.4 **Agency in practice: Foster's user manual**

Foster provides a concrete example of the workings of agentic resistance. In *Choreographies of Protest* (2003a), she describes, among other forms of disobedience involving the physical body, the wave of non-violent protests
conducted by black students in 1960, throughout various segregated American states. Black protesters would sit for extended periods of time at food-counters reserved to white customers, with full knowledge that they would be refused service. They sat in silence, behaving with the same passive neutrality and composure whether receiving words of encouragement by bystanders or being attacked by them verbally. In the context of a racially segregated society, their bodies were, to apply Rancière's analysis, unaccounted-for, existing but not counted, as if invisible. The protesters would, nonetheless, continue sitting at the counter, as if expecting service. In so doing, their bodies thematised dissensus, thus initiating the political process of demanding acknowledgment, by the police, that they are part of the distribution of the sensible.

While the thematisation of dissensus, materialised in the decision to defy the notion of racial segregation, was in itself an expression of the agency of the unaccounted-for subjects, agency also informed the two further stages of the students' protest: firstly, the identification of a suitable tactic of dissent such as the occupation of seats not meant for black subjects and, secondly, the task of sustaining the protesters' anti-normative stance in the face of the challenges that their behaviour elicited. Even in the case of physical attacks, the protesters would not respond with violence towards their aggressor (Foster, 2003a).

The example of the black protesters is not provided here with the intention of establishing an exact correspondence between each phase of their protest, from its inception to its implementation, and the phases of my oppositional improvisation. Rather, the consideration of the students' act of disobedience is useful as it sheds
light on the role and nature of agency. This can potentially identify elements relevant to my oppositional practice and of use to my planned first-person reflection upon it. In particular, this exercise will be useful in helping to identify the different modalities of application of agency at different stages of the oppositional process. In relation to this, the aspect of the students' protest that acquires particular significance is the already mentioned decision not to react violently even if physically set upon. As part of their tactic of rejection of physical confrontation, protesters practiced techniques to passively protect themselves when attacked. This, explains Foster (2003a), included learning what positions to assume in order to protect the most vulnerable parts of their body. Furthermore, if the severity of the attack was such that a protester was in danger, fellow protesters would interpose themselves between the protester being hit and the aggressors, so as to distribute the force of the attack among various bodies, in the attempt to minimise the damage sustained by any one individual (Foster, 2003a). The precondition for the acquisition of these techniques of the body was the protesters' ability to block the automaticity of their embedded reaction to physical danger: "Participants discovered how to defy the physical impulse to respond in kind to assault" (Foster, 2003a, p. 400).

The black protesters' choice not to respond with violence to circumstances that would normally elicit a violent response can be likened to my decision not to use the movement habits ingrained in my trained body after years of genre-based training. In both instances, the body counters what would normally be its automatic response, its instinctive response; namely, the use of the dance technique embedded in me, and, in the case of the black protesters, either the instinct to react to their aggressors in kind or to remove themselves from the situation by walking away.
In this sense, reflecting on the students' protest may also help clarify the specific role of agency in oppositional improvisational practice. The protesters' passive resistance negated the criteria of engagement ordinarily adopted in the context of a physical attack. To paraphrase Webb (2003), protesters were responsive in ways not bound by their usual self-definition. They let go of embedded habits and disabled their instinctive response. Agency is displayed in their initial choice to oppose segregation, in their undertaking of training designed to refrain from violent retaliatory actions, and in the implementation of that training within public protest. Although the overall objective remains the disruption of the normativity of segregation, the focus and modalities of the agentic intervention vary in relation to the specific stage of the oppositional process. Specifically, in the phases of acquisition of non-violent training and real-life implementation of it in public protest, the agentic focus is not (or, at least, is not limited to) opposing the normativity of segregation but, rather, the normativity of self-preservation.

With regard to the modalities of agentic intervention, a change occurs when protesters progress from the non-violent training to its implementation in the improvisational framework of public protest. In the former, agency is realised in the acquisition of the ability to alter one's spontaneously occurring behaviour through a process of structured learning. In this application, agency involves a high degree of self-consciousness; it requires a lucid, reflective and reflexive awareness because subjects, at least initially, must thematise their own experience in order to prevent themselves from acting according to their instinctual predispositions.

On the other hand, as subjects interact within the improvisational setting of public
protest, at which point it is reasonable to assume that the training will have removed
the natural tendency to react to violence, a different application of agency is elicited.
What is called forth is, as it were, a kind of operational agency that, although equally
premeditated with regards to its aims, that is to say the countering of segregation and
the avoidance of violence, does not require, on the part of the subjects, the same
degree of conscious awareness demanded in training, when learning to control their
instinctive reactions. This does not mean that the subject is not conscious of her
actions27 but that, while improvising, her conscious-self and her moving body are
one and the same, they operate as an indivisible unit, as opposed to being configured
as two explicitly distinct entities, with the former instructing the latter. As will be
argued in more detail later, this lighter form of consciousness is justified by the fact
that the thematisation undertaken in the training phase has expanded the subject's
motor-awareness to include alternative kinetic possibilities, which are therefore now
readily available without needing further thematisation.

In the improvisational context of public protest (and any other improvisational
context), the process of movement production relies on agency operating
interactively and instantaneously, so as to adapt to the fluid nature of the evolving
circumstances. In this situation there is no clear distinction between the subject as an
intellectual entity and as a physical one. Once the improvisational aim is clear, the
actions being performed are formulated through a process based neither on a
hierarchical order between the intellectual and physical-self, nor on a separation
between the two. Instead, as suggested by de Certeau, the subject's mindful body
(Foster, 2003a) articulates the most effective response for the achievement of the
desired aim, given the particular circumstances and the possibilities realistically
available to the physical body. At any given time, the black protesters monitored the changing situation and improvised along the stipulated guidelines, choosing, within those boundaries, the most appropriate modalities and timing for the implementation of their disruptive stance. Agency provides a response that is intelligent without being intellectual. As Foster observes:

Agency does not manifest as the product of a transcendent state. Instead, the process of creating political interference calls forth a perceptive and responsive physicality that, everywhere along the way, deciphers the social and then choreographs an imagined alternative.

Foster, 2003a, p. 412

Crucially, Foster (2003a) also remarks that a sense of agency is not exclusively called forth by the particularly challenging circumstance that the body encounters when the subject defies habits and pursues a non-normative course of actions. On the contrary, a sense of agency is elicited by any activity involving a degree of physicality, including the subject's engagement in habitual everyday activities. This also suggests that, in varying degrees, individual agency ordinarily informs all human actions, be the latter in compliance with or against normativity. This observation has two important implications.

Firstly, the existence of a sense of agency suggests that individuals perceive themselves as subjects intent on fulfilling specific aims. This, in turn, implies that they should be able to acknowledge themselves as being the subject who is performing a certain action. This does not mean that subjects continuously thematise themselves, their decision-making process or the kinetic implementation of it, but that they are aware of the ownership of their own movement, without having to reflect upon it consciously. As it will be reiterated later, this can provide a sense of
control over one's own actions, thus facilitating the subject's capacity to create opposition to normativity.

The second implication to be derived by the notion that subjects do experience a sense of agency is that their agentic awareness might include, explicitly or implicitly, the perception of the specific kinetic structure of the actions performed. This, over time, may result in the subject developing a bodily understanding of what movement possibilities, based on one's physicality, may be available in any given circumstance. In other words, the existence of a sense of agency could arguably lead to the identification of I can's, intended as achievable kinetic options from which, each time, the subject may choose the most suitable movement solution (Noland, 2009).

With specific reference to oppositional improvisation, this may allow for the identification of kinetic choices that are consistent with the aim of countering genre-based movement habits while, at the same time, being within the dancer's physical competencies. Foster's individuation of agency as the force that informs the improvising subjects transforms de Certeau's system-user logic, whereby individuals are able to use tactics in order to exploit normativity to their advantage, into a tangible reality wherein the body acquires a central role. The body that is identified is a body that, as remarked by Foster, is to be regarded neither as the executioner of the self nor as the exclusive creation of social and cultural forces. Indeed, the very existence of individual agency depends on this notion of the body. In the next section of the chapter I will refer to specific aspects of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological analysis, to elaborate further on this particular understanding of the body.
III. Merleau-Ponty: the pre-reflective agentic body of the embodied subject

In so far as, when I reflect on the essence of subjectivity, I find it bound up with that of the body and that of the world, this is because my existence as subjectivity is merely one with my existence as a body and with the existence of the world, and because the subject that I am, when taken concretely, is inseparable from this body and this world.

Merleau-Ponty, 2007, p. 475

3.5 The world through the lived body

Merleau-Ponty considers perception as an organic whole in which components have significance in relation to each other, rather than as the simple sum of independent, discrete units of sensation. The justification Merleau-Ponty offers for considering perception as a whole is his reasoned rejection of the objectivist approach, according to which reality exists, so to speak, out there, as a knowable entity, independent from the knowing subject. Merleau-Ponty argues that the idea of objective knowledge is not credible because the existence of objectivity is itself an assumption put forward by the subject who is attempting to acquire such knowledge (Merleau-Ponty, 2007).

Although this might not be realised at first, any form of objective reality is no longer objective as soon as it has been apprehended or reflected upon by the knowing subject. In the act of acquiring reality, the subject inevitably interprets it according to his or her own experience of the world. It is the experience, therefore, as lived by the individual, that is the basis for any form of understanding, including science:

The whole universe of science is built upon the world as directly experienced, and if we want to subject science itself to rigorous scrutiny… we must begin
by reawakening the basic experience of the world of which science is the second-order expression.

Merleau-Ponty, 2007, p. ix

It is the immanent state of subjects within the world and the resulting situated perspective of every individual that make it impossible to achieve a detached and objective view of reality. The subject's situated perspective also determines Merleau-Ponty's rejection of an understanding of the world in intellectualist terms, according to which reality should be seen as the creation of a pure ego, intended as a subjectivity that exists outside time and space. Therefore, Merleau-Ponty advocates relinquishing any attempt to gain an understanding of the world as if knowable in absolute terms. He invites not to take for granted preconceived forms of understanding and to suspend all assumptions, whether derived by principles of abstract subjectivity or alleged objectivity. Merleau-Ponty emphasises, instead, the need to focus on the subject's engagement with the world, on the world of experience: "that world which precedes knowledge, of which knowledge always speaks" (2007, p. x, original emphasis).

Not only the world that is being experienced but also the subjects, who are rooted and exist in it, are to be understood in relation to their own lived experience of the world. Individuals are, at the same time, subjects and objects within the world they live in and perceive. Therefore, Merleau-Ponty's earlier quotation "my existence as subjectivity is merely one with my existence as a body and with the existence of the world" (2007, p. 475) contains one of the most significant aspects of his philosophy: the notion of embodiment, intended as a presence which, at the same time, is the individual's body and subjectivity. It is through their embodied presence that subjects
experience the world and have access to it. In embodiment, the objective body (in the sense of the body perceived as object) and the subjectivity are understood as bound up together in action. This interpretation of embodiment as a unified duality is validated by the fact that actions can be explained in two different ways: in terms of their physical mechanics, whereby a stimulus is sent from neurons in the brain to the muscles via the nervous system; or in terms of the motivation that prompted them.\textsuperscript{32} To clarify, the possibility to provide explanations of two different kinds (a quantitative-mechanical explanation and a qualitative one) is justified by the fact that the body can be seen as, and is, at the same time, a physical object and the subject involved in the action, and not, separately and independently, one or the other.

Furthermore, the world exists for us in the form of the experiential engagement provided by our body. In other words, "the body is our general medium for having a world" (Merleau-Ponty, 2007, p. 169). It is the body that, depending on the nature of its engagement, gives shape to the world in its different connotations. The nature of the engagement is functional to the specific desires that subjects aim to satisfy through their embodied presence. According to Merleau-Ponty, habits are but an instance of such engagement; they are "stable dispositional tendencies" (2007, p. 169) elaborated by the body as a means to satisfy our desires. These tendencies include kinetic habits, whether of a concrete, figurative\textsuperscript{33} or cultural nature. Merleau-Ponty emphasised that, insofar as they are the result of the body's active engagement with the world in the pursuit of the subject's satisfaction, habits are actively constituted by the body, as opposed to passively acquired customs. In constituting a habit, the body becomes aware of which movement possibilities to employ in a certain engagement with the world, in order to satisfy a specific desire. What is being
understood by the embodied subject is the rapport between the body and the movement possibilities, in relation to a certain result; thus, the direct relation between the body and that result.34

Arguably, the lived body that shapes the experiential world of the subject is not to be intended purely in terms of its anatomical physicality. Therefore, its centrality in Merleau-Ponty's theory does not imply an absolute dependence of human beings on their biological nature. On the contrary, Merleau-Ponty argues against any one-dimensional understanding of human beings based on mutually exclusive notions: the scientific interpretation, which understands human beings purely as organic creatures; the cultural approach, which sees man as anthropologically constituted; or the psychological interpretation, which identifies subjects with their consciousness. In opposition to these, Merleau-Ponty puts forward the embodied subject as the initiator, rather than the result, of the alleged constituting forces enumerated above:

I am the absolute source, my existence does not stem from my antecedents, from my physical and social environment; instead it moves out towards them and sustains them… for I alone bring into being for myself the tradition which I elect to carry on…

Merleau-Ponty, 2007, p. ix

The point of view of the experiencing subject is presented as an alternative to the already mentioned alleged fallaciousness of exclusively objective or subjective approaches. However, according to Matthews (2009), Merleau-Ponty's identification of the body as the absolute source is not to be intended as a transcendental claim, but as the necessary consequence of the focus on the experiential body or, which is the same, a consequence of having acknowledged the inevitability of a view of the world from a first-person perspective. Through this engagement with the world, Merleau-
Ponty's body is necessarily the active protagonist of the habits it performs. Consequently, to the extent that its feasibility has been convincingly argued by Merleau-Ponty in his comparative critique of the antagonistic conceptions of the body (the objectivist and transcendental approaches), and given that it is a body able to bring into being the tradition it elects to carry on, it is legitimate to accept that, should the experiential body also elect to oppose normativity, it possess the power to do so. In this sense, Merleau-Ponty's notion of the body is a precursory echo and validation of Rainer's already quoted declaration "my body remains the enduring reality" (Rainer quoted in Burt, 2004, p. 29). As Rainer's body, also the experiential body is in a position to defy normativity by actively informing the parameters of its own engagement with the world.

3.6 Self-givenness: enabling the agentic body

Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the subject also chimes with Foster's conception of a body that is not only passive, but also writes. The agency that black students demonstrated in Foster's analysis of their oppositional engagement through public protest can be seen as the self-acknowledgment and subsequent active deployment of the body as understood by Merleau-Ponty, as the absolute source. This understanding of the body, as already argued, is engendered by the experiential body's first-person perspective, in which the body as subject and the body as object are comprehensively perceived as an embodied subject. What the first-person perspective made the black protesters aware of, to adopt Rancière's terminology, is their condition of dissensus: the subjects' needs, the satisfaction of which, according to Merleau-Ponty, is what motivates the body in its engagement with the world, could not be met by the social
environment postulated by the dominant – white – normative bodies. As embodied subjects, the black students perceived themselves, on the one hand, as subjects, as bodies attempting to satisfy their wishes and needs while, on the other hand, they also perceived themselves as material bodies, as objects, physically engaging with/in the environment.

However, through the first-person perspective, black protesters perceived that the demands placed by the social conventions on their body-as-object were to engage with the world according to modalities that did not meet, indeed, contradicted, the needs of their body-as-subject. The unified duality between body-as-subject and body-as-object, which exists implicitly in the experiential body, acted for the individual as a means of self-acknowledgment. Furthermore, the embodied nature of the experiential body is such that, in addition to making it possible for the awareness of their dissensus to ensue, once this consciousness has been achieved, it is also possible to activate the embodied subjects in the implementation of the political action of opposition to normativity. Once the public protest is initiated, the embodied subject mediates between the aims of the protest (the aims of the body as subject) and the situation that the protest elicited (the situation as perceived by the body as object).

Specifically, in the instance of the black students' protest, the embodied subject may have perceived itself as a body-as-object in receipt of physical violence. In that instance, the embodied subject can, as a body-as-subject, intervene on two levels: firstly, it can prevent the instinctual reaction to respond in kind to violence or to flee from it; secondly, monitoring the unfolding events, it can evaluate the available
movement possibilities and choose the most appropriate for the handling of the situation. These are both agentic interventions rendered possible by the unified nature of the first-person perspective, which perceives the body, at once, objectively and subjectively. The unitary subject-object perception that the experiential body has of itself through the first-person perspective provides the individual with an immediate sense of self-givenness, intended as the subjects' ability to experience their own physicality as recognisably theirs (Gallagher and Zahavi, 2008) even without thematising their bodies or movement. As Merleau-Ponty put it: "every movement is, indissolubly, movement and consciousness of movement" (2007, p. 127). Through this consciousness, subjects are aware of the nature of the physical activities they are engaged in, be it walking, sitting, or driving, as well as the general characteristics of their bodily engagement in these activities, for instance, the effort being applied or the position their body is in.

However, it is not a consciousness that provides a detailed level of information of the kinetic experience (Gallagher and Zahavi, 2008). This is because the knowledge that subjects have of their bodies is of a functional nature, rather than derived by an analytical investigation of it: we possess knowledge of our body "in virtue of its always being with us and of the fact that we are our body" (Merleau-Ponty, 2007, p. 239). This provides individuals with pre-reflective, uninterrupted, and direct information on their actions even when they are not actively paying attention to them (Gallagher and Zahavi, 2008).

When running to catch a bus on the other side of the street, I will be consciously aware of avoiding incoming cars while crossing the road, as well as not crushing into
other pedestrians once I reach the pavement on the other side. However, I will not be fully aware of the specific eye, arms and legs coordination that this requires; similarly, I will not be aware of the all the multiple sub-movements and adjustments into which my running and side-stepping can be broken down, and of which the overall action of catching the bus is the synthesis. My body is tasked, so to speak, with choreographing the most efficient kinetic response, given the constraints of the situation. My focus is directed towards the instantaneous individuation of the kinetic possibilities most suited to achieving the objective of catching the bus without being run over by a car or crashing into fellow pedestrians, rather than towards the conscious intellectual planning or analysis of the mechanics involved in doing this. Once the overall objective of catching the bus has been set, the action initiated to achieve it requires an instant interaction of the embodied subject with the continuously evolving environment, rather than the execution of a pre-planned kinetic sequence. In addition to the attention of the subject being directed to the fulfilment of the ultimate aim for which the action is being executed, a further reason for the subject's limited conscious awareness of the specific details of her own actions is that, as Marcel Mauss and Pierre Bourdieu remarked, once the subject has acquired the ability to perform a certain movement, the future execution of that movement may not be accompanied by a conscious somatic awareness of it (Sklar 2008). My ability to detect and avoid obstacles while running is part of my established sensorimotor capacities.

The limited level of conscious awareness displayed by the agents can be further explained by Merleau-Ponty's observation that "consciousness is in the first place not a matter of 'I think that' but of 'I can'" (2007, p. 159). The notion of the I can (which
was already presented earlier as one of the implications of subjects possessing a
sense of agency) expresses the subject's inherent bodily knowledge of the
affordability of a given action (Gallagher and Zahavi, 2008). In other words, it is the
subject's pre-reflective awareness of her body's abilities in relation to the task at
hand. The significance of Merleau-Ponty's statement is twofold. On the one hand, it
suggests that, given that it is not a matter of I think, consciousness is pre-reflective;
on the other hand, by presenting consciousness as related to the I can, Merleau-Ponty
ties the execution of an action with the subject's own ability to perform it. In this
sense, the subject's consciousness of the action is also consciousness of herself
through that action, and provides the subject with an immediate sense of self-
givenness. Insofar as this self-consciousness is pre-reflective, since it is not
thematised, individuals possess pre-reflective self-consciousness.39

Furthermore, and crucially, the subject's perception of herself as the actor who
initiates and executes the action provides her with a sense of agency. The I can's or,
to reiterate, the body's pre-reflective awareness of its capability to perform actions
that enable the achievement of a certain goal, identify the subject's multiple instances
of kinetic affordability. Over time, these may become kinetic patterns routinely
implemented in given situations. In turn, since they constitute the body's habitual
response to those situations, these patterns form a structured behavioural framework
identifiable as the 'body schema'.40 However to the extent that, in spite of the
embedded nature of the body schema, the kinetic patterns already established are not
the only movement possibilities through which a given task can be completed,41 the
dependency of the subject's actions on her own I can's renders the body schema
potentially open to her individual agency and, thus, normativity susceptible to
To conclude, the notion of the subject as an agent in active control of her action, as a body that also writes, is clearly underlined by Merleau-Ponty as he identifies the most prominent trait of his subjectivity in the fact that he is given to himself. This self-givenness is such that although his status of situated subject, existing within a specific social and physical world is always evident to him, he is not constricted by it. On the contrary, it is exactly in the engagement with the world that agency can find its application; to be precise, in the act of suspending specific aspects of that very engagement at will. The subject can, for instance, isolate herself from physical stimuli by closing her eyes or, affirms Merleau-Ponty:

> live as a stranger in society, treat others, ceremonies and institutions as mere arrangements… and strip them of all their human significance.

Merleau-Ponty, 2007, p. 419

Merleau-Ponty presents the individual as an embodied subject with the power of agency as an inevitable consequence of the self-givenness elicited by his experiential interaction with the world. It is an agentic body. As such, it can initiate the politics of public protest to resolve the dissensus of black bodies being segregated and, within that expression of dissensus, it can implement interactive tactics for the management of a continuing evolving situation while, at the same time, persevering in the attainment of its stated objective: the disruption of established normative parameters. It is a body that, inasmuch as it can alter its body schema, is also able to implement its capability for agentic intervention upon itself, be it in order to recast its instinctive response to use force to defend itself from physical violence or, as it will be argued, in order to counter the embedded technique of dance training when engaging in oppositional interference.
oppositional improvisation. Agency is the basis for change and innovation. Therefore, I would argue that the body that oppositional improvisation identifies is necessarily an agentic body.

In the following part of the study I will describe my practical engagement in the pursuit of oppositional improvisation and the findings that derived from it. In the next chapter, I will present the practical set-up and methodological criteria that framed and informed my oppositional engagement. Finally, in chapter five, I will then describe the practical tactics that the retrospective reflection upon my first-person experience has highlighted as occurring in the creation of oppositional improvisation.
EndNotes

1 As remarked earlier, these instinctive responses are also identified by Legrand and Ravn (2009) in the verbal feedback provided by ballet dancers.

2 As Noland remarks, most authors are in agreement in understanding kinesthesia as the sensation of movement (2009).

3 According to Sklar, these two modes of awareness guide contemporary approaches to dance ethnography, focusing, respectively, on "the socially sedimented meanings embodied in movement systems, especially in their political dimensions... [and on the] somatic organization of knowledge" (2008, p. 91).

4 By referring to the subject as 'situated', I intend to emphasise that Rancière's and de Certeau's analyses concern the subject in relation to the social, cultural, and historical normative framework.

5 See endnote 13 in the introduction.

6 Jacques Rancière (1940-) was Chair of Aesthetics at the University of Paris from 1990 until his retirement in 2002. His work resists classification as it spans between and across many different disciplines: from history to philosophy, art and politics.

7 Michel de Certeau (1925-1986) was Directeur d’Estudes at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in Paris and Visiting Professor of French and Comparative Literature at University of California, San Diego.

8 Due to the editorial format in which Rancière's Ten Thesis on Politics (2001) is available to me for online consultation, it is not possible to know the page number relating to any given portion of text. Therefore, I have indicated the approximate positioning of the referenced text within Ten Thesis on Politics by referring to the number of the Thesis within which it appears.

9 However, it seems reasonable to assume that the lack of conformity those subjects display in relation to the police might not be absolute but, rather, limited to their relation to specific aspects of reality, whereby the fact that they might not fit into a category with regard to one specific issue does not necessarily imply that they do not fit into any of the other categories in relation to other issues. The same individual, for instance, could potentially be, at the same time, acknowledged and not acknowledged by the framework of the distribution of the sensible (or, to use a terminology that will be shortly introduced, the subject could be, both, counted and unaccounted-for). Whether she is to be considered as one or the other will depend on the aspect of reality in relation to which her participation is being considered. To use an example that partly anticipates the arguments of this chapter and partly refers back to it, it seems reasonable not to exclude the possibility that some of the women active in the suffragettes movement might also have engaged in less oppositional modalities of participation to "spaces, times and forms of activity" (Rancière, 2006, p. 12) by working, for example, as school teachers.

10 In describing these subjects as 'not recognisable' and 'invisible', I am not implying, of course, that they are not visually perceived and remain, literally, unseen. Their invisibility is metaphorical but, as I clarify later, it has the real effect of denying to them the possibility of meaningful engagement and representation.

11 Rancière’s identification of the subjects he has termed 'unaccounted-for' is based on his historical and political analysis, in which these subjects are presented, quite literally, as those who are not counted. What Rancière means by this is that they are part of an indistinct mass (demos) whose only common feature is to lack the qualities that are necessary to be counted, which is to say, the qualities traditionally deemed necessary to take part in the running of the community, to be fit to govern. However, argues Rancière, "by suspending the various logics of legitimate domination" (2001, Thesis 5) and shifting the power towards the demos, democracy "disconnects the population from itself"
In the beginning of the twentieth century, in Britain, the suffragette movement engaged in direct action to secure the right to vote for women. Also see: http://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/electionsvoting/womenvote/overview/startsuffragette/.

Occupy London is part of a wider world-wide campaign condemning social injustice and corporate greed, and asking for a change of the socio-economic system that fosters them. For more on the Occupy London movement: http://occupylondon.org.uk/about-occupy-london-2.

It could be suggested that, with regard to oppositional improvisation, the oppositional body's rejection of the qualifying criteria for dance genres, whereby a trained dancing body is transformed into an unaccounted-for dancing body, represents, to paraphrase Rancière, the manifestation of a distance of dance from itself — although, in the case of oppositional improvisation, the distancing is the result of my deliberated decision. Similarly, another of Rancière's remarks, namely that the word "people" … refers to the supplement that disconnects the population from itself, by suspending the various logics of legitimate domination" (2001, Thesis 5) reflects oppositional practice in that oppositional improvisation refers to the supplement that disconnects the dancer from herself by suspending the various logics of legitimate dance making.

Dissensus should not be confused with the difference of ideas that socially recognised entities might espouse when supporting their respective positions within already established parameters of legitimacy. This would be the case, for instance, when claims of gender, religious or racial discrimination are made in a society where it is already acknowledged that each of these categories is entitled to equal treatment. The remonstrating group would already be perceived as a legitimate interlocutor and the specific topic of contention would also be seen as legitimate, although not necessarily agreeable.

This is the case, for instance, of Gorge Dickie's already mentioned institutional theory of art — see chapter one.

The importance of critics and/or scholars articulating the work of experimental art practitioners is emphasised by critic Judith Mackrell (1992) and choreographer Jérôme Bel (in Burrows, 2007) with regard, respectively, to British New Dance and to contemporary experimental dance.

In their attempt to gain artistic visibility, experimental artists display the same behaviour Rancière attributed to unaccounted-for subjects in their demands for political visibility, as they "invent the scene upon which spoken words may be audible, in which objects may be visible, and individuals themselves may be recognized" (2000, p. 116). In other words, they construct a "political argument [which] is at one and the same time the demonstration of a possible world where the argument could count as argument" (Rancière, 2001, Thesis 8); or, in relation to art, I would suggest, a possible world where experimental art could count as art.

Rancière identifies three regimes of art, which form part of the distribution of the sensible. They are, in chronological order: the ethic regime, the representative regime — also termed poetics — and the aesthetic regime. During the ethic regime true art had an educational role; during the representative regime, the endorsement of true art led to the identification of art with standardisation of its characteristics, i.e. normativity. The aesthetic regime of art disregards these criteria and democratically abandons all distinctions, to the extent that also the difference between art and life becomes blurred. This is reflected, for instance, in performance art. As remarked in chapter one, commenting on her work Apartment 6 (1965), Halprin described the piece as "a real-life situation, in
which you as a performer and you as a person were completely the same thing” (quoted in Kaplan 1995, p. 99). The aesthetic regime produces art works that dictate a revision of the notion of art.

20 According to de Certeau, although not meaningful enough in their impact to subvert and replace normative systems, tactics are nevertheless able to destabilise and question them (1988).

21 For a better understanding of the notion of ‘tactics’, other examples given by de Certeau include: immigrants to a host nation introducing their own customs while living according to the host country’s laws; Indians enslaved by Spanish conquistadores seemingly embracing the practices of their conquerors while surreptitiously using them in contexts other than those they were intended for, as a way to resist domination; the appropriation and parodic adaptation of the language of certain social categories by lower classes as a way to exert revenge on social hierarchies (de Certeau, 1988).

22 What is offered here is a simplification of the notion of enunciative procedures, which is to say, processes of language formation the structure of which can be likened to that of actions in social environments (de Certeau, 1988).

23 The reference to the acts of evaluating, choosing, and formulating decisions is meant to underline the opposition to a notion of the body as the unquestioning executioner of cultural or social normativity. However, it is not meant to imply that the decisions are necessarily elaborated by the subject's conscious rationality. As it will be argued later, agency can be generated by states, as it were, of unconscious consciousness, or pre-reflective consciousness.

24 For instance, they practiced curling up on the floor with arms around the head and knees in front of the stomach, to protect those delicate areas (Foster, 2003a).

25 It should be noted that, due to the unscripted nature of public protests, although rehearsed prior to embarking upon the described demonstration of dissent, these coping behavioural tactics simply acted as oppositional guidelines, without causing the protest to morph into the enactment of choreographed routines. They just provided protesters with a frame of reference within which to improvise.


27 What is at play, here, is the distinction between two levels of agentic awareness, one conscious and one unconscious – or, at least, not entirely conscious; more detailed account of levels of agentic awareness in The Phenomenological Mind, Gallagher and Zahavi, 2008.

28 Gallagher and Zahavi (2008) draw attention to the fact that the acquisition of a sense of agency does not demand conscious awareness; on the contrary, it can be provided by a simple pre-reflective awareness.

29 By this, I am not implying that the movement possibilities deemed viable will necessarily and only be movement solutions that have already been employed previously in the same kind of circumstances.

30 Gallagher and Zahavi describe Husserl’s notion of the I can in similar terms as ”the embodied capabilities for action that correlate with the affordances of the world” (2008, p. 147).

31 It is in this light of criticism of the objectivist approach that one should read Merleau-Ponty’s remark that ”the most important lesson which the reduction teaches us is the impossibility of a complete reduction” (1962, p. xv).

32 For instance, if the movement considered was a moderate running, it could be explained by the subject’s decision to hurry up when late for work, or by the resolve to do some exercise, following a period of sedentary activity.

33 Dance is offered by Merleau-Ponty as an instance of a kinetic habit providing a figurative meaning and developed by the body as non-literal elaboration of more basic engagements with the world.
This, remarks Merleau-Ponty, is different from learning the specific spatial and temporal details of that engagement. With reference to an experienced organist playing the instrument, Merleau-Ponty observes:

During rehearsal, as during the performance, the stops, pedals and manuals are given to him as nothing more than possibilities of achieving certain emotional or musical values…

Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 169

The habit that the organist develops, as he rehearses, is an understanding of the link between his bodily movements and the musical effect it elicits, rather than the rational acquisition of the objective positions of each single stop and pedals. The acquisition will automatically result from the understanding.

With specific reference to the black protesters, their skin colour was what made them ineligible for consideration as legitimate interlocutors within the established and acknowledged social and political framework of the distribution of the sensible.

In the case of the black protesters, the subjects' needs are to be identified with their demands for racial equality.

On an anecdotal level, the individuation of needs that are not compliant with normativity suggests the existence of a body that is not exclusively constituted by normative impositions but, rather, retains the enduring character referred to by Rainer, and elects not to carry on with a tradition that counters its perceived needs.

It should be emphasised that, although separated in two distinct entities for the purpose of a logical explanation, the body-as-object and body-as-subject do not simply occur simultaneously in the embodied subject, rather, they occur as the embodied subject. The experiential embodied subject is not formed by the body-as-object and the body-as-subject; it is the body as-object-and-subject.

According to Gallagher and Zahavi (2008), despite differences in the exact definition of self-consciousness, phenomenologists are mostly in agreement with regard to the fact that conscious experience always includes also a degree of self-consciousness.

The body schema is here presented as formed by the kinetic (or behavioural), pre-reflective patterns of habitual actions, in agreement with Gallagher and Zahavi (2008) and Gallagher (2001).

For instance, although, ordinarily, in order reach for a glass I extend my arm and direct my open hand towards it, theoretically, I could decide to lift the glass with my elbow-pit, by trapping it between the inner forearm and the upper arm; or I might, instead, decide to cross my forearms and execute a scissor-like movement, so as to trap the glass between the back of my hands; and so forth.

Individuals that, due to debilitating illness or traumatic incidents, become physically unable to engage in everyday tasks through the same kinetic strategies they ordinarily employed when able-bodied develop modalities of engagement tailored to the changed abilities of their physicality. This demonstrates the existence of alternative ways to accomplish a given task and, insofar as the replacement movement differs from the old kinetic habit, it testifies to the possibility of altering the subject's original body schema – Gallagher (2001) also allows for this possibility.
CHAPTER 4

Oppositional practice:
Terms and Conditions

4.1 Methodological considerations: First-person perspective, improvisational practice and organisational considerations

This chapter focuses on the methodological and organisational aspects involved in carrying out my practice sessions, their documentation and subsequent analysis. These include the identification of an input to elicit movement, the definition of practical arrangements, such as location and duration, and the individuation of the modalities through which I have documented the oppositional practice. The specific character of these three elements was chosen and developed so as to accommodate the terms of the kinetic engagement highlighted by the research question. In other words, the organisation of the practice takes into account the stated intention to produce movement that does not employ the established techniques or movement vocabularies I acquired in my previous dance training and that does not convey a narrative content.

All organisational aspects were subordinated to two overriding methodological
considerations: the need to offer a first-person perspective of the movement production process and the decision to use improvisation as a movement practice.

As observed, in analysing the work of Butcher and Halprin, in chapter one, a clear limitation emerged, namely that as a viewer I could only afford a third-person perspective. In those circumstances, I deduced the choreographers' agency from signs detectable in the choreographic choices and from the choreographers' often available statements. However, these indications are of much more difficult individuation by simply observing the dancers' movement; furthermore, typically, dancers do not voice their approach to the discipline as readily as choreographers. This tends to provide a view of performance as product and causes the dancers' bodies to be perceived as carriers, and the expression of, cultural discourses rather than agency. Bannerman (2006) describes this misrepresentation as similar to the casing of butterflies in a museum display: useful from the point of view of classification, but not able to provide an understanding that relates to butterflies as living creatures. On the rare occasions when the agentic intentions could be intuited, it was still not possible for me to have access to the inner workings of the dancer's oppositional creative process. In other words, I remained unaware of what is at the heart of my research: the specific dynamics between agency and kinesthesia in the creation of oppositional movement.

For this reason, in setting up the practice for this research, I established a methodology that allowed for me to have direct access to the interaction between agency and kinesthesia. This consisted in engaging in my own oppositional improvisation practice, so as to be able to have a first-person perspective of my
creative process. I then accessed the latter by reflecting upon it in the form of post-practice annotations and by reviewing my movement, captured in video-recordings I made of my improvisational practice. As anticipated, and as explained in the last chapter, the findings elicited through this experiential approach are four tactics that I have termed 'kinesthetic modes'. These are specific ways in which agency employed kinesthesia to create an abject body.

The choice of solo improvisation was not only motivated by the necessity of gaining access to the inner working of the dancer's creative process. Midgelow (2012, p. 1) describes an understanding of improvisation derived from artistic practices such as Contact Improvisation as "a way of breaking free from the perceived strictures on and of the body." Insofar as improvisation inherently allows for the possibility to counter normativity, it is perfectly suited to my attempt to implement dissensus and kinetically transform my trained body into an abject one. Furthermore, the unfixed and unfixing nature of improvisation actively elicits an oppositional engagement; finally, in the form of improvised oppositional movement, it delivers an embodied understanding of the oppositional process.

In sum, improvisation is a framework facilitating the oppositional engagement, a process eliciting specific oppositional interactions between agency and kinesthesia, and the movement resulting from that engagement. Improvisation, therefore, reflects the three structural steps constituting de Certeau's notion of 'tactic'. Therefore, appropriating de Certeau's terminology, improvisation is revealed as an oppositional tactic.
These requirements raised practical issues that informed the organisational structure of the practice. Following the identification of a suitable input, but prior to tackling the practical arrangements for the practice sessions and the modalities for their documentation, the chapter clarifies the terms of application of the oppositional criteria to my improvisational movement. The subsequent part of the chapter, relating to more practical aspects, will identify the video-recording of my improvised movement as a documentary means to prompt my experiential recollection of its inception.

It is worth emphasising that, in my attempt to move without using my embedded movement habits I realised that, should the oppositional kinetic exploration produce solutions based primarily on stillness and pedestrian movement, it would only offer, in my opinion, a limited and limiting response to my original enquiry. Despite the fact that neither stillness nor pedestrian movement are among the movement techniques that shaped my dancing body, they are nevertheless embedded as if they were. They presuppose a use of the body in which I have necessarily trained as part of my inevitable engagement in the activities of my everyday living. In this respect, their use would not allow me to meaningfully challenge my kinetic habits; it would equate to substituting the known techniques acquired through dance training with equally familiar ones – although acquired in a context that is not dance-related. This does not imply that I attempted to prevent every instance of pedestrian movement or stillness from occurring in my improvisational practice. It was inevitable that these would partially feature – and, at times, they proved a useful buffer zone until the next oppositional movement emerged. However, I did not consider them as satisfactory alternatives to embeddedness in their own right. For similar reasons, I have also
decided to avoid evading normativity by setting myself task-based movements since, I would argue, also in this instance I would be substituting a familiar technical movement with another. It should also be highlighted that, as I have anticipated in the introduction, my attempt to resist the dancing body as shaped by the normative dance training I have undergone should not be intended as an attempt to resist my body's normativity across the complexity of discourses it incorporates such as, for instance, those of race and gender.

Finally, alongside the organisational solutions for my oppositional improvisation as I have implemented them, the chapter also presents them as I had originally conceived them prior to my actual engagement with the practice. While the majority of these were implemented as planned and functioned satisfactorily, others proved ineffective or counterproductive and had to be abandoned. I decided to include in this chapter also the approaches that I later excluded from my practice and the related pre-practice speculative considerations on their effectiveness, instead of featuring only the organisational suggestions that were successfully implemented. The reason for this is twofold: first, it provides a more accurate reflection of the actual process that I engaged in on the path to oppositional improvisation; second, some of the suggestions that, personally, I found not conducive to creating oppositional improvisation might be deemed suitable for that purpose by other practitioners who might decide to engage in the same attempt.

4.2 Research question as reflexive input: the problem of worded abstraction

The first step towards engaging in oppositional practice consisted in identifying an
input suitable for the purpose highlighted in the research question; an input suitable to explore the process of movement production as it takes place when neither a narrative structure nor movement techniques and vocabularies acquired from established dance traditions are used. With this in mind, I focused on two possible options. The first solution was to select as input any concept – the concept of 'freedom', for instance – and to engage with it kinetically, within the given framework. The second possibility, and the one that I have chosen, was to use as input the concept expressed by the research question itself. The rationale for this choice is that it allows for the development of a movement that is not only a bodily engagement with the input within a certain framework (the oppositional criteria), but it is also the body's kinetic consideration upon the specific modalities of this engagement; a reflection upon the way it itself operates within that particular framework. In other words, having the research question as input meant that the movement I produced within oppositional criteria is, itself, movement about the production of movement within oppositional criteria. The movement became a means of reflexive analysis. In this respect, my oppositional practice can be regarded as an instance of metadance, inasmuch as it used dance to focus on dance.¹

This approach has two advantages. Firstly, as one of the characteristics of conceptual art is the use of a reflexive approach as a means of critique (Rorimer, 2004), the reflexivity offered by the choice of having the research question as input contributes to entrenching my practice more firmly within a conceptual approach to art. Secondly, and more importantly, it meant that there was conceptual equivalence between what I did (pondering upon the notion of oppositional criteria and shape my movement accordingly) and what I intended to observe (how movement is created...
within oppositional criteria). This had the advantage of facilitating a greater depth of analysis, since the focus was maintained entirely on how movement is created under oppositional criteria. The conceptual identity existing between the framework of movement creation and the subject matter of the movement being created meant that, as I focused on the task of creating movement in accordance with the oppositional criteria, I was also being given the opportunity of becoming aware of the process of creation of movement under those circumstances.

To clarify further, it could be helpful to contrast the situation just described with one in which the selected input is a concept other than the research question such as, for instance, the previously cited notion of freedom. Should 'freedom' be the input to be engaged with – while avoiding the use of narrative and established techniques and movement vocabularies\(^2\) – my awareness of the process of movement creation within oppositional criteria would originate from the observation of a process that aims to create movement relating to 'freedom'. The subject matter of my pondering (freedom) would be divorced from the modalities through which it is to be expressed (movement mindful of oppositional criteria); therefore, there would be a separation between the process I am attempting to become aware of (the creation of movement within oppositional criteria) and the aim of that process (engaging with the notion of freedom). This would cause my focus to be split three ways between moving within oppositional criteria, the effort of engaging with a concept other than the notion of oppositional criteria, and the attempt to gain awareness of how the latter is realised within the former. By contrast, having the research question as input creates equivalence between subject matter and modalities of kinetic engagement; thus, focusing on one is, simultaneously, a way to achieve the other (i.e. to operate in
accordance with the oppositional criteria) and to facilitate an awareness of the process that negotiates the relation between the two.

However, choosing the research question as input also introduces a problem: I find myself unable to engage kinetically with the issues it raises because of the way in which the question is communicated, which is to say in verbal form. This does not mean that I am normally unable to use language, in written or spoken form, as an input for my movement practice, but rather that I am unable to use, specifically, this research question, presented in that form. It is reasonable to speculate that the reason for this difficulty is that, in order for me to be able to engage kinetically with an input, its meaning must be not just intellectually understandable, but also recognisable.

By 'recognisable meaning', I mean familiar enough for me to directly engage with it, a meaning that I have already experienced enough times for it to have become part of my already consolidated knowledge without needing to be further reflected upon. Although I have had previous experiences of moving according to oppositional criteria, these have been limited in time and frequency. Therefore, they have not resulted in the formation, within me, of immediately available, ingrained semantic abstractions that represent them. Consequently, in order to be grasped, the research question, which is a verbal abstraction expressing those experiences, requires, on my part, a conscious interpretative effort. Furthermore, even once its meaning has been apprehended, continued concentration is required in order for that meaning not to dissipate, for it to remain present to my consciousness. A lapse in concentration would cause, as it were, the exit of the research question's meaning from my
consciousness, and would necessitate the intellectual re-elaboration of the utterance for its significance to be re-acquired. In a sense, by engaging with the verbal articulation of the research question I become entrapped in an abstract semantic loop, as I have to maintain continuous intellectual engagement with the meaning of the concept with which I am attempting to engage kinetically. This, however, has the perverse consequence of preventing me from directing my attention towards the creation of the movement that should derive from the engagement with that meaning.

I will clarify by considering, again, the contrasting situation in which the notion of freedom is the chosen verbal input. Freedom is a concept that I have encountered many a time, upon which I have pondered repeatedly, which I have experienced in many instances, in various of its many different manifestations, not least in my daily living in parts of the world where, despite there being limitations, there is also a high level of freedom. On this basis, it can be argued that not just my intellectual understanding of it but also my lived engagement with the input 'freedom' is extremely wide. For this reason, the notion of freedom is intellectually available to me even as a semantic abstraction, it has constituted itself within me as consolidated knowledge. Specifically, even starting from its verbal form, it can be grasped without the need of further conscious rationalisation acting as intermediary between the meaning of the concept and my understanding of it. The concept of freedom is for me not just understandable, but understood and immediately present to me as meaning from the very moment it is willed into existence by my decision to engage with it. Once that decision has been taken, 'freedom', as a notion, will be reflected upon only inasmuch as it is selected by my intentionality as the input and engaged with kinetically, but not because I am in need to re-apprehend the abstract meaning
expressed by the word that identifies it. If 'freedom' was the input, I would feel that
the semantic immediacy that the concept has for me allows me to engage with it
directly, starting from its wording.

4.3 Memories of the lived body as oppositional input

Given that, for the purpose of it functioning as an input, a concept has its realisation
in the provision of a meaning with which I can engage, as opposed to existing in
itself as a notion non-relatable to my kinetic exploration, I have sought to develop a
proposition that makes this engagement possible. This is based on the observation
that, although I lack the ability to engage directly with the research question in its
verbal form, I do have memories of events that I have attended, either as a
practitioner or as a spectator, and that I would describe as tangible emanations of the
kind of approach to movement that the research question refers to and that I am
trying to investigate. These events disregard traditional tenets and share an approach
to dance and performance that is consistent with the notion of oppositional criteria.
My memories of these events can be used as part of a strategy to overcome the
relatability gap, so to speak, that I experience towards the research question in its
worded form.

This is a strategy that occurred to me after attending the show Cédric Andrieux
(2009), a biographical solo based on a concept by Jérôme Bel, in which dancer
Cédric Andrieux describes, in words and movement, the ups and downs and the
insights of his life as a dancer. The events that shaped his life become the input of an
autobiographical performance; or, looking at it from the opposite perspective, his
performance is, at once, the latest in the chain of his life's events and the resulting outcome of those events, the point of arrival to which those experiences have eventually led him.

The same logic could be applied, in a more selective way, to my situation: in the same way Andrieux's performance is the culmination of his life experiences, the research question and the way in which I engage with it are the culmination of my individual experience of avant-garde artistic events (or, which is the same, conceptual-criteria-based art) both as a dancer and as a spectator. As explained above, these events can be seen as tangible emanations of the research question because of the way in which they exemplify what I have termed oppositional criteria. Therefore, I believe that using memories of events as the input for my practice sessions is consistent with the aim and the framework of my study. As already anticipated, however, this does not imply that this is a study on the workings of memory or the way in which memories inform improvisational practices.

To reiterate, the memories relate to events that are emanations of the research question; thus, using them as input does not mean changing input but, rather, helping to reformulate the same input in a form that I am able to relate to through movement. The shift, from the verbal expression of the concept as presented in the research question to my lived experience of tangible instances of its application, makes it possible for me to access the same concept as it presents itself to me through my memories. While the manipulation of the research question from abstract wording into memories of lived experiences transforms the input, I suggest that the presence of movement-related memories and, additionally, the subsequent creation of
movement, do not imply that aesthetic considerations are the aim of the practice. It is true, however, that it is through the aesthetic element that the oppositional objectives of my practice are often evaluated and achieved.

Closer reflection on the input can highlight an additional advantage of its reformulation from abstract wording into memories of its embodied emanations. Undeniably, when compared to the live events, the recollection that refers to them necessarily provides a more limited quantity and accuracy of information. While, at first glance, this could be seen as a negative factor, it could be argued, instead, that the recollection is of greater use to the aims of this research than the live event, as it is feasible that the information that forms my memories has been retained on the basis of its significance for me. To put it differently, the incompleteness of the recollection testifies to the fact that, at least in part, I have already initiated an engagement with the live events, and that this tacit process has already resulted in the filtering out of the aspects least relevant to me. The recollection I have of those events, therefore, can be seen as the relatable distillation of the issues raised by the research question.

4.4 Specific oppositional input-events

As stated, the events I used as lived experiences from which to elicit my recollections are of two kinds: those in which I have participated as a practitioner and those at which I was a spectator. The former category comprises two short collaborations with Rosemary Butcher. One was Butcher's project *From Here to There* (2011), developed as part of a practice-based course. The project was structured around the
notion that "anything can emerge from anything". It encouraged participants to embark upon unplanned journeys through London (whereby the route or mode of transport to a chosen destination was not decided before setting off) and to make use of the experience as a means "to explore the very nature of practice within the arts and in particular the nature of performance". While maintaining the objective of reaching the destination, the framework of the journey contravened the traditional approach to travelling, as the journey became the focus rather than a means to an end. This shift also allowed for the structure of the journey to abandon the traditional logic of time/discomfort minimisation and to develop as an organic, reflexive experience. The exercise is comparable to my effort in examining my own improvisational process since, by engaging the artist in unstructured journeys as a means of creative discovery, Butcher's project offered the opportunity to develop greater awareness of the impromptu decision making process that shaped them, which is also a process encountered in improvising.

The second collaboration with Butcher (although, chronologically, the first) was for the dance-film The Return. This was the first time I had ever been asked to produce improvisational movement while trying to consciously avoid using pre-constituted dance techniques and movement vocabularies or expressing a narrative, which makes the experience directly related to my present research. In fact, this was the initial catalyst for the development of my interest in this research.

With regard to the events in which I have participated as a spectator, among the most noteworthy are the exhibition Move: Choreographing You (13 Oct. 2010 – 9 Jan. 2011), in London, and the alternative performance festival For the Time Being (17
– 20 March 2011), in Berlin. As described in chapter three, *Move* was an event comprising works by both visual and dance artists, some established since the 1970s, others having come to prominence in more recent times, but with one common denominator: the creation of works that challenge the traditional notions of performance and, consequently, liberates artists from the fixed canons of established genres. It is in this respect that *Move* can be seen as a tangible instance of the kind of approach to art implied in the research question of this study and encapsulated in the notion of oppositional criteria. As an example of this philosophy it is worth remembering again the concise statement of conceptual artist Bruce Nauman, already quoted in chapter three, and whose works also featured in the exhibition: “You can take any simple movement and make it into a dance, just by presenting it as a dance” (Nauman quoted in Rosenthal, 2010, p. 69). Like *Move*, also *For the Time Being* is a tangible manifestation in which a conceptual-criteria-based approach to art may be seen to apply. It consisted of an alternative performance-making 'assembly', as it was termed in the event literature. It was described by the organisers as "a four day reflection-affection-investigation chamber in which formats of artistic enquiry neighbour, inform and examine one another" (http://www.forthetimebeing.cc/).

To sum up, both categories of events, those in which I have actively participated as a practitioner and those in which I was present as a spectator, satisfy the requisites of suitability as an input appropriate for this study. On the one hand, their tangibility, of which I have direct experiential knowledge, satisfies my need for a stimulus in a relatable form. On the other hand, with regard to the content of the input, the events are the embodied implementation of the core notions expressed by the research question: the liberating artistic experience of an oppositional approach to art.
production. This combination makes of my memories of these events a viable input through which to engage kinetically with the issue the research question articulates. As in Andrieux's performance, the retracing of my artistic experiences is, at once, the input for my movement and the reason for the formulation of the research question. In this context, the resulting kinetic engagement becomes a body-based critique of those experiences.

4.5 Application of oppositional criteria and the specific case of the narrative element

Before proceeding any further, it is important to make a few additional considerations on the application of oppositional criteria to my improvisational movement. As indicated repeatedly throughout the thesis, to apply the oppositional criteria means to create a movement that questions the notion of narrative structure and the techniques and movement vocabularies which are part of my formal training. However, it should be acknowledged that, in spite of my best efforts, I do not expect to achieve the erasure of all discernable traces of said three elements from my movement. This, however, does not matter. What the oppositional practice I embark upon is meant to provide the research with is an opportunity to develop a theoretical understanding of how movement is produced when it is not automatically and uncritically filtered through an already approved and established approach to dancing. In other words, the focus is on the application of the oppositional criteria to movement improvisation as an ongoing experimentation, and on the movement creation process that this effort engenders; the aim is not to guarantee the production of a finished movement unquestionably free from the three elements identified as
emblematic of my embeddedness. Given this, my objective is to create instances of resistance – even if only partial – to my embedded kinetic habits, and to elicit alternative paths towards the creation of improvised movement. The practice sessions are a way of opening to new movement possibilities and of investigating the process that enables them.

In relation to the kind of movement I am attempting to create, a further, more specific, consideration should also be made with regard to my intention to exclude the narrative element. While, as a trained dancer, the avoidance of movement techniques and vocabularies belonging to already established dance traditions is difficult to achieve, the exclusion of a narrative structure might be seen as not constituting a problem. The reason for this is that, firstly, even within a dance created according to the canons of established dance traditions, the narrative element is expressed through given movement vocabularies; it is created by the deliberate sequencing of elements of the latter in a web of temporally organised causal links, so as to identify an intelligible story-line. Consequently, although the narrative informs the choice of which elements of vocabulary to use, it is not an intrinsic component of the physicality of movement in the way that movement vocabulary and technique are. To be more specific, despite my formal dance training, narrative is not an intrinsic element of the way I move.

The second reason that should allow for the unproblematic exclusion of the narrative element from my improvisational movement is that, despite being constituted by past experiences, the input I have chosen does not have a narrative structure itself. Although my input is the memories of what I have described as tangible emanations
of the oppositional criteria, which is to say my memories of the body-based works that I recognise as embodying the oppositional criteria, these emanations are not what they are by virtue of their chronological relation to each other; they are not connected to one another by causal links that necessarily identify a chronological structure, as in the case of event B happening as a result of the prior occurrence of event A. Whereas an event's existence in time is logically dependant on what came before and informs what comes after, the chronology of events is a structure that allows the understanding of the role of each discrete part, and time is a means for its realisation. In these cases, the recounting of past events requires memory to assume a narrative structure.

The artistic events I refer to as input, on the other hand, belong to a different category, following a different temporal logic. They can be described as discrete events, autonomous in time, and lacking a causal interdependency but that, nonetheless, belong to the same typology of occurrence. However, sharing the same character does not equate to being causally linked. Therefore, their reciprocal chronological placing is not relevant to their existence. Under these circumstances, the act of referring to them is an act of identification of a similar concept at different, finite, moments in the past but it is not, and it does not need to be, the delineation of a narrative. Consequently, also my memories of those events, despite referring to events that occurred at specific moments in time, are memories that do not have a temporal structure as subject matter. They simply refer to the various artistic events I witnessed or participated to as sites in which I recognised the oppositional criteria taking shape, each time in different ways. As a result, the input did not impose to the improvised movement I created any kind of narrative, intended as a web of variously
interdependent events or notions developing within a temporal framework.\textsuperscript{11}

In the light of this, narrative structures are absent from my improvisational movement, even without any active attempts on my part to prevent their emergence. For this reason, my efforts towards the creation of movement free from the constraints imposed by my dance training exclusively concentrated on trying to eliminate the dependence of my improvisation from the acquired technical elements and vocabularies which, unlike the narrative component, I know are intrinsic elements of my movement creation habits and, if unchallenged, would shape my improvising comprehensively. The reasoning above attempted to clarify the direction of my focus as I improvised, but it cannot exclude the possibility that the movement provided as documentation of my practice in the attached video-material may be deemed, by a viewer other than myself, as possessing a narrative structure.\textsuperscript{12} As Foster remarked with reference to Cunningham's work:

\begin{quote}
Unusual changes in dynamics and interactions between dancers offer multiple, diverse references to the world, none of which occur in logical order. The viewer can choose from among these references, occasionally fabricating incidental narratives.

Foster, 1986, p. 41
\end{quote}

This eventuality, however, does not affect the relevance of the research in relation to its stated aim: to analyse the process of production of oppositional movement possibilities within improvisation.

To conclude, for the purposes of this study the application of oppositional criteria to my movement improvisation could be likened to Yvonne Rainer's \textit{NO Manifesto} and, as such, understood as a provocation through which to explore new movement
possibilities and investigate their inception, and not necessarily as a guaranteed means to deliver kinetic results that have no traces of orthodox movement elements.

4.6 Movement awareness: informing, documenting and understanding oppositional practice

Having defined above the input and the terms of application of the oppositional criteria, the next section of the chapter will focus on the initiation of the practice and on the strategies of analysis and documentation through which the findings presented in the next chapter were identified. The need for conscious awareness is a common denominator to the initiation of the practice and to its documentation and understanding. This has informed the individuation of four strategies used for engaging in and observing oppositional practice: pre-practice, in-practice and post-practice reflections, and the video-recording of movement.

- Pre-practice reflections

With a view to limiting the influence of past training on my movement, each improvisational segment was preceded by a pre-practice phase, during which I spent several minutes concentrating on two tasks. The first was to focus on the input, namely my memories of the events I have mentioned earlier, in order to elicit material with which to interact. It could be material in the form of mental images, emotive traces, conscious observations, or in any other form. The hypothesis that the eliciting of relevant input memories prior to improvising might enhance oppositional practice is based on the possibility that exposure to the memories might induce the
kinesthetic equivalent of the priming process, described by neuroscientist Larry R. Squire as follows:

Priming refers to an improvement in the ability to identify or process a stimulus as the result of a recent encounter with the same or a related stimulus (Tulving and Schacter, 1990).

Squire, 2009, p. 12714

The second endeavour, prior to commencing the practice, was to remind myself of the movement habits that I am aware I have. The rationale behind this decision was that being as aware as possible of these habits before I embarked upon creating improvised movement should improve my ability to avoid them. I reasoned that the oppositional agentic intentionality that engenders and underscores my practice as a whole – and disallows embeddedness – also attends to the pre-practice reflections. The conscious identification of my movement habits during those reflections may facilitate my oppositional agency's ability to counter them by developing a preventive built-in predisposition towards their avoidance during practice.

Additionally, Gallagher's and Zahavi's (2008) remark that agency can be present in the subject's actions even only pre-reflectively supported the further expectation that the prior eliciting of my movement habits to consciousness would not result in their reinforcement but, rather, in their more effective containment. It was thought that pre-reflective agency, informed by my oppositional intentionality, might manipulate my awareness of movement habits into a reverse priming process, whereby the ability to avoid a certain stimulus would be improved "as the result of a recent encounter with the same or a related stimulus" (Squire, 2009, p. 12714). If working, this process would prove particularly effective in the later practice sessions, by which
point I would have identified, during the preceding practices, more embedded habits to avoid.

The pre-practice reflections were followed by three strategies to document and analyse the movement: in-practice reflections, reflections expressed immediately post-practice, and reflections upon re-viewing the video-recorded practice sessions. In the initial stages of planning how to document the practice sessions – to facilitate the analysis that would follow – I had also envisaged that, as part of the in-practice reflections, it might have been useful to voice the observations on the movement practice in spoken form, at the same time as engaging in the movement, so as to produce a live commentary of oppositional improvisation. This, however, did not prove a desirable strategy as it seemed to inhibit the search for movement, and was therefore abandoned. Nevertheless, I have decided to acknowledge and include in this chapter this and other speculations that I had made in relation to the possible ways to document and engage in oppositional practice because, although eventually abandoned, they were part of the process that informed and unpacked oppositional movement. The ensuing part of the chapter will focus on the character and importance of the implemented strategies and the reasons for abandoning others.

- In-practice reflections

The possibility of producing in-practice and post-practice feedback on the movement creation process depended on managing to maintain some level of observational awareness at the time the oppositional process was taking place. The first-person perspective offers a unique vantage point into the movement creation process, but for
this potential to be realised, strategies have to be found for the practitioner to apprehend the process and, further, retrieve and articulate this knowledge. The problem is that the self-observation required to achieve that awareness could potentially inhibit or compromise the very process being observed. Dance scholar Sheets Johnstone, for instance, warned against the dancer focusing her attention directly on her experience of dancing as it is happening, claiming that this would objectify the lived experience by transforming it into an object of thought (Rothfield, 2005).

The solution that I adopted was to try to find a middle ground: to maintain a present but unobtrusive awareness of the process; to rely on a discrete self-monitoring that does not become a piercing gaze interfering with the production of movement. This approach was based, once again, on Gallagher's and Zahavi's (2008) observation that intentional agency possesses a degree of pre-reflective awareness and, further, on Merleau-Ponty's notion that the embodied subject enjoys a sense of givenness about her body, thus an implicit awareness of her actions. Both these observations indicated that it might be possible to achieve awareness of movement as it is being performed, without compromising significantly the movement production process itself.

My experience of the practice sessions appeared to substantiate this possibility. The concern that I expressed above with regard to the danger of inhibiting movement production by trying to observe the manner in which the latter was realised proved largely unwarranted. As I moved, I felt that the dancer-observer dichotomy was more theoretical than actual, not in the sense that the act of focusing on observing the
movement production tactics does not have the potential to hinder movement creation, but in the sense that I found it possible to gain a significant awareness of my oppositional tactics even without focusing on movement analytically, with the specific intent of observing those tactics. Their conscious individuation proved relatively unproblematic. A clarification must be made with regard to this statement. The conscious awareness I am referring to should not be intended as a readily accessible understanding that presented itself in an intellectually accessible format; rather, it was an experiential understanding. It was an awareness that could perhaps be described as glimpses of conscious, yet unravelled understanding of my oppositional tactics.

A speculative but plausible explanation that would account for oppositional tactics being brought from the pre-reflective awareness of the body's self-givenness into conscious awareness is that this study's intention of observing such tactics is already pre-reflectively present as my stated purpose. I am suggesting that since I was implicitly aware, at any given time, that my study was attempting to individuate the oppositional tactics, my conscious observational awareness was automatically activated when an instance worth registering occurred (i.e. whenever I employed an oppositional tactic); conversely, when no such instances manifested themselves, my awareness remained mindful but dormant and unconscious, as it were, only existing as a potentiality, in a mechanism reminiscent of the priming process described previously.

It is also plausible that the perceived observational ease may be a consequence of the reflexivity I have built into the practice whereby, to restate this aspect, there is
equivalence between the content of the input – thus the content of movement that derives from it – and the kinetic modalities of the movement that expresses that content – since these modalities are themselves the content of the input. In these circumstances, as I become aware of emerging instances of oppositional movement I am also automatically maintaining the focus, although not specifically on the oppositional tactics that produced them, on the kinetic realisations of those tactics. Therefore, the observation of the self-reflexive movement being generated could be considered as a further engagement with the input, since it is a further opportunity to relate to tangible manifestations of an oppositional expression. In this sense, the observational focus could complement the creative oppositional focus, rather than competing against it for my – the practitioner's – attention.16

- Unspeakable reflections

While the speculative possibility of in-practice reflection was substantiated by the real-life experience of oppositional practice, the expectation that it could also take spoken form was disproved. The rationale for speaking was that aspects of the experience that I might consider particularly significant, whether they be problems, solutions or neutral observations on the movement process, would be recorded as they happened. This could create a log of insights highlighting what tactics were adopted in the creation of oppositional movement. Just like the movements, also the speaking could have been captured as part of the video-recording of the practice. I had envisaged that these spoken observations could consist of very few words rather than lengthy explanations, in order to avoid shifting my focus away from creating movement. For the same reason, the wording could be either English or Korean,
whichever would come to mind more readily. The self-reflective nature of my movement was previously described as facilitating oppositional practice and the individuation of its tactics. The same logic appeared to support the speculative expectation that speaking while moving could have an equivalent effect: it could prove an effective method to develop an awareness of the process of non-embedded movement creation. It could be argued that to give spoken form to aspects of my movement awareness, effectively equates to describing the engagement with the input itself and that, in turn, this verbal activity could positively inform the practice by intensifying further the focus on the input. In simpler terms, to talk about how I am creating – oppositional – movement while doing so is to focus on the input, since the latter questions the creation of movement within oppositional criteria. To talk about the process is, therefore, to answer the research question.

Furthermore, taking this logic to its extreme, it could also be expected that a more decisive approach to talking about what I experience while I move might, in fact, give strength to my focus on the production of movement within oppositional criteria, and therefore facilitate rather than inhibit it. On this basis, I had also envisaged the possibility that my spoken remarks might become more frequent, articulate and extended. I speculated that it might even prove useful to play my spoken observations from previous practice sessions as an aural background during the execution of later ones. I was aware, however, that I had to keep an open mind and assess, within the context of the practice sessions, both the usefulness of the speculations and the potential danger that they could disrupt my focus. To reiterate, these were speculative considerations that I had either to embrace or exclude in the light of what I would experience in my practice sessions.
Eventually, while the pre-practice priming-inducing focus, the in-practice silent reflections and, as we will see shortly, the post-practice note-taking, all proved effective and suitable tools, the notion that I could express verbally reflections on the practice while engaging in it proved an unworkable proposition and had therefore to be abandoned. I have already remarked that the conscious awareness occurring to me as in-practice reflections was an experiential understanding yet to be unravelled into an intellectually accessible format. It was not an awareness occurring in the readily communicable form of utterances. The attempt to intellectually unravel that understanding into words – however few – caused excessive distraction from the individuation of oppositional movement and a loss of the kinetic flow.

- Post-practice reflections and video-documentation

As anticipated, the end of each practice session was promptly followed by immediate post-practice reflections on the improvisation just completed, in an attempt to capture insights of the movement creation process experienced while still fresh in my memory. I favoured a brisk, intuitive and at times monosyllabic style of writing, rather than elaborate expressions, and allowed myself the freedom to use either English or Korean, whichever occurred to me first, so as to elicit as much information as possible in the shortest possible time, before it escaped me. The post-practice reflections often consisted in finding a viable articulation for the conscious, yet unravelled awareness that had emerged as in-practice reflections. On other occasions, the post-practice reflections were observations unrelated to the content elicited by the in-practice reflections. After a first quick drafting, the post-practice reflections were revised and, if needed, further expanded while still in the studio.
Post-practice reflections proved of great importance, particularly given that my original intention of gaining an insight into oppositional tactics by articulating my reflections in spoken form had to be abandoned. Post-practice note-writing became the earliest opportunity to transform my unspoken awareness of the process of movement creation into conscious awareness, into an intellectually intelligible articulation of my pre-reflective bodily knowledge. The post-practice reflections also provided information that enhanced further my ability to reconnect with the memory of my lived experience when, later, I re-viewed my video-recorded practice.

As it was the case for the post-practice reflections, also the video-documentation was created to identify the modalities through which opposition to normativity was achieved. This gave me the opportunity to further expand on the understanding already acquired when compiling the post-practice reflections. I suggest that the re-viewing of my video-recorded practice sessions enabled me to do this because, as I will argue in greater detail later, it prompted my physical memory of the re-viewed movement; it caused me to re-live the production of movement as experienced at the time of its conception and execution. The re-viewing of my movement also had a corrective and, in conjunction with the pre-practice reflections, a preventive function. It enabled me to observe if, at any stage in my improvisation, I reverted to using movement vocabulary or techniques that belonged to my traditional dance training. Whenever embedded movements should emerge, an attempt could be made in the practice sessions that followed to either avoid the movements in question altogether or to make a conscious effort to change them – and, in particular, to resist the specific aspects of their execution that I considered related to my training.
The possibility, just described, to prevent the insurgence of embedded movement requires the ability to intervene at the stage of its inception or prior to it. I suggest that this is possible because, in addition to identifying the specific embedded movements, the re-living of the first-person experience afforded by the re-viewing also allowed me (or any practitioner in the same situation) to recognise the triggers that elicited embedded movements (by re-living them as I watched the videoed movement), to become aware of the kinetic path that leads to it. Once this path has been identified, it can become part of the awareness that informs the next pre-practice reflections. The recording of my movement, therefore, is more than a means of documentation. It is an instrument functional to oppositional practice, given that it provides information acting upon which I can interfere more effectively with my embedded movement. For this reason, its relevance in relation to the process of disruption of normativity will be explored in the next chapter, as part of my analysis of the modalities through which I have implemented intentional agency.

4.7 Practice sessions: structure, location, and recording practicalities

In the planning stages, I had theorised the division of the practice sessions in three phases: the first one focusing on resisting embedded technique, the second one focusing on the avoidance of movement vocabularies, and the third one combining the refusal of both those criteria. Early on in the process, this three-phase structure was abandoned in favour of the simultaneous avoidance of both criteria in every practice session. The reason for this was the realisation that, in my embedded movements, movement vocabulary and technique have become inseparable. My movement habits are not created by uniting discrete, autonomous instances of
movement vocabularies and techniques but, rather, they are the organic synthesis of the two. Consequently, I found it impossible to disentangle and reject them selectively and independently.

Each practice session lasted approximately two hours and was subdivided into twenty to thirty minute improvisational segments between which, crucially, I produced the immediate post-practice annotated reflections and, of course, prepared for the subsequent improvisation by focusing on the input and on the avoidance of known movement habits, as explained earlier. Given the difficulty to attune myself to moving without using my embedded movement habits, as I expected, my ability to produce oppositional movement fluctuated throughout the practice sessions. I had to accept that the movement would be irregular, discontinuous and that there would be moments of frustration and inactivity.

With regard to the location, I considered two possibilities: a dance studio and an open space, such as a park. I therefore briefly tried both of these options, to evaluate the findings generated in each. As expected, the limiting aspect of using a studio was a greater difficulty in avoiding movement habits, since the familiar environment facilitates the automatic triggering of my embedded movement responses. However, being in the studio, it felt natural to improvise and engage in the exploration of movement. When I attempted to improvise in an open space, instead, I found it difficult to focus and to engage in the exploration of movement; it felt awkward and unproductive. The positive aspect was that the unfamiliar surroundings did not trigger as much the mindset that a studio-space ordinarily activates. Therefore, it felt relatively easier to distance myself from technical movement.
My final decision, however, was to do my practice sessions in a studio, for a reason that might seem counterintuitive: the familiarity with the environment makes it harder to abandon old movement habits. I have become convinced that this problem could be used to my advantage, because it guarantees that the non-traditional movements I produce are truly the result of having overcome my own movement habits rather than, for instance, the consequence of having to respond to a different environment, such as a park surroundings. In other words, by operating in a studio I am faced with the *sameness* that needs changing or inhibiting in order for new movement to be produced. This ensures that new movement is generated from a new way of relating to the input, rather than from relating to unfamiliar external circumstances.

Finally, the filming of the moving body as a means of documentation of the practice was done using a video-camera placed on a tripod. This ensured the fixity and consistency of the vantage point. I found this to be preferable to the alternative solution, which is to have someone filming my movement. Having watched the footage of my practice videoed by a third party, it became apparent to me that the subjectivity of the individual operating the video-camera was inevitably introduced. This emerged, for example, in the choice of camera angles, the distance from the dancer or the decision to zoom in on specific aspects of my movement. Furthermore, the presence of someone filming might alter my engagement with the input, as I might consciously or unconsciously tailor aspects of my movement to the individuality of the person holding the camera or to their relative position in space in relation to me, especially if they move around the studio while filming. This might make it more difficult for me to use the videoed movement later, as a way to
remember my lived improvisational experience in terms of my engagement with the input.

### 4.8 Practice documentation

The videoed improvisational sessions are made available in DVD format attached to the thesis (Appendix 1). The video-material does not present the improvisational sessions in their entirety, but edited versions of them. I have, of course, focused the attention on the movements reflecting upon which helped me identify the kinesthetic modes. However, I have also included movements that I regard as oppositional although I was not able to gain any insights relating to the mechanics of their inception; in other words, I was not able to identify for them a new specific kinesthetic mode that would explain through what application of kinesthesia I was able to inhibit embeddedness and create – what I considered – opposition.

I have tried to present the relevant movements in the context of the session within which they were improvised by also showing the movements that preceded and followed them, thus avoiding creating a rapid succession of short movement clips. The instances of oppositional movement I have selected can be viewed alongside sample pages of post-practice annotations that I have attached to Appendix 2.

Consistently with the understanding of oppositional practice as a process, I have included in the video-material also those organisational decisions that were later abandoned as deemed unsuitable, such as the choice of a park as location for the practice. Despite the editing touches, just like the improvisational movement that it
contains, the video-material was not developed as a product intended for viewing pleasure. It is meant as a documentation of my movement practice and as documentary support on which I based my reflections on the practice. Throughout my thesis I have maintained that my findings derived from the first-person understanding of my improvisational sessions. This implies that virtually any viewer other than myself will be at a disadvantage trying to recognise the relation I propose between my oppositional movement and the kinesthetic modes I identified in it. The video-material is not offered as an example to follow in pursue of oppositional improvisation. In this respect, readers who might approach this study with a view to finding ways to develop their own exploration into oppositional practice might find the written text of the thesis of greater usefulness than the viewing of the movement. It is hoped, however, that the viewing of the practice sessions might provide the reader with a sense of my practice's participation of the common oppositional approach shared by the artistic scene I referred to in my historicising.

The choices listed above, with regard to the strategies through which to bring forth the conscious awareness of the lived experience, the terms of engagement with the experience, and the modalities of documentation of the practice, facilitated the understanding of oppositional movement creation and led to the findings detailed in the next chapter.
ENDNOTES

1 The definition of this reflexive use of dance as *metadance* is derived from the equivalent notion of metalanguage, the use of language to talk about language. It is a concept to which particular relevance was given by Russian-born American linguist Roman Jakobson (Hübler and Bublitz, 2007):

we may speak in English (as metalanguage) about English (as object language) and interpret English words and sentences by means of English synonyms and circumlocutions.

Jakobson in Rudy, 2010, p. 117

2 The focus on an input that is not self-referential and does not coincide with the notion of oppositional criteria does not in itself entail the impossibility of dancing following those criteria, since a difference exists between dancing without technique – to take as an example just one of the three criteria – and dancing about dancing without technique, in response to an abstract input that establishes an equivalence between what is being danced and how it is danced.

3 As I will partly explain in the main text, I refer here to ‘knowledge’ as, at once, the understanding of the meaning of a concept, the availability of immediate retrieval of that understanding without any further pondering upon its meaning, and the notion that it is an understanding that exists in me as a given, thus also pre-reflectively and implicitly, even when not expressly elicited.

4 I am here referring to the kind of reflection that is needed for the understanding of a concept, as opposed to ‘reflection’ intended as additional pondering over an already understood concept.

5 I am referring to the previously mentioned problem of notions that are non-relatable to my kinetic exploration due to my lack of familiarity with the concept they express.

6 It is reasonable to suggest that, alongside teaching methods such as those employed by Laban and Halprin, aimed at eliciting from their students idiosyncratic non-normative movements, also individual experiences of conceptual-criteria-based practices – either as a spectator or as an artist directly engaging, unaided, in the search for non-normative solutions – can be considered further modalities of transmission or development of the avant-garde approach.

7 The course was held at the Siobhan Davies Studios over a period stretching from 11 January to 29 March 2011(www.dancerspro.com/uk/page.php?uid=3186). Some of the documentation that came to inform my practice can be found here: http://frhrtothr.blogspot.co.uk/p/eun-hi.html.

8/8a For course synopsis, see Critical Pathways at: http://www.independentdance.co.uk/rsc/ID-Winter-2011.

9 Although I have not specifically selected them as events to be used as input, in addition to those being featured in *Move*, I have also attended other performances consistent with the notion of oppositional criteria and produced by the same artists whose works featured in *Move*; among these: Jérôme Bel, Twyla Tharp, Anna Halprin, Trisha Brown, Yvonne Rainer, Xavier Le Roy.

10 For more information, please see: www.playberlin.com/2011/03/for-the-time-being-performance-assembly-about/.

11 The absence of a story-line or, in terms of conceptual content, the absence of a cause and effect relation provided by a chronological structure does not imply the absence of a meaning, since concepts can exist and be understood as what they are, independently of time-based references. It is feasible, for instance, that the notion of freedom, to revert to the earlier example, might also be communicated through movement that does not necessarily refer to a sequence of events. Similarly, the concept of the creation of movement outside the canons of established orthodoxies can be communicated without a narrative structure.
12 With the same rationale, it is also possible that, should someone other than myself happen to view my movement, they might recognise in it elements of technique and vocabulary, even with reference to those instances in which I believe I had managed to avoid them.

13 It is interesting to notice how there seem to be a correspondence between, on the one hand, the pre-reflective consciousness of agentic intentionality implicitly guiding a subject's action (Gallagher and Zahavi, 2008) and, on the other hand, the priming process whereby, similarly, an implicit, non-conscious mechanism informs the subject choices.

14 This is not in contradiction with the previously stated difficulty, for a trained dancer, to abandon normative movement. The difficulty is creating oppositional movement, because it requires the identification and implementation of new ways of moving, alternative kinetic tactics that counter normativity. However, once these are, for lack of a better word, 'discovered', observing and acknowledging them is not in itself problematic – at least, not in the context of my meta-practice, as it were.

15 I am suggesting, here, that agentic intentionality attended simultaneously to two aspect of my practice. On the one hand, it directed my movement in the search for oppositional improvisation; on the other hand, it informed the individuation of the modalities that made oppositional movement possible.

16 An impediment to the creation of oppositional movement would arise, instead, if the observational focus competed for attention with the creative focus. This would be the case in a situation in which the dancer attempts to move oppositionally, while engaging with an input that does not have the notion of oppositional movement at its core. In this instance observational attention to the kinetic modalities would distract from the subject matter of the input, thus hindering the search for new movement. I am not suggesting that it would be impossible to create and identify oppositional movement while engaging with an input unrelated to an oppositional approach, but that the endeavour would encounter more substantial difficulties.
CHAPTER 5

Oppositional practice revealed

Chapter three briefly introduced Noland's argument in favour of the notion that subjects possess agency and, to the same effect, Sklar's remark that habitus can be broken. In this chapter I identify the necessary condition for oppositional practice in the 'lucid moment', the trained dancer's realisation that she is an agent in control of her movements, as opposed to her trained body being passively directed by her movement habits. To conclude, I present the findings that emerged from my practice sessions. Kinesthesia is acknowledged, in its various applications, as the enabler for oppositional agency.

It should be reiterated that the findings did not emerge from, and do not consist of, the analytic breaking down of the specific discrete movements produced in the practice sessions; rather, they originated from the experiential reflection on the oppositional engagement which, in turn, was expressed in the immediate post-practice annotations or derived from the re-viewing of the videoed sessions. The findings individuate the modalities or, to use de Certeau's terminology, the tactics employed to disrupt normativity and elicit oppositional movement possibilities, rather than the specific instances of oppositional movement. The reason for this is
that my purpose is to explore oppositional practice in terms of the process from which it ensues, not in terms of the kinetic product that it delivers. Furthermore, since different dancers would produce different oppositional movements, it appears more useful, to dance discourse, to overlook the idiosyncratic elements and to focus instead on the aspects of the experience that can be a common ground; aspects that also other practitioners who should decide to engage in a similar oppositional endeavour might be able to relate to.

I. Kinesthesia and agency for oppositional practitioners

5.1 Noland and Sklar: kinesthesia as a path to agentic awareness

Although with differences, Noland's and Sklar's rationale mirrors Merleau-Ponty's articulation of the embodied subject, in that individuals possess a sense of agency because they experience themselves, through their body, as the subjects of their actions. Noland suggested that the execution of what Butler describes as performatives can elicit a chance somatic experience which, in turn, may cause subjects to thematise their bodies – Sklar applies a similar consideration to act of repeating the same movements, whether while driving or dance-training. Reiteration can make subjects aware of the bodily experience of moving, namely kinesthesia, and of their ability to use kinesthesia to disrupt the movement routine that engendered it. This can cause individuals to experience themselves as acting subjectivities, which provides them with a sense of agency. If successful, the subject's acquisition of agency establishes, albeit fortuitously, the grounding for the
intentional implementation of oppositional tactics in the future. However, it is not in itself an instance of such tactical engagement with the normative system.

What is being described in Noland's and Sklar's examples are kinetic experiences through which the potentials for intentional agency may – or may not – reveal itself to the moving body. In other words, Noland's and Sklar's observations refer to the process through which intentional agency is, potentially, revealed. They refer to agency as the possible point of arrival engendered by the acquisition of kinesthetic awareness, rather than to the modalities through which agency, as the originating impulse for the disruption of normativity, shapes oppositional movement.

Oppositional improvisation, on the other hand, is a tactic in which an already agentic subject engages with kinesthesia as a means of intentional interference with normativity. In the tactic of oppositional improvisation, agency is, so to speak, oppositional improvisation's starting point, not its point of arrival. Therefore, while useful in supporting the notion that individual agency exists, Noland's and Sklar's remarks cannot provide an insight into oppositional practice.

Furthermore, Noland's reference to subjects developing kinesthesia as a possible consequence of focusing on an accidental somatic experience suggests that her analysis pertains to subjects that are in the first stages of their acquaintance with kinetic awareness. However, I approach oppositional improvisation as a movement practitioner, and it is reasonable to assume that I might possess more developed kinetic and kinesthetic skills than the subjects in Noland's example. Lewis observes that movement practitioners can attain "mediated states of multiple or diffuse awareness" (Lewis quoted in Sklar, 2008, p. 105). In other words, unlike Noland's
generic subject, trained dancers possess a higher kinesthetic competence – originally developed as part of their formal training.

In sum, Noland's example is not suitable\(^4\) to elucidate oppositional practice because it relates to subjects whose level of kinetic expertise is not comparable to that of trained dancers but primarily because, as in Sklar's example, she describes a relation between kinesthesia and agency that does not pertain to the practice of oppositional improvisation, which presupposes agency as its initiating force, not as the feasible but accidental outcome of kinesthesia.

However, Noland also acknowledges the possibility of achieving a level of kinesthetic awareness higher than that incidentally elicited by casual kinetic reiteration, and recognises movement practitioners as the carriers of this enhanced ability (2009). Further, she relates enhanced kinesthetic competences to the possibility of disassociating from normative patterns – thus potentially allowing for an engagement in oppositional practice. The relation between dance and a heightened kinesthetic expertise is derived from anthropologist Thomas Csordas' inclusion of dance practice among what he termed 'somatic mode of attention':

> culturally elaborated ways of attending to and with one’s body in surroundings that include the embodied presence of others.
> Csordas, 1993, p. 138

Csordas' somatic modes of attention are culture-bound modalities through which the body operates, is attended to, and relates to other bodies, within the specific cultural, social and historical settings in which it exists. Csordas' modes of attention synthesise the dichotomy between opposing ways to understand movement: either in
terms of its – exogenously informed – cultural significance or as the first-person experience of the moving subject. The somatic modes of attention mediate the two by inviting a phenomenological understanding of culturally informed movement (Sklar, 2008).

In particular, on the one hand, Csordas describes dance as a "somatic mode of attention to the position and movement of others' bodies" (1993, p. 139); on the other hand, he posits the existence of many somatic modes of attention, depending on which "bodily sensation" (1993, p. 139) the subject is engaging with. Taking advantage of the breadth of application offered by Csordas' definition of somatic modes of attention, Sklar (2008) has recognised the possibility to activate Csordas' model by using proprioceptive awareness as the somatic mode through which to attend to the body, thus engaging with the body in terms of experiencing itself moving. Similarly, Noland (2009) considers bodily practices such as dance in terms of how the body attends, and is being attended to, through the somatic sense of kinesthesia. Accordingly, dancers, as the users of the system 'dance', are understood as the carriers of a highly developed kinesthetic awareness, which enables them to disassociate the given kinetic patterns of gestural performatives from the meanings these purport to express. This, in turn, allows for the ability and scope for agentic resistance to such gestures, and to interfere deliberately with their constitution, thus disrupting normativity. Their practice is then defined, referring back to the system-user theory introduced earlier, by/as the gap between the way in which their trained body moves and the way in which it would be expected to move based on its practice and training history.
Noland's and Sklar's reference to Csordas' somatic modes of attention clarifies that expert practitioners possess potentially effective instruments, namely kinesthesia, for the disruption of normativity. However, I would argue that possessing these instruments does not equate to possessing the pre-requisite for their activation. Kinesthesia is a necessary but not sufficient condition to create oppositional movement. In other words, even once the dancer is kinesthetically aware, and expertly so, the recognition and activation of these disruptive capabilities require a catalyst. This conclusion can be elicited from Sklar's remark that it takes a lucid moment, in the course of their routine training, for dancers to acquire a critical perception of their genre-based movement habits (2008).

5.2 A lucid moment: the recasting of kinesthesia

It is not until that lucid moment ensues that the movement routines are recognised as just one of many possible kinetic options and/or as potentially subjected to the dancer's agency, thus providing the latter with the depth of awareness necessary to break the habitus. However, since dancers, as movement practitioners, undoubtedly possessed kinesthetic awareness even prior to their lucid moment, it is reasonable to deduce that this critical outlook upon their own movement is not delivered by kinesthesia alone. The lucid moment provides a perception that is different from the unquestioning kinesthetic awareness that guides dancers in their learning, practicing and fine-tuning of standard movement routines. Although the dancer's kinesthetic expertise is still called upon in the process of research and execution of kinetic alternatives to normativity, it only becomes able to perform this operation, as it were, when activated by the lucid moment, which acts as a catalyst.
I would argue that this activation takes place because what Sklar has described as a lucid moment is the understanding, on the part of the dancer, that, insofar as movement is only being created through the use of her body, it is she who exercises control over movement, rather than the prescriptive routines of dance genres having control over her. Therefore, the difference, between a dancer who has not experienced a lucid moment and one who has, is not that the former lacks kinesthesia while the latter possesses it. Demonstrably, they both possess it. The difference is that the dancer who has experienced the lucid moment has also gained the conscious understanding, firstly, of what kinesthesia implicitly means – that it is the dancer, not the dance genre, in control of the movement – and, secondly, of what potentials possessing it brings. I would suggest that this realisation is linked to the latent, pre-reflective, sense of agency referred to in chapter four. The sense of agency, as remarked, ensues from unavoidable somatic experiences afforded by the very fact of possessing a body. This affords individuals a sense of self-givenness whereby, implicitly but invariably, they perceive their actions as their own, whether or not the action is thematised and acknowledged at a conscious level. As Merleau-Ponty stated: "the word 'consciousness' has no meaning independently of this fundamental self-givenness" (2007, p. 426). This sense of ownership fosters the understanding that actions are the outcome of a subject-centred decision-making process, which is to say, intentional agency.

With specific regard to dance, this can elicit the understanding that, as long as the existence of genre-based movements relies on these being implemented by the dancer, such movements are potentially vulnerable to disruption by the dancer's intentional agency. This understanding is the lucid moment. The causative link
between the dancer's agency and the disruption of normativity is also implicit in
Noland's seemingly counterintuitive observation that the dancer's kinesthetic
competence, through which she is able to oppose the embedded movement of her
formal training, was nurtured through that same training:

Motor challenges to acculturated behaviours\textsuperscript{10} are themselves a form of
agency, one that arises from experiences of movement afforded, paradoxi-
cally, by acculturation itself.

Noland, 2009, p. 2

The realisation that the acculturated behaviours being challenged are engendered by
the subject's prior engagement in movement that perpetuates those behaviours can
trigger the understanding that it is within the subject's power to disrupt those
movement, by re-appropriating her moving body. The lucid moment can release
kinesthesia from the stronghold of normativity, and bring it under the control of
individual agency. It is because of the need for the dancer to acquire this
understanding prior to being able to counter her trained body that, although vital in
the subsequent implementation of individual agency within oppositional movement
practice, kinesthesia was described as a necessary but not sufficient condition to
deliberately alter normativity.

The lucid moment introduces the possibility for the practitioner to recast her body as
a medium for the articulation of tactics, agency-informed actions aimed at disrupting
normativity. As anticipated in espousing de Certeau's system-user theory, this calls
for the trained body to engage against itself to varying degrees of opposition, in the
role of both the embodiment of normative system and the antidote to it. The lucid
moment, in other words, marks the potential, for the dancer, to transition from a
technically trained, kinesthetically compliant body to one that impresses her own agency on movement. In relation to oppositional improvisation, this entails a rejection of the embedded performatives of the formal training in voluntary pursuit of what could be described as the dancerly equivalent of the abject body or, to refer to Rancière, a condition of dissensus.

As I remark in greater detail below, reflecting upon my oppositional practice I observed that agentic intentionality employs kinesthetic awareness to disrupt the embedded movement patterns of the dancer's formal training. Intentional agency provides the decisional independence for this endeavour and manifests itself through kinesthesia. As remarked by Noland:

> Kinesthetic experience, the somatic attention accorded to the lived sensation of movement…allows the subject to become an agent in the making of herself.

Noland, 2009, p. 171

However, neither kinesthesia nor agency anticipate the modalities of their engagement; they do not specify in what particular ways kinesthesia can intervene in order to, on the one hand, inhibit the automatisms that the trained body has developed and, on the other, develop oppositional alternatives. It is within the context of oppositional improvisational practice that modalities of interaction between agency and kinesthesia have emerged. Reflecting on my engagement in oppositional improvisation, the ensuing analysis identifies the modalities through which kinesthesia as the enabler of agentic intentionality has been deployed to resist normative solutions.
II. Reflecting on oppositional practice: kinesthetic modes as agentic tactics

Oppositional improvisation could be considered through Csordas' somatic modes of attention, albeit an extreme version of them. Given the multitude of possible manifestations of the notion of 'somatic mode of attention', it would presumably acceptable to speculate about a specialised 'oppositional mode' through which the body attends to itself in ways that, although kinesthetically informed, are elaborated through dissensus rather than culture. Csordas understands somatic modes of attention to differ between cultures, in relation to the different movement qualities that each culture emphasises. Based on the movement qualities that it emphasises, oppositional improvisation, as a practice, can be both understood and implemented through a kinesthetic mode of attention to a first-person perspective, sensitised to the avoidance of the normative movements of the dancer's formal training as well as to eliciting oppositional ones, within an ever shifting improvisational practice. In this respect, the 'oppositional' mode of attention could be regarded as if attuned to the individuation and/or creation of movement belonging to Rancière's aesthetic regime of art, in which normativity is conspicuous by its absence, intuited only indirectly, as what is being avoided by the embodied oppositional manifestations that negate it.

The methodology described in the previous chapter, for the implementation, documentation and reflection of oppositional practice, was devised sympathetically to the movement qualities of the specialised oppositional mode of attention described above, and which I have here constructed for explanatory purposes. It is within this
framework that, as anticipated, kinesthesia and agency, and the dynamic relation between the two, have emerged as having a pivotal role in the creation of oppositional movement.

The next section relates the specific relations established, primarily through improvisation, between agency and kinesthesia, as unravelled through a reflection upon my first-person experience of oppositional practice. Kinesthesia was regarded by dance critic John Martin (Foster, 2011) and, more recently, by Carrie Noland (2009) as a fully fledged sixth sense, although its importance is often not recognised: Sklar remarks that "kinesthesia... has been entirely omitted from the western sensorium" (2008, p. 87). Furthermore, its accessibility to consciousness is a matter of debate: kinesthesia is regarded by some as being irretrievably concealed by cultural conditioning or by the automaticity of habitus, while, by others, as being available for retrieval, for instance, by focusing on somatic modes of attention. Kinesthesia was described as the bodily awareness of one's own movements and, based on my experience as movement practitioner, I regard its acquisition as attainable. Further, I individuate specific agentic applications of kinesthesia which, I argue, engender oppositional practice.

5.3 Observing practice, identifying kinesthetic modes

As previously described, the two methods that I have adopted to observe and reflect on my movement production process consisted in the post-practice critical reviewing of video-recordings of my movement, and the writing of post-practice reflections on the movement experience. The instances that I regarded as the ones
that most closely realised my attempts to produce improvised oppositional movement existed, as it were, beyond what could be described as a point of maximum resistance, a normative threshold; the point past which oppositional movement is found, and where it becomes possible to dwell in a new kinetic space or, in the best cases, also to progress in the development of a new kinetic proposition. What became the priority, therefore, was to find a way to breach that threshold.

I observed that the breaching was rendered possible by kinesthesia. I will argue that intentional agency deploys kinesthesia as a tactic to deconstruct embedded movement habits or to insinuate itself in the somatic gaps of the trained body – through which the social kinetic body might be intuited/visible – and expand, from within, the latent potentials for deliberate genre abjection.

In my practice, what Merleau-Ponty would describe as the fulfilment of the intention is the creation of oppositional movement, using as input memories and lived experiences of instances of non-normative artistic practices. In this context, the role of kinesthesia has emerged as a means to identify viable kinetic alternatives within the framework of non-normative parameters. Kinesthesia allows for the identification of oppositional I can's. What follows is an account of the specific applications of kinesthesia through which, in my case, it was possible to disrupt genre-based movement and identify alternative I can's to it. In my experience of oppositional improvisation I have not felt that my body's training history completely precluded my ability to disrupt normativity. When confronted with the practical challenge of improvising without using my embedded movement habits, I found myself – in most cases unknowingly – undertaking specific actions. Each of these actions offered a
different point of access to new movement possibilities and, on reflection, it became apparent that they were produced by a different kinesthetic engagement with the old. I have described these specific applications of kinesthesia as 'kinesthetic modes'.

Kinesthetic modes are, to use a terminology derived from de Certeau's system-user theory, the tactics that I employed in order to oppose the embedded movement strategy of my normative training. They provide the dancer with the opportunity to access movement potentialities that exist within the dancing body's kinetic system, independently of coercive training regimes, the body's oppositional I can's. As such, the kinesthetic modes are the modalities through which agency can manifest itself as oppositional improvisation or, to phrase it differently, as the disruption of the normative relation between my trained body and its movement habits.coes Conversely, inasmuch as oppositional improvisation is dependent on the existence of agency as a creative and interactive force, and agency, in turn, is realised through tactical actions, identifying the kinesthetic modes is to identify the constitutive elements of agency itself or, which is the same, to identify the nature of the tactics that realise agency – or, which is also equivalent, to identify the structural elements of oppositional improvisation. In particular, I have identified four kinesthetic modes which, according to their distinctive, targeted, use of kinesthesia, I have labelled as preventive, iterative, mnemonic, and the empathic kinesthetic modes.

It should be emphasised that it is not possible to exclusively associate the movements created during a practice session to a specific kinesthetic mode. To a greater or lesser extent, each of the four kinesthetic modes variously contributed to all my engagements in oppositional practice. However, I was able to observe that, in
successive practice sessions, as I grew more familiar with the process of creating oppositional movement, the use of the mnemonic kinesthetic mode and a specific implementation of the preventive mode, which could be described as the pre-reflexive, became more prominent. The practice sessions where the influence of the – pre-reflexive – preventive and mnemonic modes is more relevant are the latter ones, featured in video-file three of the DVD documentation. Also the role of the empathic kinesthetic mode became increasingly significant as my engagement progressed. On the other hand, the application of the iterative kinesthetic mode as well as the use of stillness – as one of the modalities of implementation of the preventive kinesthetic mode (see p. 231) – appeared to recur more frequently towards the initial and middle stages of my series of improvisational sessions. These constitute, respectively, the first and second video-files of the DVD documentation.

In the next pages, as the kinesthetic modes are introduced, timings identifying movements on the DVD are occasionally provided. The movements referenced in this way are given as examples of movements informed by the specific kinesthetic modes discussed in the respective sections. However, in the same way that it is not possible to associate the movements within a given practice session exclusively with a single kinesthetic mode, it is also not possible to associate a movement with a single kinesthetic mode. Kinesthetic modes may overlap and operate concurrently in informing the same movement. Therefore, the identification of a given movement as representative of a certain kinesthetic mode does not entail that no other kinesthetic modes intervened in the constitution of that movement. It does indicate, however, that the kinesthetic mode in question was prominent in the creation of the movement. In the case of the iterative kinesthetic mode being the primary influence, this relation
might appear obvious also to a subject other than the dancer: in such instance repetition will be the main feature of the movement. However, when movement is primarily informed by other kinesthetic modes, establishing which kinesthetic mode is more prominent in informing movement becomes only possible through a reflection on the practice from a first-person perspective, accessing the creative process.

5.4 Preventive kinesthetic mode

As the wording suggests, with the term preventive kinesthetic mode I refer to an engagement of kinesthesia that averts the formation of genre-based movement either prior to, or at, the point of inception. The first of the two instances (formation of normative movement averted prior to its inception) occurs when I immediately produce, in a seemingly effortless manner, a movement that successfully embodies my oppositional objectives, a movement that I do not recognise as the product of normative criteria. This instance can be explained by the combined, interrelated, action of three elements: firstly, by my pre-practice phase of quiet reflection, in which I try to bring to the forefront of my conscious awareness, so as to recall what to avoid, those embedded movements that I already know to be part of my habitual way of moving; secondly, by what could be described as kinesthetic agency, the mechanism suggested by Merleau-Ponty, whereby, once the objective is known, the embodied subject acts pre-reflectively towards its accomplishment, based on an implicit and immediate bodily knowledge of the I can's available; and, lastly, by the use of the empathic kinesthetic mode, which will be discussed later.
To clarify further, I have stated earlier, in relation to the methodology of my practice, that, before each improvisational session, I spent some time to bring into mental/kinesthetic focus those specific movements or combination of movements that I know to be among my most recurrent kinetic habits. However, in the practical implementation of this exercise, I also tried to direct my awareness, more generally, towards the notion of the normative *I can's* at large, as a category of movements that I was trying to avoid. In reference to this, I did not focus on each specific instance of these movements – which would be impossible – but on an all-embracing understanding of their kinesthetic approach. I would argue that this possibility is legitimately justified as long as it is accepted that the normative *I can's* can concurrently exist within me in the unitary form of my implicit bodily knowledge of them; in the form of the pre-reflective self-consciousness of those kinetic possibilities, which is a notion that is consistent with Merleau-Ponty's understanding of embodiment and kinesthesia previously presented. Therefore, in the context of oppositional improvisation, the pre-reflective self-consciousness represents a form of implicit kinesthetic understanding that can inform the agentic endeavour to avoid normative *I can's*, rather than pursue their attainment. Moreover, and conversely, applying the same logic in the opposite direction, once oppositional improvisation has been established as the aim of the practice session, the pre-reflective self-consciousness will also provide instant access to those oppositional *I can's* already, though implicitly so, understood by my bodily knowledge as being suitable for a non-normative improvisational practice. The avoidance of the emergence of genre-based movement creates the ideal pre-conditions for the emergence of non-normative ones.
However, on those occasions when genre-based movement was not successfully pre-
empted prior to its inception, I was often able to disrupt it, as anticipated above, by
means of a second modality, where the preventive kinesthetic mode found expression
in averting the development of normative movement at the point of its inception,
rather than prior to it. This situation would occur when I became aware of the
impulse to move in a habitual way immediately prior to executing the movement.
Unlike in the previous instance, in this case, the impulse was already present and
fully formed. It was through my kinesthetic sense that I was able to perceive what
could be described as a surge of energy in which, although not yet developed in a
discernable movement, the instinct to move in a normative way was detectable as “a
germ of movement which only secondarily develop in an objective movement”
(Merleau-Ponty, 2007, p. 107). The ability to detect, through kinesthetic awareness,
the impulse to move normatively allowed me to pursue three possible routes to
disengage that as yet unexpressed movement.

The first option consisted in acting immediately, by imposing on my body a self-
enforced stillness as soon as the normative impulse was recognised, in order to deny
it the opportunity to achieve its kinetic expression. In this case, of course, stillness is
not to be seen as an oppositional kinetic response; rather, as a means through which
to create a buffer zone within which I can attempt to negotiate a different and new
movement solution. Examples of this tactic are movements such as those video-
recorded in the attached DVD in: video-file 1, at 04'05'' ff.; video-file 2, at 02'09'' ff.;
video-file 3, at 09'19'' ff. The second tactic that I found effective in disengaging the
normative impulse was to allow for the movement to acquire embodied form, but not
the intended form conceived at impulse level. I would attempt to interfere with the
appropriate execution of the normative movement by altering its rhythm, quality, or kinetic path, thus producing an intentional kinetic misrepresentation of the normative original. Upon re-viewing my videoed improvisation, I have identified this tactic, for example, in the creation of the movement in: video-file 1, at 06'29" ff.; video-file 3, at 09'05" ff.

Whether the interference was achieved by varying the quantitative or qualitative elements of movement, or both, I have observed that even a relatively modest interference was sometimes sufficient to cause the movement to veer, albeit shortly, from the path of normativity. This is consistent with Foster's understanding of improvisation as characterised by a heightened state of consciousness that allows for an awareness of movement as a continuum: the present movement is viewed in relation to the movement previously executed and the movement not yet executed (Foster, 2003b). In turn, Foster description is reminiscent of Husserl's understanding of consciousness as temporally extended, whereby the specific structure of the present, as perceived by us at any given moment in time, is the result of the preceding situation. The present is the current embodiment of an intentional action initiated in the past. From this point of view, the past could be seen as contained in the present. Similarly, the future is the temporal extension of the present intentionality. It is for this reason that it is possible to have a sense of protentionality,\textsuperscript{20} intended as an expectation of what is to come (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2008; Cerbone, 2006). This is the mechanism that operates, for instance, when listening to a piece of music. Even if the melody had never been heard before, the listener holds implicit expectations with regard to how the ensuing notes are going to sound. It is not a detailed knowledge, pre-empting the exact notes; rather, the notes
still to be sounded will be expected to fall within a certain range of aural possibilities. However, it is an understanding precise enough to cause the listener to be surprised if the music departs from those expectations.21

The idea of relationality between the present and the future is also implicit in Merleau-Ponty's notion that, at any given time, kinesthetic awareness already implies the understanding of the movement that will be performed. This understanding is expressed in the immediate, pre-reflective, bodily knowledge of the specific I can's suitable for the achievement of the objective at hand. Far from being a discrete, autonomous unit, every action is, at the same time, what has come before and what is to follow. The existence of this interdependence reflects what I found empirically in my movement practice, as it suggests that it should be possible to prevent the development of normative movement by intervening on the present, so as to induce a non-normative protentional outlook for the ensuing kinetic path. That is to say, interfering with embedded movement at its inception, thus disrupting its normative structure, will elicit a protentional structure that will plausibly envisage an ensuing movement consistent with having been previously interfered with, thus an oppositional movement. In this context, kinesthesia is employed to identify the normative impulses at source and to intervene kinetically on the ensuing normative movement at the early stages of its development, so as to produce oppositional solutions.

Finally, the third option I employed to engage with normative movement impulses consisted, paradoxically, in the conscious execution and protracted repetition of normative movement, in order to elicit from it a non-normative one. Although
presented here as one of the possible preventive modalities through which to disengage normative movement apprehended while still at the impulse stage, this option is implemented through one of the other kinesthetic modes already mentioned, albeit only cursorily: the iterative mode. This is a mode of kinesthetic engagement that I have ordinarily found myself using in order to remedy a situation in which I had not identified the normative movement at impulse level early enough to prevent its emergence. Nonetheless, I have mentioned the iterative mode among the preventive options because I have at times employed it as a deliberate choice to engage with instances in which I had managed to individuate the impulse before it produced the normative movement.

In general terms, within the preventive mode, the role of kinesthesia is clearly played out at different stages and in different manners: firstly, in the recognition of the movement impulse, secondly in the ability to somatically interfere with the development of the normative movement and, thirdly, in the eliciting of oppositional kinetic solutions from normative movement through modalities that will become clearer imminently, as I will be describing the iterative mode in greater detail.

### 5.5 Iterative kinesthetic mode

My attempts to detect and counter normative movement impulses were not always successful and, on various instances, I failed to apprehend the impulse of the pending embeddedness before it translated into fully formed, genre-based movement. On these occasions, I found myself countering normativity by adopting the iterative kinesthetic mode. It is a tactic that consisted in the extensive repetition of the
movement habits that, so to speak, had slipped undetected past the pre-emptive function of my kinesthetic awareness (I identified this occurrence, for instance, in: video-file 1, at 01'52" ff.; video-file 3, at 01'11" ff.).

The advantage of recursively reiterating the embedded movement is twofold. On the one hand, it can prevent the execution of further normative movements and, on the other, paradoxically, it can lead to the creation of kinetic solutions that are oppositional to those they originated from. The first claim is based on the observation that, by definition, the repetition of the same movement makes it impossible for the body to engage in any other action. Therefore, the development of that specific movement into further movement habits stemming from it is averted. The expectation that, if left to progress in its kinetic development unmonitored, normative movement would engender further embedded movements is justified by a protentional understanding of the improvisational dynamics. Unless I actively counter my spontaneous responses, once I have created a movement that is part of my extended network of embedded habits, as a trained dancer I will be likely to produce, as a follow-up movement, an embedded movement related to the previous one – out of consistency with already established patterns of kinetic exploration. In addition to countering the development of further embedded habits, the recursive repetition of the normative movement can, as remarked, have the paradoxical effect of engendering non-normative movements.

To clarify the logic that underlies this process, it can be useful to compare the result of the reiterated repetition of a given movement habit to the possible effect of the incessant iteration of an utterance. Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure observed
that the relation between words and the concepts they refer to is not one of necessity (de Certeau, 1988). The meaning of a word is not derived by an inherent relation between the sound of that word and the nature of the notion it communicates. On the contrary, the relation is one of arbitrary attribution of a certain sound as an aural sign to designate a certain concept. It is a relation that is established in and by language usage, and that has no reason other than that for being what it is. Proof of this is the fact that different languages use different words to express identical concepts. The English word 'table', for instance, is different from the Korean word used to refer to the same object.

Because the link between the sound of words and their referents is arbitrary, the continuous reiteration of an utterance causes the sound to become the focus. The meaning that the sound is meant to communicate slips away because it is not anchored to the sound by any necessary bond. A perceived dissociation occurs between the otherwise linked constitutive elements, namely the word's sound and the concept to which that sound traditionally refers. The utterance, in a sense, is emptied and becomes perceptible only as a sound structure. This makes it vulnerable to be experimented with, maybe through re-arrangement, distortion or even substitution of its phonetic elements. In theory, this could result in the creation of new arbitrary links between sounds and meanings, thus of completely new utterances. If taken to its logical extreme, this reasoning could allow for the conclusion that it is theoretically possible to create a new language formed by new utterances that are produced through the reiterative deconstruction of the old ones.

It could be argued that the same tactics of reiterative deconstruction can also be
applied to the creation of oppositional improvisation. For the purpose of this example, my embedded movement habits could be regarded, similarly to language utterances, as discrete components of a coded movement system, the genre-system of movements in which I have been trained. These habits are arbitrary rather than necessary. They exist by virtue of their reciprocal relation to other movement habits that are part of the same arbitrarily structured system, within which they are seen as appropriate kinetic choices. In this context, once the dancer has attained what Sklar described as a lucid moment, the continuous repetition of a specific movement habit progressively causes the loss of its significance making, at the same time, its kinetic structure become more and more noticeable. Divested of its original relationality to other movement habits of the same genre, the movement habit being reiterated can gradually be experienced by the dancing body primarily in terms of the somato-kinetic sensations it elicits.

This kinesthetic awareness also exposes the potential vulnerability of the movement habit. Once repetition has brought to the fore the kinetic structure as the main feature of the embedded movement, given that this is a feature that relies on the dancing body for its implementation, the former comes to be experienced as dependent from the latter. The dancing body acquires power over the movement habit, instead of being subjected to it. This power, conferred to the dancing body by kinesthesia, is the realisation, on the part of the body, of having the ability and opportunity to interfere and experiment with the embedded movement; or, which is the same, the trained body's ability to challenge its own second nature. It should be reiterated, however, that, despite being experientially revealed to the body through its kinesthetic awareness, this power is not originally derived from kinesthesia.
As argued previously, the understanding of the body as potentially in control of its habits is based on an agency-inspired lucid moment. It is this lucid moment that allows for a critical use of kinesthesia. This is why kinesthesia was earlier described as a necessary but not sufficient condition to oppositional improvisation, while the lucid moment was referred to as kinesthesia's catalyst. However, it is also true that it is through kinesthesia that the embodied realisation of that lucid moment can acquire for me an embodied experiential dimension. Therefore, in the pursuit of oppositional improvisation, kinesthesia and agency are complementary forces. The embedded movement becomes understood as just one of many potential movement solutions, and the agentic exploration of kinetic alternatives can be initiated. In these circumstances, the protentional structure of movement no longer reflected the progression from an embedded movement towards further embedded movement patterns derived from my training. Instead, the iterative kinesthetic mode allowed access to a path enabled by my kinesthetic awareness and informed by what I have given myself as an input, the notion of opposition to normativity.

To sum up, having conceivably experienced a lucid moment at some unspecified point in my past, my dancing body's kinesthetic awareness is no longer uncritical in the acceptance of embedded movements aimed at perpetuating dance genres. The reiterative repetition of movement habits was used by kinesthesia to facilitate a re-apprehension of the kinetic structure of movement as potentially changeable. This allowed for agentic control to be implemented over my dancing body's second – embedded – nature, and for the creation of movement solutions in opposition to the original ones. 23
In the course of the self-observation of my oppositional practice, I noticed that I have engaged in the disruption of habitus also through a variation on the iterative kinesthetic mode: by using repetition – although less intensively than in the previous application of the modality – as a means of thematisation of the movement being repeated, whereby I focused on the mechanics of the embedded movement. As Merleau-Ponty remarked (2007), the act of focusing on the movement sequence of habitual gestures, far from improving their execution, is an impediment to their performance. Merleau-Ponty observed that the movements of a typist's fingers, for example, will be hindered, rather than aided, were she to focus on the specific movement of each individual finger as opposed to focusing on the words she is required to type. The typist's proficient movement is provided by a bodily knowledge that bridges the gap between the subject's intentions and their fulfilment. The intellectual element that movement thematisation introduces disrupts bodily knowledge. In my improvisational practices, I have sometimes applied this same tactic to my reiterated normative movements (e.g. video-file 2, at 17'48" ff.). The result was a more tentative execution of the embedded movements. This, in turn, opened up instances of kinetic ambiguity that offered the opportunity to develop kinetic alternatives to established patterns.

### 5.6 Mnemonic kinesthetic mode

A further way in which, as I reflected retrospectively on my oppositional practice, kinesthesia has emerged as pivotal to the creation of oppositional improvisation is through what I described as the mnemonic kinesthetic mode. With this term, I refer to the activity of individuation, retrieval and use of my kinesthetic memories. The
suggestion that kinetic solutions suited to oppositional improvisation should be elicited from the kinesthetic memories of the trained dancer's body may seem counterintuitive. However, I would argue that, even for a dancer with a history of formal dance training, it is possible to access movement possibilities disconnected from the specific field of normative dance.

With reference to the activity of subjecting physical spaces to urban renovation, de Certeau observes that "beneath the fabricating and universal writing of technology, opaque and stubborn places remain" (1988, p. 201). Attempts to change the urban landscape encounter the implicit resistance of layers of social, economic, ritual and demographic reminiscences that connoted the place throughout its history. If the same logic is applied to the attempt, on the part of the improviser, to produce oppositional movement against her embeddedness, the equivalent objection could be raised: that the improviser's dancing body will have a kinetic history consisting of many layers of stubborn formal training, so to speak. At first glance, therefore, eliciting oppositional movement from the trained dancer appears as an unviable proposition. However, de Certeau's statement could also be read in a different light. If one were to take a step back in the dancing body's kinetic history, a point in time could be found when the dancing body was not a dancing body but simply a social body. Furthermore, even presently, the trained dancer will be involved in contemporary kinetic engagements that relate to capabilities and functions of her body outside dance, such as its social role, for example. Therefore, it could also be argued that formal dance training is built upon stubborn layers of already existing kinetic experiences that were, and are, not dance related. In the light of this consideration, the rationale behind the idea of accessing the movement storage
system of a trained dancer as a possible source of dissenting movement solutions is that the strata of kinesthetic possibilities that preceded or exist alongside dance training are still available under the layers of the trained body's embedded approach to movement. These may offer suitable material for the creation of oppositional movements.

An instance that has helped me to recognise the role of kinesthetic memory as a means to turn the normative dancing body into an agentic dancing body was the realisation that, during one of my practice sessions, an association derived from the input I engaged with elicited the kinesthetic memory of moving while drunk as an approach to searching for oppositional movement. The association was based on the visual memory I had of a performance I saw in Berlin, in which the artist was completely naked and made strange and exaggerated facial expressions. Her nakedness and forced unintelligent expressions suggested to me a sense of vulnerability, but also of uncompromising opposition to the norm. These features, in turn, elicited in me the image of a drunken individual, who may be perceived as conveying a similar level of inappropriateness in terms of social demeanour, a similar vulnerability, both on a physical and intellectual level, a similar exposure of the self, although in an emotional rather than physical sense, and who, although not deliberately resisting normative movement patterns, is not complying with them due to an impairment of the kinetic skills. This produced some of the movement I created in video-file 3 of the DVD, at 12’37” ff.

On that occasion, therefore, one of the non-normative performances that I had seen in Berlin triggered kinesthetic memories relating to my experience and understanding
of drunkenness; kinesthetic memories, that is, relating not to the dancing body, but to
the body in one of the expression of its social engagement. This social connotation of
the body then proceeded to inform aspects of my improvisational session and the
individuation of oppositional I can's. However, it should be emphasised that the
contribution of kinesthetic memories in the creation of oppositional movement does
not imply that my movement replicates exactly the movement associated with the
kinesthetic memory I have elicited. When I elicited the kinesthetic memory of
drunkenness I did not simply replicate the specific movements associated with it,
thus mimicking the kinetic patterns of a drunken person. The kinesthetic memory
was used as a means to elaborate, for instance, on those qualitative aspects of the
experience that were consistent with the disruption of normativity, such as a non-
conventional relation to the elements of balance, spatial symmetry, or motor-
coordination. Further movements engendered by the mnemonic kinesthetic mode
include those in: video-file 3, at 04'37'' ff.; video-file 3, at 13'40'' ff.

The source of kinesthetic memories can be varied and also include kinesthetic
experiences that occurred in the process of acquiring technical, social or cultural
abilities, from typing to learning to speak. Taking the latter as an example, the
endeavour of learning to speak implies, on the part of the infant, a use of the mouth,
tongue and throat that will be gradually perfected, moving from incomprehensible
babbling to intelligible words (Noland, 2009). Initially, the infant will use tongue,
mouth and throat in experimental ways, some of which are not required to articulate
language. Subsequently, the latter will be abandoned and, eventually, only the
movements that are necessary to effect successful communication will be retained.
However, as Noland explains in reference to Merleau-Ponty's position, the kinetic
experiences that are discarded because not conducive to the established communicative patterns

will be retained instead as motor memory, part of a "kinesthetic background"… will remain as prior inscription on the level of motor experience, that is, on the level of kinesthetic memory of past action. The child can draw on these lived "I can's" belonging not to culture but to the apparatus, if given the opportunity to do so.

Noland, 2009, p. 89, original emphasis

To sum up, whether acquired in the learning stages of a basic cultural skill, derived from a social behavioural pattern, or reflecting consolidated expertise, an archive of potentially oppositional kinesthetic memories exists, imbricated in the strata of the dancer's varied kinetic history. However, in addition to the issue of the existence of non-normative kinesthetic memories in the dancing body, there is, of course, the question of whether these kinesthetic memories are accessible, and whether they can activate agency in the search for oppositional movement. A theoretical validation of this possibility is provided by Noland. Drawing on the work of various authors, Noland remarks that past kinesthetic experiences are stored in the subject's kinetic memory, that they can be accessed, and that they inform the creation of movement in the present:

Humans… mediate their actions through another layer of experience that Deleuze associates with affect, Bergson with the memory of past actions, and Merleau-Ponty with what he calls a kinesthetic "background"… that includes skills and the kinesthetic memory of performing them.

Noland, 2009, p. 64

Crucially, Noland also remarks that kinesthetic memories could be accessible to consciousness; that, should a subject so wish, she could re-activate her awareness of past kinesthetic sensations. This can be done

through what Thomas J. Csordas has termed "somatic modes of attention,"
[or, alternatively, through] therapeutic retraining, or the simple act of self-interrogation.

Noland, 2009, p. 52

This possibility is echoed, indirectly, by Sklar in her request to her students, during a meditative exercise, to allow "the memory's kinetic sensations claim the body and awareness" (2008, p. 86). Based on this evidence, it seems reasonable to argue that kinesthetic memories, not related to normative dance training, exist within the dancing body, are accessible, and may empower the subject's agency. This is consistent with my empirical observation that mnemonic kinesthetic modes can contribute to the process of oppositional improvisation.

5.7 Empathic kinesthetic mode

The fourth way in which kinesthesia emerged in my practice as a means to create oppositional movement was in the form of an empathic kinesthetic mode. Unlike the preventive, iterative and, partly, mnemonic modes, this was not a tactic that I found myself employing without prior planning. As specified when describing the aims and modalities of documentation of my practice, the video-recording of my movement was identified as one of the ways to develop a stronger awareness of my movement habits, so as to be in a better position to counter them. The re-viewing of my videoed movement is, in a sense, a deferred use of kinesthesia, inasmuch as the kinesthetic awareness that will inform the ensuing practice session is acquired, prior to that session, by watching back the video-recordings of the previous practice. This implies that the experiencing of kinesthetic awareness occurs, in this case, not in the act of moving, as it ordinarily does, but retrospectively, while watching the movement.
This is a controversial notion but one that derives from the empirical observation that, after watching the video-recordings of my movement, in the practice sessions that followed I had more control over my movement habits. Crucially, I had a degree of control not only over the movement habits that I had tried to counter in the course of my previous improvisational session, but also over those of which I became aware only by re-viewing my improvisation in video format. The improvement in my ability to control the latter indicates that this was not simply the result of having had practice at doing that previously, in my earlier session. It indicates that the viewing of my movement engendered a kinesthetic awareness through which I was then able to effectively inhibit specific movement habits that I had not challenged before.

In more general terms, following the critical re-viewing of my video-recorded sessions, my kinesthetic awareness appeared to counter normativity more effectively in two ways: on the one hand, by monitoring and blocking movement habits (an instance of this is found in video-file 2, at 15'30" ff.); and, on the other hand, by consolidating kinetic approaches in which I had engaged previously and that I had deemed effective in creating oppositional improvisation (e.g. video-file 3, at 02'00" ff.; video-file 3, at 06'06" ff.). Therefore, unlike the iterative and mnemonic kinesthetic modes, which helped mainly in the disruption of embedded movements and in the search for new kinetic possibilities, the emphatic mode had, partly, the effect of averting embeddedness, as the preventive mode had, and, partly, of consolidating approaches to the disruption of normativity that had already been identified as effective.

The claim that watching my own movement can elicit and reinforce my kinesthetic
awareness is also supported by the notion of kinetic empathy.\textsuperscript{24} The kinetic empathy experienced in the act of apprehending another person's gesture is described by Merleau-Ponty "as if the other person's intention inhabited my body and mine his" (Merleau-Ponty quoted in Foster, 2011, p. 165). It is a theory that normally involves two different subjects (one moving, the other spectating), rather than, as in my case, the same subject viewing her own past movement. However, a case could be made for suggesting that, when applied to the same subject, the rationale of the theory can be even more compelling. When engaged in the reflexive experience of viewing her own movement, the dancer can relate to it on a deeper level than a spectator watching a dancer's movement. Just like the spectator, the dancer relates the movement to her physicality; yet, beyond the spectator's reach, the dancer apprehends her physicality not as something new or alien, but as a re-acquaintance with her kinetic responses. In turn, this can activate her memory of the web of kinetic potentialities that she had negotiated when she performed the movement being watched. As I have had occasion to experience myself, this becomes, for the dancer, an opportunity to re-examine what happens in the space between the moment she initiates, her engagement with the input and the execution of the improvised movement; an opportunity to re-examine the space in which the kinetic creation occurred and agency either is successfully realised or is defeated by normativity.

Re-viewing the video-recording of my movement allowed me to re-apprehend the kinesthetic experience of the lived improvisation as it originally progressed, including my kinetic choices and, on many occasions, the awareness of the I can's at my disposal at specific moments throughout the improvisation. This was particularly useful when the kinetic choices I had made were not consistent with my objective to
counter normative habits. In those circumstances, the opportunity to re-live the experience kinesthetically by re-viewing my movement gave me the possibility to try to consciously detach myself from the kinetic choice I had made and evaluate imagined alternatives. The claim that watching my videoed movement reconnected me with my lived kinesthetic experience of it is consistent with Foster's observation:

> strong evidence in support of... [the] argument that perception simulates action has been provided with the discovery of mirror neurons... These neurons fire when the subject performs an action, and they also fire when the subject sees the action performed.

Foster, 2011, p. 123

The activation of mirror neurons when watching a body in movement causes viewers to experience kinesthetic sensations equivalent to those they would experience if they physically performed the movement. The correspondence between the viewer's kinesthetic experience and that of the moving body is arguably even more comprehensive when viewer and moving body are one and the same subject. The notion that the viewing of my own movement engenders kinesthetic awareness is further reinforced by the strength of first-person experience. The importance of the first-person understanding that a dancer has of her lived experience of moving is emphasised by anthropologist Brenda Farnell. Farnell remarks that the task of creating movement scores only on the basis of filmed documentation

> [is] impossible because, apart from visual ambiguities, vital questions about the intentions of movers, and about the meanings of spatial relationships and spatial organization have not been asked.

Farnell, 1994, p. 964

According to Farnell (1994), the third-person perspective (the perspective a spectator would have) can only offer a record about movement, while the actor-centred
perspective can offer a record of movement. Therefore, it is reasonable to argue that the combined action of the principle of kinetic empathy and the insight afforded by the first-person perspective allowed for the re-viewing of my own movement to provide me with a renewed bodily understanding and a kinesthetic awareness of the body, both of which proved crucial in countering embedded movement.

To conclude, the retrospective reflection on my engagement with oppositional improvisation took the form of a revision of my post-practice annotations and the re-viewing of the videoed improvisational sessions. By this method I was able to identify the preventive, iterative, mnemonic and empathic kinesthetic modes. These are specific applications of kinesthesia, through which my normatively trained body is able to supersede itself by inhibiting embeddedness, and through which the creation of oppositional movement is enabled. It should be emphasised, however, that other practitioners may identify different or additional kinesthetic modes from the ones I have. This is because, to the extent that each dancer will have different training backgrounds, thus different habits to oppose, different solutions to oppose them may be required.

5.8 Concluding remarks

Oppositional improvisation is a dynamic process in which, through the kinesthetic modes, the body's agency as oppositional intentionality is realised in the individuation of non-genre-based I can's, involving a re-definition of the body's embeddedness and the normative gaze that informs it. While this clearly means that agency cannot be realised without kinesthesia, it is important to emphasise that its
dependence on kinesthesia does not make of agency a secondary concept or an irrelevant abstraction. Agency remains the organic, interactive force that prompts and coordinates kinesthesia; it is the logic of resistance that articulates the moving body's kinesthetic awareness into the individuation of the kinesthetic modes that make oppositional practice possible.

In the course of the thesis, I endeavoured to answer the question of how it is possible for a normatively trained body to produce improvised oppositional movement. To this end, I set the criteria for and embark upon oppositional improvisational sessions, as described in chapter four; I then employ an experiential reflective approach to explore their dynamics. The reflection on my first-person experience of oppositional practice indicates agency as the catalyst for opposition, and reveals four ways in which agency interacts with kinesthesia to create opposition. However, the existence of theories negating that subjects possess agency demanded a theoretical challenge than run parallel to the engagement with the practice. To this end, I critically engage with the work of Judith Butler, Rancière and de Certeau, and with the more experientially inclined approaches of Foster, Merleau-Ponty, Sklar and Noland. From these, intentional agency emerges as existing, and as the elemental constituent of oppositional practice. The reflection upon my practice further led to the identification of what I have termed 'kinesthetic modes', the modalities through which kinesthesia realises oppositional agentic intentionality.

The kinesthetic modes represent ways in which kinesthesia enables the creation of oppositional practice, they explain the creative mechanics of opposition. In this respect, they are the answer to the practice-related element of the initial question.
'how is it possible for a normatively trained body to produce oppositional movement?' The theory-related element of the question is answered by the understanding of the dancer as agentic subject. I would argue that the most distinctive trait of oppositional practice is not the dancer's ability to experience kinesthesia, but her ability to make an agentic use of it. It was argued that the crucial instance in the practitioner's acquisition of this ability is what Sklar describes as the 'lucid moment'. This consists not just in the possession of kinesthesia, but in the added understanding that it can be employed for active engagement with potential I can's, rather than exclusively for the passive execution of established kinetic modalities. The practitioner realises that she controls movement, instead of her body being controlled by movement normativity. This is the common ground shared by oppositional practitioners: the use of individual agency as a means for questioning normativity. The access to individual agency provided by the lucid moment allows the dancer to be an agent in control of kinesthesia, no longer viewing her dancing body through the normative gaze.

The importance of agency in informing kinesthesia had already emerged before in the study. The crucial role of individual agency emerged, as it was the case for the kinesthetic modes, from my reflection upon the practice. As a dancer, I relate to the practice in and through movement. It was my first-person experience of oppositional practice that motivated me to explore it more in depth in this study.

It is recognised that, frequently, the approach of this study has been strongly theoretical; however, it is a theory that has emerged from the practice and that aimed at accounting for the subject's independence, importance and capabilities. In this
respect, the research contributes to providing a more balanced view of the moving body. On the one hand, it offers more visibility to the significance and potentials of the body as the originative source in the creation of movement; on the other, by fostering a better understanding of movement and the body from the perspective of the practitioner, as opposed to exogenously understood from a spectatorship’s perspective, it contributes to a greater recognition of experiential approaches in the studying of body practices.

Finally, the thesis might instigate further enquiries into oppositional practice. A future investigation could be undertaken, for instance, in the cognitive dynamics experienced by the embodied subject engaging in oppositional practice. A possible direction of such study might involve the concepts of body image and body schema, broadly identifiable, respectively, as conscious bodily awareness and as the pre-reflective matrix of established behavioural patterns (Gallagher and Zahavi, 2008; Gallagher, 2001). In particular, the research could explore the possibility that the inhibition of embedded movement habits and the creation of oppositional alternatives may be related to the use of the body image to alter the body schema. This is only one of many possibilities for the further exploration of oppositional practice.
ENDNOTES

1 In this specific example, Noland suggests a path to agency that differs from that of Merleau-Ponty. According to Merleau-Ponty, agency is inherent to the subject's first-person apprehension of itself – self-givenness – without there being a need for the repetitions and thematisation of the body to engender kinesthesia and, in turn, agency.

2 This is not to say that agency can be realised without kinesthesia, that the specific ensuing choices of intentional agency could be shaped in the absence of the somatic basis provided by kinesthetic awareness. However, despite the reciprocal interactive relation between the two, I would argue that, in the specific context of oppositional improvisation, the initiating impulse and guiding principle is to be recognised in agency, rather than kinesthesia.

3 Sklar provides the following bibliographical reference: 'Lowell Lewis, Genre and embodiment: From Brazilian Capoeira to the Ethnology of Human Movement', Cultural Anthropology 10, no.2 (1995): 231" (Sklar, 2008, p. 105).

4 My claim that Noland's (and Sklar's) approach is not suitable to explaining agency as an originative force and to understanding how it is implemented through kinesthesia in realising oppositional improvisation is limited to the specific elements of their analyses that I have introduced and engaged with here. I do not mean to imply that this is a comprehensive limitation that applies to the whole of their extensive contribution to the issues of kinesthesia and agency.

5 Different cultures may emphasise different aspects of movement, both in producing and apprehending it. The dichotomy between a cultural and a kinesthetic understanding of movement is an example of this (Sklar, 2008).

6 It should be observed that the notion of somatic modes of attention was meant to emphasise that, as Csordas put it, "the ways we attend to and with our bodies… are culturally constituted" (1993, p. 140). This, however, does not imply that the notion of modes of attention is unsuitable to attend to kinesthetic occurrences. Rather, it means that the subject will interpret such occurrences through the gaze of her native culture. The kinesthetic components that will most come to the fore will be those that are most prominent in that specific culture. To give an arbitrary example, for purely explanatory purposes, in a given culture rhythm might emerge as a stronger component of movement than, for instance, the spatial element. As Sklar (2008) observes, this was clearly highlighted by anthropologist David Efron's comparative analysis of the gestural patterns in the Italian and Jewish communities in the United States – Efron, D. (1972 [1941]) Gesture, Race and Culture. The Hague: Mouton.

7 It could be objected that the kinesthetic awareness that movement practitioners acquire through somatic modes of attention is not recognised or is rendered irrelevant, as a means to disrupt normativity, by the notion of the agentic body previously introduced, namely Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the body. According to the latter, agency is enabled by a pre-reflective self-consciousness that provides a low level of detail about movement, but which links directly the objective pursued by the subject with the implementation of the movement capabilities at her disposal – the I can's – to achieve that objective. This appears to exclude consciously acquired awareness. However, insofar as pre-reflective self-consciousness is also consciousness of movement, which is to say kinesthetic awareness, the role of the latter is unaffected by Merleau-Ponty's interpretation of the agentic body: the depth of the kinesthetic awareness still results increased by the somatic modes of attention employed by movement practitioners. What changes, due to the unity between movement and consciousness of movement is that the notion of kinesthesia offered by Merleau-Ponty seems to incorporate within itself the deployment of agency: once the aim of the action has been established, "kinesthetic sensations" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 107) are regarded as already anticipating the movement that will be performed in order to achieve that aim. Kinesthesia is, in this sense, the impulse to move, in which it is already implied the specific movement possibility that will be executed; it is a kind of kinetic perception that anticipates the movement itself. What this indicates is Merleau-Ponty's notion of the unity between consciousness and movement, whereby the agentic body is instantaneously responsive to the situation. Therefore, I would argue that Merleau-Ponty's
understanding of kinesthesia does not exclude or contradict the previously introduced notion of kinesthesia as a sense of movement that can be heightened by somatic modes of attention; it only alters its relative timing. While, ordinarily, movement is kinesthetically apprehended as it is being executed, in Merleau-Ponty’s understanding, kinesthesia is implicitly experienced by the subject prior to the movement execution. Although apparently contradictory, this claim can be justified by the fact that the movement is the specific I can that the body, even prior to executing it, immediately understands as being suitable – and achievable – for the specific task at hand. As such, it can be kinesthetically apprehended because, on the one hand, it is instantaneously known and, on the other, a movement, as remarked by Foster, can be kinesthetically experienced, prior to being performed, just by being watched or imagined (Noland, 2009).

Foster also argues against the claim that the spontaneous character of improvisation implies that no technique is required. Foster comments that improvisation calls for “an articulateness in the body through which the known and the unknown will find expression” (2003b, p. 7). Foster includes in the idea of technique also the ability an improviser must have to be receptive towards the unknown, so as to recognise and allow through the movement material relevant to the specific needs of the improvisation in course. Furthermore, it is crucial that the dancer understands in what way to handle the unknown material, in order to avoid transforming it into a movement pattern that does not allow any further development of the movement exploration. Equally, an improviser needs to understand how to merge known and unknown. All these are skills that, according to Foster, can only be acquired through continuous practice.

In Noland earlier example, however, agency was the accidental result of a kinesthetic awareness induced by a chance somatic experience, in turn caused by the repetition of gestures.

I suggest that, insofar as it perpetuates a hierarchy of established value judgments, formal dance training, regardless of its specific affiliation, can be regarded as an instance of acculturated behaviour.

Subscribing to this school of thought would be scholars such as Pierre Bourdieu, Marcel Mauss, Michel Foucault and Judith Butler.

This understanding of kinesthesia would be endorsed by those who consider the subject and the subject’s body as potentially capable of agency, as it is the case for Merleau-Ponty, Yvonne Rainer, Rudolf Laban, Margaret H'Doubler, Carrie Noland, Susan Foster, and Deidre Sklar, to mention but a few.

However, it should be noted that, later in the chapter, a further interpretation of kinesthesia will be introduced and adopted, whereby kinesthesia is not only acknowledged as the sense of self-movement, but also as the ability to experience a sense of movement vicariously, by watching other individuals moving. For a more in depth analysis of the notion of kinesthesia, including alternative interpretations of the concept and for a historical contextualisation of its development, see Foster’s Choreographing Empathy (2011, pp. 73-125) and Noland’s Agency and Embodiment (2009).

It is useful to restate that my purpose, as I improvise oppositionally, is not to achieve a movement completely free from any sign of embeddedness. The main aim is to initiate a process in which I am able to observe instances of creation of new, non-genre based movement. It is with reference to these instances that I have identified the oppositional tactics. It should also be restated that my oppositional attempt is aimed at resisting the dancing body as shaped by the dance training I have undergone. I am not attempting to resist my body as the complexity of discourses it incorporates, for instance the social or cultural discourses that may inform the gendered, racialised or cultural body.

Here, as elsewhere, I use the term ‘tactic’ in a meaning that I consider an extension of de Certeau’s original use, an action that aims to achieve the subject’s desired objective by interfering with normativity. The normative system interfered with in performing oppositional improvisation is, as already clarified, the kinetic normativity of the dance genres I trained in.
By ‘social kinetic body’, I refer to the body’s kinetic I can’s that, specifically, do not belong to the category of dance genres’ technical movements.

It should be remembered that, in my attempt to move without using my embedded movement habits, I have felt that stillness and pedestrian movement would not be a desirable response. This does not mean that I will never use pedestrian movement or stillness, but that I did not deliberately focus on these alternatives as the solution. Despite neither of the two belonging to the training traditions that shaped my dancing body, they both employ techniques in which I have extensively trained as part of my everyday living and have thus become habitus. Consequently, if I were to choose stillness or pedestrian movement as the alternative to my embeddedness, I would be substituting a known technique with another equally familiar. This would remove the necessity for me to find ways of moving that challenge my kinetic habits. I would not be forced to develop tactics to distance myself from old habits and to find new kinetic solutions. I would not have the opportunity to observe what I set out to observe in this study: the process through which oppositional movement is generated.

The specific implementation to which I refer consists in the avoidance of movement habits at a pre-reflexive level, thus preventing normative movement from emerging altogether. This is one of the possible modalities of the preventive kinesthetic mode described, in section 5.4, as averting the formation of genre-based movement prior to the point of inception.

As clarified in Appendix 1, video-file three can be viewed by clicking on the ‘tile 4’ icon, within the DVD. Similarly, video-file one is accessed by clicking on ‘tile 2’, and video-file two by clicking on ‘tile 3’. To access the tile-selection screen, click on the icon ‘Scene’ in the initial DVD menu screen.

Very succinctly exposed, Husserl’s theory of consciousness could be summarised in the concepts of retention, protention, horizon and synthesis (Cerbone, 2006). From first to last, these are, respectively, having a memory of the past experience, having an expectation of what is coming, having an understanding of their interrelation, whereby the past is understood as existing in the present moment and, finally, having the ability to see them as a finished unit. See Cerbone (2006) and Gallagher and Zahavi (2008) for a more extensive treatment of Husserl’s theory of consciousness.

In this respect, my movement improvisation can be intended as a creative kinetic awareness that, from the kinetic-presence, simultaneously, links back through a kinetic-memory to the unit of movement just performed and, also, links forward, through a kinetic-prediction to a sense of the improvisation to come. I suggest that, understood as one, these three mutually interacting aspects form a kinetic-synthesis that is identifiable as oppositional improvisation.

In visual terms, an analogous effect to the continuous repetition of words was also achieved by Andy Warhol’s thirty-two canvasses of Campbell’s soup. The repetition of the identical image caused the viewer to see the artwork for what it is, namely thirty-two canvasses bearing the image of a tin of Campbell’s soup, as opposed to the illusory representation of the object shown in the image. The canvases are not just used as a surface for the display of the image and, as such, invisible. They become prominent to the eye.

The oppositional improvisation practice sessions that I have carried out as part of this research were meant as a way to develop an oppositional process and explore the modalities through which it is realised, namely, the existence of tactics through which the dancing body can access its own agentic potentials. On the other hand, the research is not aimed at identifying what specific new forms the dis-embedded movements take or the range of oppositional movements that become available following the body’s implementation of its agency. Therefore, it should suffice to say that, although the way in which I interfere with and modify embedded movement varies, it often takes the form of an exaggeration of the embedded movement, or of a self-imposed limitation on the movement range specific to my body.

References to the notion of kinetic (or kinesthetic) empathy can also be found in: Foster 2011 pp.162-8; Noland 2009, p.38; Parviainen 2002, p.19; Dodds 2001, p.34.
APPENDIX 1

(pre-viewing information)

Video-recordings of oppositional practice

This appendix consists of three video-files, each comprising instances of edited video-documentation of my oppositional practice sessions.

Re-viewing the movement-material was helpful for me in the individuation of the *kinesthetic modes* and in informing the further practice sessions that followed. However, the intention is not to suggest that the movements I created reflect what oppositional practice should look like; neither should they be regarded as means through which a hypothetical viewer could learn how to engage in the latter. The video-recordings provided are only to be seen as a documentation of my first-person experience of oppositional practice.

Nevertheless, it is hoped that the video-files will offer a sense of my practice's participation to the oppositional approach I have delineated in my historicising. To this end, it is suggested that the video-documentation be viewed by the reader as soon as a general understanding of the purpose of this study has been acquired in the introduction.

Hopefully, the reader's appreciation of the oppositional nature of my practice will also be facilitated by the captioning that I have added to the video-files during the editing stages. It consists of wordings that refer to various aspects of my movement and my relationship with it. It may refer to the oppositional and experimental character of the practice, to my experiential or theoretical understanding of it, or to its positioning within the context of a wider oppositional approach to dance practices.

Consistently with the conception of oppositional practice as a process, I have also included in the video-files evidence of those organisational decisions that were later abandoned as deemed unsuitable, such as the choice of a public park as a location for my practice sessions and of hand-held videoing for the recording of my movement – as opposed to having the video-camera mounted on a fixed tripod.
Video-files details

All practice sessions took place between 2010 and 2012.

All video-files were edited with Windows Movie Maker by Eun Hi Kim.

**Video-file 1** (Present as 'Tile 2' in the 'Scene' menu – select 'Scene' icon on DVD initial display-screen, i.e. root-menu, to access tile-menu).

Duration: 17' 24"

Practice locations:

- Siobhan Davies Studios, 85 St. George’s Road, London SE1 6ER
- Greenwich Dance Agency, Borough Hall, Royal Hill, London SE10 8RE
- The Place, 17 Duke's Road, London WC1H 9PY
- Kennington Park, London SE11

**Video-file 2** (Present as 'Tile 3' in the 'Scene' menu – select 'Scene' icon on DVD initial display-screen, i.e. root-menu, to access tile-menu).

Duration: 19' 37"

Practice locations:

- Kennington Park, London SE11
- Surrey University, PATS Studio One

**Video-file 3** (Present as 'Tile 4' in the 'Scene' menu – select 'Scene' icon on DVD initial display-screen, i.e. root-menu, to access tile-menu).

Duration: 22' 32"

Practice locations:

- Surrey University, PATS Studio One
- Greenwich Dance Agency, Studio 3, Royal Hill, London SE10 8RE
APPENDIX 2

Post-practice annotations – sample pages

As for the video-recorded material provided for my movement practice in Appendix 1, also the post-practice annotation samples here attached are not to be intended as a guide to creating oppositional practice. They simply represent the documentary evidence of my attempt to reflect, and to reflect on, the experiential element of my practice.
Appendix 2

8 February

Rehearsal

To think of first it

Germany. "To remember the performance, I said"

To replace the Rehearsal Memory, "the piece"

"The piece," at the same time, with the memory

"20 min. to remember the flash, which is a memory for the true being"

"For the true being" workshop (play & language)

"After that"

Eun Hi Kim
After defend Rehearsal

Eun Hi Kim

2011

= 2nd - 2nd

Focus on for the time being

Still there yet!

body found different way of

Eun Hi Kim
Appendix 2

Eun Hi Kim

12 Saturday

Act → No act

try of to find different
way to move
- I feel I am so stupid

reductions
→ traditional (got to do will form)

→ space makes me lonely
should makes me n?

should I feel this
this is wrong (not sure)

No music.

How can I move??

(Area 2 reheasals)

- continuous effort
- balance
- symmetry (often)

→ walk if I drag my feet
→ with my arm

but I can still I am stupid

[wonder] → I can still

lots of wonder.

February 17, 2011

M 1 1 11 12 21 28
T 2 12 19 26
W 3 10 17 24
H 4 11 18 25
S 1 8 15 22
S 2 9 16 23

M 1 11 18 25
T 2 9 16 23
W 3 10 17 24
R 4 11 18 25
S 1 8 15 22
S 2 9 16 23

M 2 9 16 23
T 3 10 17 24
W 4 11 18 25
T 5 12 19 26
W 6 13 20 27
Eun Hi Kim
Appendix Eun Hi Kim

- move or dance front of camera stage use
> only front
> only front

- can I recognize? or is something happen
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Bibliography

Eun Hi Kim


**Works & Events Cited**


__________ (2005) *The Return* [choreographic/screen work] 16 mins. 73 secs. [DVD – author's personal copy]. Choreography by Butcher, R.; photography by Otter, M. Created as part of AHRC-funded Research Fellowship at Middlesex University.


Halprin, A. (1965) *Apartment 6* [live performance]. Premiere: San Francisco Playhouse, San Francisco


Kim, E. H. (2010-2012) Video Documentation of Oppositional Practice Sessions [DVD, part of Appendix 1 in this research] approx. 1hr [studio-work, 2010-2012, various dates].

Online Links


